



From Repertoires to Recipes: Rethinking Political Organisation in the Long 19th Century^{*}

RICHARD HUZZEY  AND KATRINA NAVICKAS 

Durham University and University of Hertfordshire

This article examines approaches to the history of 19th-century politics in Britain and Ireland in order to propose fruitful directions for further debate. It argues that historians should return to a more holistic view of the practices of political action and democratisation, reframing the divide between social movements, parties and popular politics through a focus on organising. We propose a shift from foregrounding franchise extension as the principal narrative of the 19th century and to focus instead on forms of organising political participation as means of asserting and developing practices of popular sovereignty throughout the period. Recipes – rather than repertoires – offer a metaphor for variety and change in the ingredients and environments for organising. This article emphasises a comparative and global framework for understanding practices of politics, including organising, in the British Isles.

Keywords: political history; Britain; Ireland; practices; organisation; representation; democratisation; movements; recipes; repertoires

1. Introduction

This special issue suggests new directions in 19th-century political history, with a particular focus on organisation and practices. The articles point to new ways of understanding the multiplicity of forms of political organisation at all levels, from ‘low’ to ‘high’ politics and from the local to the national and international. These new histories demonstrate how politics, from the vestry to parliament, and from the street-level to the empire, operated in relation to each other. They analyse how political associations and structures evolved over the period as the electoral system came to encompass a wider section of the population in Britain and Ireland. Many of these practices involved formal representative structures, such as electoral registration, party organisation and pollbooks, that developed since the 1688–90 constitutional settlements and unions of 1707 and 1801. The classic forms of parliamentary and party politics also provided the basis for the extra-parliamentary modes of action and organisation discussed, based around selection, representation and assembly, including forum selection, the mass platform demonstration, itinerant organisers and speakers. The historical perspectives presented in this issue together underline the need to understand the relations between popular and parliamentary politics. They reiterate the significance of a four nations

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approach to British political history, one that has been addressed before but perhaps been lost sight of more recently, and also the broader contexts of global revolutions, colonial expansion and democratic experiments.

This afterword offers some further reflections and suggestions about how historians can reinvigorate and realign the study of politics at all levels in Britain and Ireland in the long 19th century. First, we argue for historians to look closer at the forms of political organising inside and outside the parliamentary and electoral system, and at how the different movements or parties conceptualised organisation and organising as practices of politics. We propose ways of understanding the development of politics in this era through its practices, which includes the organisation of a wide range of forms of action, encompassing the collective and public (including delegations, petitioning or protest) and also the individual and inter-personal (such as negotiating, persuasion or acts of violence). In some ways, historians take the ubiquity of forms of organising for granted as tools of politics because they largely still exist today. But we should understand the origins, contexts and working of such practices, in part because it is evident that political movements, their organisers and leaders made a conscious choice to use such tools, while their potential supporters made judgments on their effectiveness and viability for achieving their aims. This afterword discusses how political movements and parties were able to select appropriate practices and tactics according to the circumstances and knowledge available at the time, using an analogy of choosing from a variety of ingredients and methods to make recipes.

Furthermore, we see possibilities for comparative histories of practices of politics, particularly forms of organising as one of these practices. We propose that historians should use comparisons of organisational forms to break down barriers that they have usually placed between different movements. Historians should consider how practices and organisations differed regionally, nationally and within the four nations. They should consider the iterative forms that political practices took throughout this period, avoiding a teleological story of process from one to another, but rather substituting a range of choices available to actors within and without parliaments. Through an examination of organising – meaning the practices of political organisation – we also see similarities between participation in movements that were not necessarily aiming for democratisation. Being involved in collective action was not solely about gaining the vote. We therefore argue that historians should shift away from foregrounding franchise extension as the central narrative of the 19th century and focus rather on ‘political participation’ and organisation as means of asserting and developing practices of popular sovereignty throughout the period. Third, and building on the second point, we ask how these forms of national organisation of political groups compare with those in other parts of the world, especially those that also identify a process of democratisation in the long 19th century. We seek to suggest that an emphasis on the practices of politics may change the narrative of histories of representation in Britain, Ireland and the empire.

2. Organising

A focus on the means of organising collective forms of action and groups of people offers one way to bridge divisions that have traditionally been made between social, cultural and political histories, as well as between parliamentary and popular politics. From Lewis Namier onwards, histories of the long 19th century have framed politics through the

fixed structures of organisations, be they parties or extra-parliamentary associations. Rich historiographies have developed around specific types of organisation, certain causes straddling organisations and the lives of political actors pursuing their priorities.¹ We argue for the potential of a verb-led rather than noun-led approach. A focus on practices of organising helps to broaden the prism of ‘the political’. We see the political as an ongoing process of relationship between people and the state in a variety of forms – that is, channelled by individual and group actions, which in themselves form structures and patterns of behaviour. By contrast, histories of both ‘high’ parliamentary politics and ‘low’ popular collective action have tended to categorise ‘the political’ narrowly in terms of particular organisations, be they parties, pressure groups or institutions. We seek to focus rather on the linkages between these structures, and how they were formed and developed through action, ritual and custom.² Analysis of the practices of organising also enables a focus on the relative roles of regional to national co-ordination and local delivery. An inclusive and reintegrative approach to method and scale can transcend the Balkanisation of 19th-century political history, which has tended to focus on specific events, projects and movements.³ Historians can further appreciate the longer and broader contexts shaping why groups acted in particular ways at the time and place in which they operated.

There are, of course, precedents that demonstrate the value of attention to organisation and to the channels in which practices and ideas were disseminated. E.P. Thompson, and those influenced by his work, wrote as social historians, in distinction to the then-dominant political history of elites and states. In many ways, however, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was as much about political practices and organisation as it was about the development of class consciousness in early 19th-century England. Together with George Rudé, Thompson and subsequent historians of popular protest and politics realised that democratic social movements were formed not by ideological commitment alone, but also through popular choices about forms of organisation, originating from and reflecting existing cultures of association and collective action suited to the communities from which they sprang.⁴ We have chosen to emphasise the metaphor of ‘recipe’ here, to distinguish from Charles Tilly’s important metaphor of ‘repertoire’ of contentious action, discussed below. The model of situated agency obviously relates closely to Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological concepts of *habitus*, to suggest the combination of place, circumstances and time period that engendered the optimal circumstances in which actors chose how to organise collectively.⁵

Following the various post-structuralist ‘turns’ in political and social history during the 1990s and 2000s that explored the gender, language, culture and spaces of 19th-century politics, organisation was relegated to the background of the story of democratisation in Britain. The ‘new political history’, spearheaded by Gareth Stedman Jones’s analysis of

¹Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1957). For recent assessments of causes and institutions, see Parts II and III of *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800–2000*, ed. David Brown, Gordon Pentland and Robert Cowcroft (Oxford, 2018).

²See David Craig, “‘High Politics’ and the “‘New Political History’”, *HJ*, liii (2010), 453–75; Malcolm Chase, ‘Popular Politics’, in *Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History*, ed. Brown, Pentland and Cowcroft, 48–64; Alex Middleton, ‘High Politics and its Intellectual Contexts’, *PH*, xl (2022), 168–91.

³Luke Blaxill, *The War of Words: The Language of British Elections, 1880–1914* (2020).

⁴E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1963; new edn, 1968); George Rudé, *The Crowd in History; a Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (New York, 1964).

⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, 1990), 52–65.

'languages of class' and James Vernon's survey of popular politics and the development of party, sought to place language and the concept of a public sphere at the core of explaining political change. Still, awareness of the centrality of organisations and associations as a channel of political communication and action remained evident in the studies of 'democratic practices' by James Epstein and others.⁶ Even the 'new political' historians needed to account for tangible structures such as committees, voting and associations in their narrative.⁷ Following these overviews of the period, later studies tended to highlight the symbolic, ritual and representational aspects of popular politics, or to offer a deep examination of a particular event or year rather than the whole period.⁸ The articles in this collection point to the need to bring organisational and practical forms back to the forefront, in a broader dialogue with longer trends and comparative approaches, in order to explore national and international parallels and intersections between political movements of all kinds.

We propose a model that focuses on analysing the repertoire of practices and organisation that structured, channelled and enabled the operation of political communication and decision-making within and outside Westminster. The idea of a repertoire, meaning a range of choices that individuals and groups employed, is borrowed loosely from Charles Tilly's notion of 'repertoires of contention'.⁹ It is worth here pausing to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Tilly's approach. In his analysis of the democratisation of political action in Britain between the 18th and 19th centuries, Tilly categorised modes of protest and what he termed 'contentious gathering' into types – that is, forms of action that could be contested, including meetings, committees and petitions, as well as riots and violence – from which, he argued, social movements made conscious choices according to the circumstances, the constraints and the outcomes they envisaged at the time. He sought to show how the repertoires of political movements shifted from localised, specific, often violent, forms of protest (such as rioting and charivari against individuals) to forms that were national, generic, non-violent and centred on parliament (such as petitions and the organisation of federated branches with a central executive committee). One of the key drivers of change, argued Tilly, was 'parliamentarisation', that is, an increasing focus on central government and its representative institutions as the source of power.

Although we broadly agree with this framework of understanding and analysing popular politics, we also raise a note of caution that we are drawing on Tilly's conceptualisation but less so his methodology or more detailed conclusions about historical change. Subsequent studies of 19th-century protest and popular politics have complicated Tilly's chronology of change, arguing that his model was deliberately teleological. His detailed analysis was based on partial evidence, manual collation and subjective categorisation of types of 'contentious gatherings' from a limited range of newspaper reports, sampled over specific ranges of years.

⁶James Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003).

⁷James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁸See, for example, Robert Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Manchester, 2019); Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester, 2013).

⁹Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Harvard, 1998). For examinations of Tilly's concept of repertoires, see Takeshi Wada, 'Modularity and Transferability of Repertoires of Contention', *Social Problems*, lix (2012), 544–71; Sidney Tarrow, 'Charles Tilly and the Practice of Contentious Politics', *Social Movement Studies*, vii (2008), 225–46.

The digitisation of newspapers has enabled historians to rethink and rework Tilly's data on a comprehensive scale. For example, recent digital history research into petitioning and political violence in Britain and Ireland has demonstrated the continuity of both forms of action across the long 19th century, challenging Tilly's conclusions about the rapid decline of riot as a mode of pressure, and its replacement by predominantly constitutional measures by 1832.¹⁰ Moreover, not all protests or popular political movements fixated on parliament as the main source of power or redress of grievances, and Tilly did not appreciate the ways in which the 'parliamentarisation' of grievances required a countervailing 'localisation' of parliamentary contention. His general model of repertoire is nonetheless helpful in thinking about broad trends and varieties of political activity, including the extra-parliamentary.

The choices of organising practices that political activists took during the long 19th century were more akin to recipes, we argue. The metaphor of the recipe represents practices as a range of ingredients that could be borrowed and varied, in response to the available resources, political temperature or cultural environment of the time. Practices of organising could develop forms of organisation or structure, which could mix old and new tactics under different pressures and internal or external circumstances. Such recipes could be transmitted textually, in political tracts or in speeches, but they could also be shared through bodily rituals and emotional gestures. Tradition, custom and memory may have influenced the choices that political actors made: they continued to use forms that they knew worked or were familiar using, adapting them for new contexts or developing new techniques to meet new circumstances. At the same time, repressive legislative or policing had major impacts on modes of protest and organisation, constraining choices or pushing groups to develop new tactics and organisation. The widening franchise had an effect on how political parties and pressure groups sought electoral support, while new issues and ideas, from democracy to the claims of workers, women, enslaved people and other unrepresented groups, further shaped the combination of tactics and organisational modes chosen.

Analysing the recipes for political organising provides a way to think about continuity and change, tracing the complex evolution of mass politics without succumbing to teleologies of progress or decline. Our model of a 'recipe' of practices allows for iteration, adaptation and a modular approach, focusing on organising as an activity rather than the persisting organisations people may – or may not – succeed in producing. It draws our attention more closely to the material, as well as the ideological, factors shaping popular politics. It also emphasises the mutable and flexible components of political action. Interactions between a group and their singular leadership, for example, could change the recipe or its outcomes. Political representation and its channels had a basic model, which was established in constitutional and intellectual writing as well as in custom and practice, but these modes could be altered in response to circumstances or be altered by external forces.

Certain forms of electoral and representative organisation had crystallised by the 18th century, and certainly dominated by the 19th century: the public meeting, the committee, the requisition, the resolution, the petition, forms of electoral registration and the use of

¹⁰Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, 'The Politics of Petitioning: Parliament, Government, and Subscriptional Cultures in the United Kingdom, 1780–1918', *History*, cvii (2021), 221–43; Matteo Tiratelli, 'The Changing Practice of Rioting: Revisiting Repertoire Transitions in Britain, 1800–1939', *Mobilizations*, xxv (2020), 201–19; 'Causes and Consequences of Electoral Violence: Evidence from England and Wales, 1832–1914', <https://victorianelectionviolence.uk/> (accessed 18 Feb. 2025).

newspapers and pamphlets for political propaganda, to name a few. These forms continued to evolve as the franchise expanded and party organisation developed in complexity, but they generally remained current and well used throughout the 19th century. A framework focusing on the organisation and organising of politics at all levels allows historians to move beyond the entrenched division between 'high' and 'low' politics or between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics.¹¹ It is clear that there was cross-fertilisation of pressure groups with party organisation, and vice versa. For example, canvassing door-to-door for votes in elections closely resembled the mode of amassing petition signatures.¹² Ticketing for society and party meetings similarly sought to manage the class or disposition of an audience.¹³

Examining modes of practice is a multi-scalar way of understanding politics. Of course, so is examining other historical structures, such as ideologies, customs and social groups. But for the history of representation in Britain and Ireland in the long 19th century, there has been a tendency to isolate actions or movements within traditional binaries through the lens of party organisation in opposition to extra-parliamentary 'movements'. Using a comparative framework of practices of politics enables the larger view of the whole spectrum of political activity. It crosses from the local to the national to the international. Organising is dynamic: it involves the organisers' choice of forms of action, from meeting, to committees, to petitioning, and decisions by crowds to protest on the streets or even through activists pursuing legal action in the courtroom. Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organising overlapped, especially during elections. The act of organising could be a politicising process for individuals and communities who had previously little representation, or good training for local political activists to become national leaders, such as the anti-New Poor Law organisations that metamorphosed into Chartist associations in 1837–8.

Moreover, organisation can be messy or incoherent, an iterative process whereby political actors try out types of action and adapt them to the circumstances, improvising the recipes from the ingredients available to them. Practices can also be constrained, as well as enabled, by external factors: the power of the state, the passing of legislation, popular responses to national and international events. Political organisation could be a cause of disorder as well as order, creating factions and caucuses between groups and individuals. Many histories of democratic and labour movements, notably of the Chartists and women's suffrage, tend to focus on clashes between the personalities of individual leaders as hampering the campaigns' progress or success. Yet, there is more to be understood about the constraints of organisation and practice in which political activists operated that either exacerbated these differences or, conversely, overcame them to promote successful recruitment to the cause. The women's suffrage movement may have fragmented into different factions, for example, but these factions remained highly organised and committed to structures and practices adapted to their local and regional circumstances, as Erin Geraghty's examination of suffrage missionaries in Ireland illustrates.

¹¹Middleton, 'High Politics'; J.P. Parry, 'High and Low Politics in Modern Britain', *HJ*, xxix (1986), 753–70; Craig, "'High Politics'".

¹²Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, 'Petitions, Parliament and Political Culture: Petitioning the House of Commons, 1780–1918', *Past & Present*, ccxlviii (2020), 123–64.

¹³Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture* (Oxford, 2015), 168, 182; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 59–60.

Histories of 19th-century politics still risk presuming a teleological path of modernisation through the development of political parties in Britain. As Tilly argued, political activity became less localised or focused on intermediaries such as the lord of the manor or the MP, and shifted towards more national forms and organisations, more directly centred on addressing parliament as the ultimate source of power.¹⁴ The development of party-political organisation, national electoral registration and federated structures of executive committees directing the policies of local branches, and the refining of the ‘mass platform’ or ‘monster meeting’ as the dominant mode of crowd protest seems to support this argument of a nationalisation of types of organising. The extension of the franchise in Britain and Ireland was nevertheless a reactive process. Governments – whether Whig, Tory or Liberal – generally did not want to give their entire populations the vote, and each Reform Act was passed in specific parliamentary circumstances that involved compromises and party-political manoeuvring. The narrative of the tortuous progress of franchise extension in much of the historical debate, and indeed in popular histories, leads to an inevitable focus on failure: not least the limits of the 1832 and 1867–8 Reform Acts, parliament’s rejection of the Chartist Six Points or the protracted attempts at repeal and home rule. But the process of democratisation did occur within Britain and Ireland over this period. The idea of democracy spread from the American Revolutionary wars, inspiring reform associations in Yorkshire and Westminster. The popularisation of democratic ideals and practices developed further during the French Revolution, notably inspiring working-class agitation for parliamentary reform and universal suffrage. Whether or not these agitations and various campaigns achieved their goals immediately is not their only measure of success. Indeed, we go as far to suggest that democratisation in the form of franchise extension was not the defining feature of the long 19th century.

Rather, it is the emergence of a widespread acceptance among a large proportion of the population that political representation was desirable, and that there were various forms of organisation that even the lowest member of the working class could join to provide some sort of voice for their grievances and demands for change. Organising extra-parliamentary forms of participation consequently forged wider, vernacular expectations of popular sovereignty, not necessarily linked to demands for parliamentary reform.¹⁵ For example, the first half of the period saw cumulative expectations that resolutions or petitions representing a locality should be endorsed by open meetings of ‘inhabitants’, not just propertied elites or office-holders.¹⁶ The development of party-political organisation and electoral machinery was a result of the increased importance of elections after 1832 in determining the makeup of parliament, as Kathryn Rix suggests in this special issue. But the franchise was not the total means by which the populace participated and so it was not the driving force of change. The extension of the franchise was the result, rather than the cause, of wider political participation in existing and new forms of representation and political organisation. Other forms of extra-parliamentary association were developed that

¹⁴Charles Tilly, ‘Parliamentarization of Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834’, *Theory and Society*, xxvi (1997), 245–73.

¹⁵Duncan Kelly, ‘Popular Sovereignty as State Theory in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, ed. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 2016), 270.

¹⁶Richard Huzzey, ‘Public Meetings, Respectable Requisitions, and Popular Politics in Great Britain and Ireland, c.1769–1850’, *EHR*, cxxxiii (2023), 185–221.

were not about suffrage but concerned either single-issue campaigns or larger global movements, from the Anti-Corn Law League to anti-slavery and temperance. In participating in the whole plethora of organisations and actions, even if they were not directly about suffrage, non-voters therefore learned the practices of politics and had some voice and representation in the larger political public sphere. The participation of the working classes and women in other types of representative and organisational bodies – from trade union committees, branches of the Chartist Land Company, to charities and educational institutions – offered opportunities and training for administration, propaganda, public speaking, recruitment and other key political practices. Conferral of the vote was important as the product of organised political participation, not merely as an enabler of popular sovereignty.

The articles in this collection demonstrate that modes of organisation remained rooted in custom and tradition inherited from earlier movements. The iterative process of choosing tactics and developing new ones – such as exclusive dealing, as in the case of Daniel O’Connell’s repeal movement in the 1820s, a practice that was then taken up by Operative Conservative associations, English radicals, Chartists and Owenites in the 1830s – did not preclude the use of older methods of political action.¹⁷ People still targeted local political and social elites as sources of power. Petitioning remained a popular form of political action throughout the long 19th century, mutating into other forms of name-signing or being targeted at new institutions.¹⁸ Political organising could also be drawn from forms of action at the grassroots that were customary and not overtly understood as political: for example, correspondence networks as part of the everyday general epistolary culture of the literate, which then developed into political information sharing and more formal organisations such as the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s. Other everyday practices and behaviours were somewhat innate and popularly understood without being written down, as Thompson suggested in his description of the ‘moral economy’ of the 18th-century food riot.¹⁹ Forms of electoral pressure drawn from traditions of charivari and rough music also showed behaviours learned from custom and tradition.²⁰ As we discuss in the conclusion, the current turn to ‘vernacular politics’ in 20th-century political history may offer a way of combining the previous emphasis on text and culture in 19th-century politics with a new emphasis on the ways in which politics operated at all levels, shaped by structures of power and organisation, including the development of new forms and practices.

3. *Comparative Histories of Organisations and Practices*

Histories of popular politics have tended to be ‘noun’ oriented: scholars study, for example, Chartism, abolitionism, female suffragism, among other movements. Or, they can be narrowly focused on specific years or singular events of political change – to name a few: the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, the 1820 Scottish Rising, the 1832 Reform Act,

¹⁷Richard Huzzey and Kathryn Rix, ‘From Exclusive Dealing to the Boycott: Consumer Activism and British Electoral Politics, c. 1830–1895’, paper given at the ‘Organise! Organise! Organise!’ conference (2023).

¹⁸Huzzey and Miller, ‘Politics of Petitioning’; Henry Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners: Petitions and Petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780–1918* (Cambridge, 2023).

¹⁹E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past & Present*, i (1971), 76–136.

²⁰David Kennerly, ‘Music, Politics, and History: An Introduction’, *Journal of British Studies*, lx (2021), 362–74.

Gladstone's Midlothian campaign of 1879–80 or the Ulster Crisis of 1911–14 – and these studies are published often in response to a centenary or other contemporary commemoration.²¹ Depth of analysis has been perhaps favoured over breadth, leaving us with highly rich accounts of particular movements situated in their immediate point of time. The advent of cultural, spatial and material 'turns' in history has certainly enriched our understandings of practices of politics within each movement. We now know a lot more, for example, about how movements developed and operated through their cultures within communities in specific locations and through class identities nationally, but there is more to be researched on how their methods, rules and regulations borrowed from and built on each other.

Historians have now, we argue, reached the point to take a comparative approach, taking in the insights and new approaches from these recent studies and looking to what they tell us about 19th-century politics across the whole period. We propose that attention to organisation in the different events and movements can facilitate a comparative approach between distinct movements. In this issue, Graeme Morton's case study of Edinburgh civil society at the polls shows strong links between voluntary associations and candidate preference, revealing how some political alignments arose from wider associational culture. Comparative histories of organising can cut across the isolationist or fragmentary trends that historians often fall into in studying single political movements or events. Thinking across each movement, we see horizontal connections and influences driving change. For example, the forms of nomination, delegation and committee membership in the National Chartist Association and the Anti-Corn Law League were similar because of the common organisational forms of the 1840s, which themselves drew on a developing electoral and party framework after the 1832 Reform Act. Modes of petitioning by these groups drew on in turn earlier practices by anti-slavery societies.²² These modes developed in both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organisations in response to the more complex party politics of the 1860s and 1870s, following the introduction of the secret ballot and new forms of voter registration. In the 1880s, the rise of new political movements of the socialists and anarchists, alongside the caucus and Primrose League within the traditional parties, ensured cross-pollination of the forms of organisation, if not ideologies.²³ Such tools were still useful to later movements inside and outside parliament, not least the female suffrage movement.²⁴ There were iterative practices that were shaped and adapted over the long 19th century.

²¹ Poole, *Peterloo*; Chase, 1820; Gordon Pentland, *The Spirit of the Union: Popular Politics in Scotland, 1815–1820* (2013); David Brooks, 'Gladstone and Midlothian: The Background to the First Campaign', *Scottish Historical Review*, lxiv (1985), 42–67; T.C. Kennedy "'The Gravest Situation of Our Lives'": Conservatives, Ulster, and the Home Rule Crisis, 1911–14', *Éire-Ireland*, xxxvi (2001), 67–82; Naomi Lloyd-Jones, 'The 1892 General Election in England: Home Rule, the Newcastle Programme and Positive Unionism', *HR*, xciii (2020), 73–104; Naomi Lloyd-Jones, "'Liberal Disaffection Such as has not been Seen in Scotland'": Home Rule, Political Organisation and the Liberal Party in 1886', *Scottish Historical Review*, cii (2023), 116–23; A.K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War* (2016).

²² Simon Morgan, 'The Anti-Corn Law League and British Anti-Slavery in Comparative Perspective, 1838–1846', *HJ*, lii (2009), 87–107; Henry Miller, 'Popular Petitioning and the Corn Laws, 1833–46', *EHR*, cxxvii (2012), 882–919; Janette Martin, 'Oratory, Itinerant Lecturing and Victorian Popular Politics: A Case Study of James Acland (1799–1876)', *HR*, lxxxvi (2013), 30–52.

²³ Philippe Vervaecke, 'The Primrose League and Women's Suffrage, 1883–1918', in *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women's Vote in Britain, 1880–1914*, ed. Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (2007), 180–202.

²⁴ Krista Cowman, *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), 1904–18* (Manchester, 2007).

Switching across and between such movements opens the opportunity to understand the organisational and practice similarities and differences.

Focusing on organisation as a kind of practice permits us to study change over time as well as comparison between groups in Britain and Ireland. This not only enriches studies of individual movements but allows us to draw longer-term conclusions about the practices they shared and developed, restoring a focus on causality as well as thick description of experience. We do not mean to suggest that there was only one successful set of modes of practice (that is, in Tilly's case, the massification, parliamentarisation and nationalisation of collective action), but rather a range of experiments in organisation and practice that were tried, sometimes failed, and then tried again by different groups at different times. Mervyn Busted's work on the spread of the Fenian movement in Manchester in the 1860s, for example, argues that the organisation was shaped by the interaction of the dominant regimes and subaltern resistance, 'perpetually interacting, renegotiating power patterns and becoming hybrid'.²⁵ Historians should further examine the local, national and global interactions of dominant regimes with political resistance on all levels. In the case of the Manchester Irish agitation, sectarian parades and selective dealing were on the one hand highly localised, dependent on a deep knowledge of and skilful manipulation of circumstances of place and time, but on the other hand, they were also linked to international networks of the Irish repeal movement that had developed since the 1820s, and were globally connected to insurgent resistance movements.²⁶

Comparing practices between organisers over time is a way to trace the rhizomes of different forms – of which practices spread within and between particular kinds of organising – and the rhythms of change that defy simple teleology or genealogy.²⁷ For example, while parties developed new forms of organisation to contest electoral registration after 1832 and the regulation of spending from 1883, in many ways these built upon the local and regional modes of organisation developed by national pressure-groups. However, much of the classic literature on political organisation, forged in the early decades of the 20th century, focused on movements for democracy as the progenitors of party organisation.²⁸ Furthermore, studies of repression and resistance would benefit from considering the changing emotional equilibrium on the part of officials and organisers; the same actions could result – or be feared to result – in different reactions in periods of revolutionary angst, in the context of French or European revolutions in the 1790s, 1830s or 1848. Rich bodies of scholarship on electoral politics and social movements each have much to gain

²⁵ Mervyn Busted, 'Parading the Green – Procession as Subaltern Resistance in Manchester in 1867', *Political Geography*, xxiv (2005), 930.

²⁶ Anthony Daly, "'The Most Consistent of Them All': William Sharman Crawford and the Politics of Suffrage', *Labour History Review*, lxxxix (2024), 95–125; Andrew McCarthy and Martin O'Donoghue, "'This Is a Sovereign Assembly": Popular Sovereignty, Parliament and the People in the Irish Free State', *Irish Political Studies*, xxxix (2024), 1–22.

²⁷ Christian Lund, 'Of What is This a Case?: Analytical Movements in Qualitative Social Science Research', *Human Organization*, lxxiii (2014), 224–34.

²⁸ On the formative and lasting influences of Henry Jephson and Moisei Ostrogorski, see Henk te Velde, 'The Domestication of a Machine: The Debate about Political Parties around 1900', in *Organizing Democracy: Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. te Velde and Maartje Janse (2017), 255–75.

from comparison, where older accounts treated the other as an external source or object of pressure.²⁹

4. Place

Although histories of 19th-century politics in Britain have always claimed to look beyond the national, there has still been a tendency towards the case study and the insular.³⁰ British and Irish history by their very nature tend to be focused on the distinctiveness of the representative parliamentary systems instigated from the revolutionary settlements and Unions. A Whig exceptionalism often creeps in to shape and confine our analysis of representation and the emergence of democratic movements, other than with a quick nod to the impact of global revolutions and comparative philosophies. We need to situate histories of political movements within the broader historiography. As Naomi Lloyd-Jones has argued, the ‘new political history’ of the 1990s operated somewhat in isolation from the other historiographical trends of the time – the ‘new British history’ that sought to examine four nations history and the ‘new imperial history’ – and there was little dialogue between them. Historians have recently issued a call to revisit four nations history, interrogating the relevance or problematics of the nation state.³¹

A comparative ‘local-to-global’ approach takes account of both local particularity and global commonalities. Political geographers have long proposed the model of place as relational: no place, nor the things that form it, including political structures and ideas, develop in isolation. They are iterative, evolving and in relation to each other, from the local to the global. Some political practices were indeed highly place-specific, moulded by localised circumstances, not least in types of rural protest where forms of charivari or localised symbolism were still effective forms of pressure on local landowners, as seen during the Swing riots in southern England in the 1830s.³² As the articles in this issue reveal, there were many forms that were shared and adapted across different constitutional and monarchical regimes across the world. Laura C. Forster demonstrates how activists travelled across and between nations to enable the dissemination of knowledge about forms of organisation and practice, more or less successfully. Place worked on different levels simultaneously: as Mary O’Connor and Henry Miller argue, public meetings and petitions could assemble residents in different combinations to represent materially a town, trade, county or group; these might forum shop or double-count for greater effect. Equally, Isaiah Silvers shows how the growth of voluntary associations in Barbados illuminated political divisions, whether by providing inter-racial and cross-class organisation or seeking to deflect critiques of a society built on

²⁹Richard Huzzey, ‘Contesting Interests: Rethinking Pressure, Parliament, Nation, and Empire’, in *Pressure and Protest: From Civil War to Civil Society*, ed. Huzzey (Oxford, 2018), 1–17.

³⁰Although Alex Middleton’s historiographical survey starts with the assertion that histories of Victorian politics have never been insular, he suggests that the last 20 years or so of research has been so: ‘Victorian Politics and Politics Overseas’, *HJ*, lxiv (2021), 1449.

³¹Shamima Akhtar, Erika Hanna, Peter Hession, Mobeen Hussain, Krishan Kumar, Naomi Lloyd-Jones, Jane Ohlmeyer and Ian Stewart, ‘Roundtable: Four Nations’, *Modern British History*, xxxv (2024), 30–48.

³²Graham Seal, ‘Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales’, *Folklore*, xcix (1998), 146–69. There is a rich variety of studies of charivari and custom in modern political and protest cultures globally, see, for example, Ilaria Favretto and Marco Fincardi, ‘Carnavalesque and Charivari Repertoires in 1960s and 1970s Italian Protest’, in *Protest, Popular Culture and Tradition in Modern and Contemporary Western Europe*, ed. Favretto and Xabier Itcaina (2017), 149–83.

slavery. Familiar models of organisation took on very different meanings when transplanted and developed in new environments. Moreover, as Caitlin Kitchener illustrates, landscapes held cultural and material palimpsests of prior meetings that shaped new uses of familiar spaces.

A comparative approach across the four nations, empire and the world points to the distinctiveness of the long 19th century as a time of iterative and rhizomatic development for constitutional regimes, in relation to global movements and events.³³ By iterative, we mean processes in which political and social movements developed their organisation and practices by trial and error, modifying their tactics in response to the specific and constraining structures of power. By rhizomatic, moreover, we mean that such interactions could operate in parallel at the same or different times. The obvious comparisons are with North America, where a combination of colonial and republican constitutional development was forged during the revolutionary period and throughout the 19th century. Notably there has been a revival of interest in early federalism and the role of the state in the early American republic, as the contemporary electoral system has come under intense scrutiny in the wake of the insurrection on 6 January 2021.³⁴ British constitutional history does not have the same impetus or need for close attention to federalism of course, but questions of nationalisms and the home rule movements in the four nations and in colonial legislatures again need to be reconsidered – and indeed, re-placed – in a shifting contemporary debate over devolved parliaments.

Historians should also examine alternative forms of democratic organising and chronologies of widening representation. Sweden offers an interesting comparison in Western Europe. For example, Don Mitchell, Erik Jonsson and Johan Pries's work on the *Folkets Parker* (People's Parks) movement across Sweden from the 1890s charts the extra-parliamentary activities of the Social Democrats. Alongside workers' associations and trade unions, the party created People's Parks across the country, as both ideological ventures, and as practical venues for political and social protests, notably during the general strike of 1909.³⁵ There is potential for more research on how some political movements in Europe were able to develop their own spheres of action that fed directly into interventions in parliaments, in ways that perhaps were not possible or were repressed in Britain and Ireland in the same period. We also need further research on how political organisation operated within an imperial framework. The flow of ideas and structures of politics was not one way: it was reciprocal and mutable as people and pamphlets moved to and from the centre of power, and as governmental structures were experimented with, applied and adapted in the colonies. There is much more that can be explored about how practices were imposed by force or

³³We take the term 'rhizomatic' from a different context, that of Kathryn Gleadle's commentary on the historiography of women's history, and apply it here as a useful term to counter teleological narratives. See Kathryn Gleadle, 'The Imagined Communities of Women's History: Current Debates and Emerging Themes, a Rhizomatic Approach', *Women's History Review*, xxii (2013), 524–40 (repr. in *Reconsidering Women's History: Twenty Years of the Women's History Network*, ed. Lucy Bland and Katharina Rowold (2015)).

³⁴Gautham Rao, 'The New Historiography of the Early Federal Government: Institutions, Contexts, and the Imperial State', *William and Mary Quarterly*, lxxvii (2020), 97–128.

³⁵Don Mitchell, Erik Jonsson and Johan Pries, 'Making the People's Landscape: Landscape Ideals, Collective Labour and the People's Parks (*Folkets Parker*) Movement in Sweden, 1891–present', *Journal of Historical Geography*, lxxii (2021), 23–39; Johan Pries, Erik Jonsson and Don Mitchell, 'Red Outposts in a Hostile Landscape: People's Houses, People's Parks and the Reconstruction of Rural Southern Sweden's Political Geography, 1889–1909', *Political Geography*, cxix (2022), 1–13.

were deliberately seeking to replicate the structures of the imperial power. How did groups seeking representation in these imperial regimes mirror, subvert or create their own political practices and organisation? The current framing of British history within an imperial and post-colonial context offers opportunities to compare the effects or impact of rule in Ireland and the colonies. Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller's study of petitioning between the colonies and the imperial parliament, for example, illustrates the interplay of practices and forms of organisation, navigating and shaped by issues of power, distance and time delays.³⁶

5. Conclusion: Future Directions

Analysing recipes for organisation, as we propose in this article, leads to three principal suggestions for future research in 19th-century political history. First, a renewed attention to the administrative, constitutional and cultural geographies in which political organisations operated helps us to understand why certain recipes failed and others improvised new techniques. The constitutional and political changes of the 19th century are integral to understanding the distinctive legal environments for organisations and movements in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, and we need to be in greater dialogue with the current studies of empire. Twentieth-century histories of the British and Irish state and politics previously emphasised two key themes: first, the background to, and legacies of, the rise of the welfare state; and second, the impact of decolonisation and legacies of empire.³⁷ There are significant elements of these histories that could benefit from attention to the practices and organisation of politics in the ways that we have highlighted above.

Second, we must integrate a focus on the practices of politics with the history of ideas. Forms of organisation and practices of politics interacted with intellectual developments, especially in the rapid and vital cross-currents of pan-Atlantic and colonial debates over issues of representation and democracy as well as federalism and other forms of government. Organisations do not form in an intellectual vacuum. Indeed, the chains of transmission of information were a form of political practice in themselves. The politics of representation in the 19th century was, in essence, politics conducted over a distance. The spread of ideas across varying distances – from Westminster to outside parliament; from centre to periphery; across the four nations; to and from the empire – was shaped and hindered by modes of power, elite control and censorship, but ultimately political groups found ways of breaking established constraints, be it through the unstamped press, pamphlets sent across the Atlantic or lecturers physically travelling across the Irish Sea and beyond. We can conceptualise these varied modes as rhizomatic, connected yet developing their own forms and trajectories where they landed. To what extent were imperial and metropolitan actors inhabiting the same rhetorical discourses, and more importantly, how did those discourses shape the ways in which they acted and enacted politics?

The articles in this issue suggest how analysis of ideas and languages could reconnect to studies of organisation and material practices. Study of languages beyond the formality

³⁶Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, 'Colonial Petitions, Colonial Petitioners, and the Imperial Parliament, ca. 1780–1918', *Journal of British Studies*, lxi (2022), 261–89; Richard Huzzey, 'Contesting Interests: Rethinking Pressure, Parliament, Nation, and Empire', *PH*, xxxvii (2018), 1–17.

³⁷See, for example, Richard Toye, *Age of Hope: Labour, 1945, and the Birth of Modern Britain* (2023); Charlotte Riley, *Imperial Island: An Alternative History of Empire in Modern Britain* (Harvard, 2023).

of ideology and performance is useful for thinking about how the ideologies of a movement interacted with their organisational practices, and their interactions with broader ideological and organisational structures together. Here, there is much to learn from the ‘vernacular turn’ in 20th-century political history in rethinking the interactions between ideas and organisation.³⁸ Vernacular forms of communication outside the realm of political institutions and their propaganda – be they folklore, songs or graffiti – grounded politics in everyday life and non-elite culture rather than the ‘apartness’ of parliamentary and party modes of communication. Rebecca Goldsmith nonetheless suggests that the study of such linguistic practices has more continuity with the new political history in terms of methods and sources than its proponents have suggested.³⁹ We argue that the use of language as a practice and tool to disseminate ideas as well as organise was integral to the workings of both party and extra-parliamentary political movements. Chalking ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ on a wall in 1768 or hearing a ballad sung about the plight of Frost, Williams and Jones (the Newport martyrs) in a pub in 1840 were both practices and ideological structures that were part of the fabric of everyday life, materially as well as intellectually. There was a continuum, rather than a strict divide, between debates on foreign policy across the benches of Westminster and the insults shouted at a suspected ‘English Jacobin’ by church-and-king loyalists on the streets in a provincial town in 1794. Historians of the long 19th century can uncover more ways in which political ideas were spread vernacularly, interacting with the recorded word on the page and into popular speech practices.

Finally, we further argue that political historians can speak to, and learn from, historians of emotions and the senses.⁴⁰ As many of the articles in this issue show, political organising was a lived experience contingent on human relationships as well as structural forces or ideologies. Dave Steele shows how platform speakers and their audiences reciprocally responded to emotions, reactions to sounds and other sensual stimuli. Some of this texture is visible where newspapers commented on the mood of a public meeting, the joyous or conversely acrimonious responses of the audience to a speaker, or the jubilant celebrations of a crowd participating in a ‘grand entry’ procession of a victorious electoral candidate or the return of political martyrs from prison or exile. Emotions were practised habits, shaped by dominant culture and societal norms. Inside and outside parliament, in elections or political meetings – which earlier cultural historians had depicted as a theatre with a pre-determined script or a pageant of choreographed behaviours – speakers sought to manipulate collective emotion for the cause through their words, gestures and rituals, while their opponents or the crowd might employ other rituals or practices to subvert or divert popular feeling to a different cause.⁴¹ Emotions and the mechanisms through which they were expressed or demonstrated in public for political purposes should therefore form part of the recipe or repertoire of politics.

³⁸See, for example, David Cowan, ‘The “Progress of a Slogan”: Youth, Culture, and the Shaping of Everyday Political languages in late 1940s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, xxix (2018), 439–41; Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics and the Decline of Deference in England 1968–2000* (Oxford, 2018).

³⁹Rebecca Goldsmith, ‘Towards the Vernacular, Away from Politics? Political History after the “New Political History”’, *Political Quarterly*, xciv (2023), 272–8.

⁴⁰Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester, 2018); J.M. Rogenhofer and F.C. da Silva, ‘Politics with Objects? On the Affective Materiality of Contentious Politics’, *Acta Sociologica*, lxxvii (2024), 6–19.

⁴¹Frank O’Gorman, ‘Ritual Aspects of Popular Politics in England (c. 1700–1830)’, *Memoria Y Civilización*, iii (2000), 161–86; *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture: Theatre and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Peter Yeandle, Katherine Newey and Jeffrey Richards (Manchester, 2016).

The politics of the long 19th century in Britain, Ireland and the empire was an evolving – sometimes contradictory – set of established and innovative practices. This afterword has pointed to the vibrancy of new research and offered some further directions for broadening our understanding of how the constitutional settlement and popular representation developed over the period. While organisers chose from a repertoire of practices, they combined them with new methods and available ingredients and in different environments. The results and experiences therefore resembled the practice of choosing and developing recipes. Placing a full range of political organisations in comparison – and indeed considering international comparisons – highlights a distinctive confection of practices and ideas of popular sovereignty, not just formal extensions of voting rights, in the long 19th century of Britain and Ireland.