



DID NEWSPAPER COMPETITION
PROMOTE REBELLION? THE CASE OF
THE 1837-38 REBELLIONS IN QUEBEC

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Did Newspaper Competition Promote Rebellion? The case of the 1837-38 Rebellions in Quebec

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Abstract

We investigate the relationship between media competitiveness and political mobilization during the Quebec Rebellion of 1837--38. We argue that the rebellion was shaped by newspaper coordination of political action. Drawing on a new spatial dataset of newspaper agents, we test whether local media competitiveness predicts the intensity of rebel mobilization, independent of the partisan alignment of the press. The effect is magnified in areas where seigneurial (i.e., feudal) tenure persisted, suggesting a complementarity between institutionally concentrated grievance and competitive press exposure. Adding newly created human capital controls---school enrollment and literacy---does not attenuate the competition effect. Globally, media competition transformed latent discontent into active participation in the conflict. These results offer insight into the economics of rebellions and uprisings.

Résumé

Nous étudions la relation entre la compétitivité médiatique et la mobilisation politique durant la rébellion du Québec de 1837--38. Nous soutenons que la rébellion a été façonnée par la coordination de l'action politique par les journaux. À partir d'un nouvel ensemble de données spatiales sur les agents de journaux, nous testons si la compétitivité médiatique locale prédit l'intensité de la mobilisation rebelle, indépendamment de l'alignement partisan de la presse. L'effet est amplifié dans les zones où le régime seigneurial (c'est-à-dire féodal) persistait, ce qui suggère une complémentarité entre des griefs institutionnellement concentrés et l'exposition à une presse concurrentielle. L'ajout de nouveaux contrôles de capital humain — taux de scolarisation et alphabétisation — n'atténue pas l'effet de la concurrence. De manière générale, la concurrence médiatique a transformé un mécontentement latent en participation active au conflit. Ces résultats apportent un éclairage sur l'économie des rébellions et des soulèvements.

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1 Introduction

News media affect political activity through their impact on coordination costs and belief formation. But does media competition promote rebelliousness or does it act to reduce conflict?

In democratic contexts, competitive media reduces coordination costs: citizens can organize around shared information while governments learn citizen preferences (Besley & Prat, 2006; Cooray et al., 2017; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2008; Sen, 1999). In polarized societies, it can translate potentially violent movements for political change into peaceful ones (Armand et al., 2020).

In authoritarian or weakly responsive institutional settings, independent media can coordinate co-partisans against rivals and the state, amplifying cleavages and making compromise harder (Acemoglu et al., 2018; T. Aidt & Leon-Ablan, 2022; Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Mulainathan & Shleifer, 2005). Even in liberal contexts, competition can reinforce readers' priors, intensify rhetoric, and widen social divisions (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2008). When authorities also apply asymmetric repression—prosecuting opposition media while tolerating regime-friendly outlets—they create the most destabilizing configuration possible. This combination of competitive polarization under incomplete authoritarian control makes rebellion rational where either pure suppression or genuine freedom might produce different outcomes, as compromises become hard to achieve and political separation or rebellion become likelier tools to break impasses (Apolte, 2016; Blattman & Miguel, 2010; Buchanan & Faith, 1987; Tullock, 1971).

In this paper, we study the case of the 1837–38 rebellions in the modern-day Canadian province of Quebec—then known as Lower Canada. Quebec was an ethno-linguistically fractured, oligarchic colony (albeit with a colonial legislature) with remnants of a feudal institution—known as a seigneurial tenure—governing land concessions for most (not all) of its territory. The colony erupted in rebellion in 1837 following refusals by the British government to grant more administrative autonomy. After an initial successes by the rebels (known as *Patriotes*), British military forces quashed the rebellion. Many rebels fled into the United States and attempted a second uprising in the summer and fall of 1838, which also failed. The British authorities tried 108 rebel leaders, of whom 99 were condemned to death, although only 44 were ever hanged;

the rest were deported. Despite their failure, the rebellions were a stepping stone on the path to a more liberal democracy. In 1848, Britain began granting the different colonies ministerial responsibility, meaning that the executive branch became accountable to the elected legislatures rather than to the appointed Governor (solidifying self-government). The Governor’s veto faded, ministers were drawn from the legislative majority, and control over key internal functions (tariff policy, post office, infrastructure policy) shifted from London to the colonies. Well before Confederation in 1867, British North American colonies were largely self-governing in domestic affairs. Against this backdrop, we examine whether greater media competition increased radical political behavior, notably rebellious events central to Canada’s democratic transition.

Using a dataset of rebellious events from Laporte (2004)—geo-coded and matched to the 1831 census by Geloso & Kufenko (2019)—combined with a new dataset on newspaper presence, we test this hypothesis. Newspapers listed local “agents,” which proxy for distribution points, allowing us to identify where multiple papers competed within a parish or nearby radius. Crucially, these newspapers spanned the full ideological spectrum—from radical *Patriote* to staunch loyalist, and in both French and English. Our measure of newspaper competition thus captures both political diversity and the underlying ethno-linguistic cleavages that characterized Quebec. Moreover, we use the number of agents of newspapers in the period *before* the rebellions in order to avoid endogeneity issues. Finally, thanks to the cross-referencing with the census of 1831, we have a detailed array of control variables (Curtis & Geloso, 2025; Geloso et al., 2017).

We find strong evidence that media competition was linked to greater rebelliousness. This association was stronger in parts of the colony where seigneurial tenure remained *de jure*. Within seigneurial estates, however, the effect of the intensity of feudal exactions was not significant (i.e., no intensive margin). However, there was a strong interaction between media competition and seigneurial tenure such that less media competition in seigneurial areas predicted fewer rebellious activities. These results are robust to controls for partisan bias in the newspaper market. Including human capital measures (with or without interaction terms with media competition) does not alter any of our above results. Overall, our evidence shows rebellion intensity

was shaped more by living standards and media competition than by ethnicity. Ideas circulated through newspapers of all stripes—what mattered was their density, not their ideology.

Our results matter for three reasons. First, it shows that media competition facilitated rebellions. Given the rebellions' role in Canada's path toward self-governed democracy, this implies that media competition played an important role in democratization. Second, it suggests ethno-linguistic factors have been overstated. Ethno-linguistic divisions largely overlapped with institutional grievances, which media competition amplified and strategically mobilized—often using cultural distinctions to unify otherwise distinct groups under the rebels' cause—rather than fueling the rebellion itself. Historians have long debated whether the rebellions stemmed from institutions (seigneurial tenure), low living standards, or nationalism. Our evidence suggests each captures part of the story but overlooks how media competition amplified grievances and turned them into coordinated action. Absent newspapers, low incomes and a regressive tenure system might have produced resignation rather than revolt. The rebellions were not inevitable; they emerged when economic hardship and institutional constraints met a suddenly competitive press.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 situates the rebellions within their historical context and links them to the economics of media literature. Section 3 outlines the empirical strategy. Section 4 reports the results, and Section 5 offers discussion and concluding remarks.

2 Historical Background

2.1 From Conquest to Conflict

Three years after French forces in Canada capitulated to British forces near Montreal, the French formally ceded its main North American possession to the British in the 1763 Paris Treaty. The British thus began to rule a population of nearly 60,000 French-speaking Catholics. An immediate legal and political dilemma emerged: how should the colonists be treated with respect to their faith, their land tenure regime, their civil law, and their criminal law? The British

initially opted for a policy of self-interested toleration (Fyson, 2006; Geloso, 2015, 2018; Land & Geloso, 2020; Lawson, 1994).¹ They preserved land tenure regimes, civil institutions, and accommodated the Catholic church. The largest change was that British criminal law replaced French criminal law.

Only after the American Revolution—when Loyalists arrived—did a sizable English minority emerge and shift the political equilibrium. These newcomers resented French institutions, while British authorities feared conflict, creating pressure for further accommodation. They split the colony into Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). In Lower Canada, authorities froze the existing seigneurial regime while placing all new settlements under freehold tenure, creating a six-decade coexistence of two distinct systems. They also introduced a bicameral parliament with limited powers. This partial self-government was designed to co-opt French-Canadian elites—landowners, clergy, and merchants—into the colonial state and align them with British rule.

As time passed, however, the parliament's lower chamber increasingly clashed with British authorities as it became dominated by the *Parti canadien* (Bernier & Salée, 1995; Coates, 1999; Hare, 1973; Laporte, 2015; Théberge, 2022; Tousignant, 1975; Wallot, 1973).² Initially French and composed of landowners within the British-preserved seigneurial regime, the party gradually came to be dominated by the liberal professions and developed a substantial non-French wing. By the 1830s, it rebranded itself the *Parti patriote* to recognize that its electoral base had expanded to include English-speakers (Laporte, 2015; Théberge, 2022). Thus, the *Patriotes* were not exclusively French by the 1830s (Wallot, 1973).

Its main opponent was the *Parti bureaucrate*, which steadily declined in size. Nicknamed the “Cligue du Château,” it referred to a small group of wealthy individuals close to political

¹Largely under the constraint of the high burden of Britain's public debt and the feared high cost of repressive/assimilationist policies—see Geloso (2015). Moreover, until the 1790s, there was a trivial English minority in the colony.

²The term *Canadien* historically referred to the French-speaking inhabitants of New France and later of Quebec, distinguishing them from British North Americans. It was commonly used to assert a distinct cultural and national identity among French Canadians, particularly in contrast to English-speaking settlers (who were argued to be still attached to Britain rather than to Canada). The term has since declined in everyday usage.

power. Initially largely English, the party gradually came to include many French-speaking landowners. Despite its smaller size, it retained power because of the colony's constitutional structure. Appointed by London, the Governor-General had authority over both Upper and Lower Canada. He appointed an Executive Council (ministers), the members of the upper chamber (the Legislative Council), and key civil officers (e.g., solicitor general, comptroller, civil secretaries).³ These institutions were staffed by members of the *Parti bureaucrate*, even as it became increasingly marginal in the elected lower chamber.

The key political battlefield was the *bataille des subsides*. The Legislative Assembly (lower chamber) held the right to grant supplies and revenue and the Governor could not unilaterally raise funds (Legislative Council of Lower Canada, 1794, p. 28/40).⁴ No monies for the civil government could be raised unless the Assembly passed legislation, the Legislative Council consented and the Governor assented. However, under the Constitutional Act of 1791, the Legislative Council could not produce money bills—a right exclusive to the Legislative Assembly. On the other hand, the Governor's veto allowed him to essentially ignore whatever the Assembly voted for. This exclusive right was used to force concessions from the Governor. It delayed the adoption of budgets, published the salaries of civil officers to embarrass members of the *Parti bureaucrate*, frequently passed large petitions that it would then circulate to the British parliament to obtain support.⁵ On one occasion, the the British parliament sided with the *Parti canadien* and disavowed the Governor (who was sent packing to India instead). By the 1830s, the lower chamber regularly paralyzed civil administration.

In the elections of 1834, the *Parti patriote* campaigned on the basis of the 92 Resolutions—a

³However, some functions were not within his control. For example, until the 1850s, the colonial Postal Zone was a branch of the British Postal Zone, with its own rules and regulations, exempt from the Governor-General's remit (Geloso & Makovi, 2022).

⁴However, it is important to note that there were effectively *two* governments. Military expenditures—such as soldier pay, fort maintenance, and supplies—were funded directly by the British Treasury and recorded in imperial accounts. This constituted the colony's military government. Civil expenses, including salaries for judges, administration, and infrastructure, were financed through colonial revenues (e.g., customs duties and land rents), managed by the Receiver General and subject to local appropriations. This constituted the civil government. Formally, the two were separate (Paquet & Wallot, 1973).

⁵One petition, in 1827, obtained 87,000 names. Given a population of 479,288 in the 1825 census, this is not a trivial number even if we account for usual concerns regarding census underestimation (Cherkesly et al., 2019; Dillon & Joubert, 2013).

comprehensive list of political and institutional demands adopted earlier that year by the elected Assembly. While the Resolutions affirmed loyalty to the British Crown and recalled that French Canadians had defended the colony against American invasions in 1775 and 1812, they nonetheless demanded constitutional reforms: an elected Legislative Council, responsible government (i.e., an Executive Council accountable to the elected Assembly), full control over public finances by the Assembly, and the power to appoint civil officers. The *Patriotes* triumphed—winning 76 out of 88 electoral districts. In 1837, John Russell—then the Whig Home Secretary and later Prime Minister of the United Kingdom—responded with his 10 Resolutions which essentially denied the requests of the *Patriotes*. After that point, the *Patriotes* began organized local assemblies denouncing Russell’s decision and calling for boycotts (in the spirit of the American Revolution’s earlier days) which was interpreted as sedition by the Governor who ordered the arrest of the party’s leaders. Low-grade violence began to erupt between *Patriotes* and loyalists. The violence had already started in the early 1830s—well before the unveiling of the Russell Resolutions.

The violence gradually snowballed into armed conflict. Skirmishes between British army regulars and armed *Patriotes* began after rioting broke out between rival paramilitaries in Montreal in early November 1837. Within a month, 300 British regulars were dispatched to arrest the main leader of the *Patriotes*, but they were repelled by a smaller contingent of *Patriotes* at the Battle of Saint-Denis. From that point, the British doubled down and they systematically defeated the *Patriotes* in the battles of Saint-Charles and Saint-Eustache. A second wave of more radical *Patriotes* attempted a second rising in 1838, but the battles at Beauharnois, Saint-Bernard de Lacolle and Odelltown marked final defeats. The British government later, in 1840, merged the two colonies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada in order to dilute the political weight of the French-Canadians. But by 1848, and more importantly 1867, London had conceded further autonomy to their Canadian subjects, allowing for democratization and the emergence of domestic sovereignty.

2.2 The Historiography of the Rebellions

Historians of the rebellions fall into three broad camps. The traditional view emphasizes an ethno-linguistic struggle (Filteau, 1938; Groulx, 1924, 1960), often linking it to today’s separatist movement. A second view acknowledges this ethnic dimension but stresses socio-economic tensions, as reflected in the presence of an English-speaking faction within the *Parti patriote* and French-speaking landowners in the *Parti bureaucrate* (Bernier & Salée, 1995; Ouellet, 1972, 1980).⁶

Whereas the first camp is homogeneous, the second camp is not. Some emphasize the diffusion of republican ideas coming from abroad that explain the ideological transformation of the *Parti patriote* from conservative monarchism to Whiggish, liberal, and republican stances (Lamonde, 2000, 2013; Laporte, 2015). Others highlight low living standards, a structural economic malaise, and prolonged stagnation—or even outright decline—as key causes of the rebellions in Lower Canada (Ouellet, 1980). This view is challenged by claims (without using econometric methods) that the rebellions originated in relatively prosperous areas, which undermines the explanatory power of deprivation-based accounts (Greer & Robichaud, 1989).⁷ The Marxist interpretation argues that the colony was undergoing a painful shift away from agrarian structures toward a more “capitalistic” economy (Bernier & Salée, 1995; Sweeny, 1990).⁸ If a form of class struggle was emerging, it helps explain the sizable non-French contingent within the *Patriotes*, including in their leadership. A key complaint was the role of seigneurial tenure, a hold-over compromise with pre-existing French colonial elites. This land tenure regime limited mobility for perpetual renters (*censitaires*) who could not leave unless they sold the improvements on their plots (*censives*) and paid a substantial tax (*lods et ventes*) to the landlord (*seigneur*). Each year, *censitaires* were expected to pay taxes (*cens et rentes*) to the *seigneurs* and provide him with

⁶A longer summary of the different nuances between viewpoints is available in Collin (2008).

⁷These critics concede only that a decade-long stagnation may have set the timing of the uprisings, acting as a trigger or catalyst, but not as a fundamental cause (Courville, 2009; Greer & Robichaud, 1989).

⁸We remain uneasy with the frequent use of this term, which is often employed without a clear or consistent definition. It may denote a new economic mentality—associated with the modern era and greater reliance on markets—or a shift away from kin-based and community-oriented exchange. We therefore use “exposure to markets” as a control in this paper to engage with this tradition.

a fixed number of workdays for no wage (*corvée*). The *seigneurs* were generally aligned (though not perfectly) with the British and were a key target of disgruntlement within the population.⁹

While the British establishment was ambivalent about reforming (or abolishing) seigneurial tenure, the *Patriotes* rank and file was generally hostile to the institution and used it as a rallying object (Lamonde, 2000, 2013, pp. 234–235, pp. 196–197).¹⁰ Seigneurial tenure allowed for “grievance legibility”; its burdens were understood by the average inhabitant (Altman, 1983). Moreover, *seigneurs* were generally identified as being aligned with the colonial state (and the Governor). Connecting the burden of the institution to state-aligned *seigneurs* created a focal point around which rebellion could be motivated. Moreover, the features of seigneurial tenure also allowed this focal point to rally a broad coalition along social class lines. This is because any inn, store, tavern, foundry, mill, manufacture, or factory established on a seigneurial estate had to pay the aforementioned taxes. While generally costly, the *lods et ventes* was particularly problematic. Because it was a tax imposed on assets at the moment of sale, it effectively combined a capital gains tax with a capital tax, since assets were taxed regardless of whether they had appreciated or depreciated. Obviously, *seigneurs* were not subject to this tax. This constituted a major deterrent to industrial effort, which is why most non-farm industries in the colony were either operated directly by the *seigneurs* or opened in collaboration with them (Courville, 2009; Geloso et al., 2023). Thus, while the direct burden fell on *cessitaires*, the institution also antagonized merchants and business owners who saw it as an obstacle to industrialization. This made it a rare institution capable of unifying rural farmers and members of higher-income groups into a common oppositional coalition—a necessary condition for large-scale rebellion.

A third, more eclectic, camp emphasizes local contexts, highlighting how regional and parish-level dynamics shaped participation in the rebellions (Greer, 1993). Rooted in detailed

⁹Bernier & Salée (1995) analyzed the composition of the Legislative Council and Executive Council and found that substantial shares of the memberships of these Governor-aligned bodies were *seigneurs* (pp. 141–44, 146–149).

¹⁰Not all *Patriotes* objected to the seigneurial system, however. Louis-Joseph Papineau, a rebel leader and newspaper editor, supported it as a traditional means of preserving French-Canadian culture and cultivating Jeffersonian yeomanism (Guimond, 2021). His view may be explained by the fact that he was himself a *seigneur*, which contributed to inter-rebel tensions (Lamonde, 2000, 2013; Laporte, 2004, pp. 249–250, pp. 210–211, pp. 127–128).

social history, this approach purports to explain why some parishes rebelled while others did not. It contrasts with the other views by portraying the rebellions as fragmented and contingent rather than deterministic. While sometimes accused of downplaying broader ideological or structural forces, it does not reject ethnic or socio-economic factors but instead examines how they manifested differently across local settings.

All three camps are not necessarily antagonistic, but the conversation has largely stalled. This impasse stems from a significant methodological gap: of the 1,641 articles and books published on the rebellions as of 2003, none employed regression analysis or even basic statistical methods to test competing hypotheses (Larocque, 2015, p. 2).¹¹ Without empirical validation, little progress can be made for any particular hypothesis.

There are two exceptions (both after Larocque’s survey of the literature). The first is Carpenter & Brossard (2019), who analyze a large petition against the governor in the 1820s that led to his recall—a key victory for the *Patriotes*. They find that areas with a strong seigneurial presence produced more signatures, suggesting that the tenure regime helped coordinate the expression of grievances. However, their analysis uses few covariates and highly aggregated spatial units. Still, it points to a socio-economic “demand” for rebellious activity. The second is Geloso & Kufenko (2019), who show that Quebec’s economy was becoming increasingly integrated, both internally and with external markets.¹² They argue that the commercial networks underpinning this integration could be repurposed for collective action. Using parish- and township-level data, they find that more market-connected areas—proxied by price gaps with major ports—were more likely to revolt, holding wealth, ethnicity, and state presence constant. In other words, market integration reduced the costs of rebellion and increased its supply. Both studies, using econometric approaches, underscore the role of socio-economic factors in the rebellions. However, they do not speak to the relative ranking of other explanations.

¹¹A more recent discussion contained in Théberge (2022) confirms this. The most sophisticated use of econometric method found is in Laporte (2004). He uses a bivariate regression of number of *Patriote* activities (not scaled to population) and the share of Catholics in a county (less than 30 observations) (p. 39). Given this bivariate setup, he did not test rival hypotheses.

¹²Further evidence is provided by Geloso (2024).

We argue that media competition helps assess the relative importance of these explanations. By shaping perceived payoffs and lowering coordination costs, it captures demand-side drivers of rebellion that earlier accounts struggle to measure. We test whether greater media competition shifted the payoff from acquiescence to rebellion—holding ethno-linguistic factors constant—and thus tipped the equilibrium toward collective action. In doing so, we bridge and rank competing explanations within a unified framework.

2.3 The Role of Media *vis-à-vis* Rebellion

The existing literature on media economics generates two contrasting predictions about how competitive media markets affect political stability. In democratically consolidated settings, a competitive press disciplines governments, reduces information asymmetries, and channels political demands into peaceful institutional channels (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2008). In weakly institutionalized settings, however, the same competitive dynamics can amplify political cleavages and lower coordination costs for opposition movements, tipping latent grievances into collective action (Acemoglu et al., 2018; Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005). Which prediction holds depends on the surrounding institutional environment—making Lower Canada’s combination of colonial oligarchy, ethno-linguistic polarization, and a competitive multilingual press a particularly informative case.

The outbreak of rebellion is typically understood as the consequence of both long-term structural tensions and short-run shocks. Classical theories emphasize relative deprivation, the reversal of improving material conditions, and the erosion of legitimacy as central mechanisms linking frustrated economic expectations to political instability (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 2010). A growing body of empirical work has tested these mechanisms directly: rising food prices have been shown to causally increase collective violence and riots (Arezki & Brueckner, 2014; Bellemare, 2015), and frustrated labor-market outcomes among increasingly educated populations predict protest and regime instability (Campante & Chor, 2014, 2012). More precisely, *anticipated* socio-economic decline, rather than *current* relative deprivation within and between

groups, is the key driver of participation in political violence, as expectations of loss increase individuals' willingness to take risks (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022).¹³ Moral-economy approaches similarly stress violations of customary rights and perceived injustice as catalysts for collective violence (Scott, 1977), with historical evidence showing that subsistence shocks and subsequent breaches in agrarian obligations can trigger peasant revolt and demand for institutional change (Blickle, 1981; Luebke, 1997; Waldinger, 2024).

These perspectives treat rebellion as rooted in underlying social and economic grievances. Empirical work on civil conflict further highlights how structural inequality and weak institutions interact to generate instability (T. Aidt & Leon-Ablan, 2022; Blattman & Miguel, 2010; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). In Lower Canada, socio-economic disparities, ethno-linguistic divisions, and institutional rigidities—particularly those embedded in seigneurial tenure—created conditions of localized inequality and political resentment conducive to grievance formation (Geloso et al., 2023; Geloso & Kufenko, 2019).

However, grievances alone are insufficient: collective action is costly, free-riding is easy, and individuals face repression risks and uncertainty about others' participation. Dissatisfaction can remain latent without mechanisms that lower coordination costs (Olson, 2003; Popkin, 1979, pp. 24–27). Threshold models show that participation depends on beliefs about others' willingness to act (Kuran, 1989, 1995). Inequality may generate demand for rebellion, but mobilization requires means. Collier & Hoeffler (2004) find that standard proxies for grievance—income inequality, land inequality, ethnic polarization, and political repression—carry little explanatory power in predicting civil war onset, with opportunity variables such as primary commodity

¹³Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen draw on prospect theory to distinguish between two mechanisms through which deprivation might promote risk-seeking (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022, pp. 1401–1403). Static relative deprivation—perceiving oneself as worse off than others—situates the individual in a reference frame where acquiring others' resources constitutes a *gain*; under prospect theory's prediction of risk-aversion in the gain domain, this should actually dampen willingness to engage in the risky act of political violence. Prospective decremental deprivation, by contrast, casts an anticipated deterioration as a *loss* relative to one's current position, inducing risk-seeking aimed at averting that loss. Critically, *anticipation* rather than prior experience of loss is the stronger motivator: once a loss has already occurred, the reference point adjusts downward, recoding subsequent improvement as a gain and thereby restoring risk-aversion. The underlying micro-foundation is the demonstration that the value function is convex below the reference point—individuals already in the loss domain are risk-seeking—and steeper for losses than for equivalent gains in (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, pp. 268, 279).

revenues and foregone earnings consistently outperforming them; on this account, what distinguishes societies that experience civil conflict is not the severity of grievances but the feasibility of rebellion. News media shapes how grievances are framed and transmitted, while also lowering coordination costs by signaling shared dissatisfaction, publicizing focal events, and disseminating organizational information (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Gentzkow et al., 2011). In Lower Canada, partisan newspapers translated localized economic complaints—over rents, monopolies, public finance, and political favoritism—into broader narratives of colonial inequality, linking dispersed communities into a common opposition (Greer, 1993; Lamonde, 2000, 2013). In other words, newspapers might have reduced the cost of political coordination.

But did lower coordination costs tilt behavior toward non-violent or violent action? Media is a “dual-use” technology: its effects depend on context. Competition can induce partisan slant when audiences sort along ideological or linguistic lines; in such markets, outlets differentiate by moving toward positions more extreme than even their most biased readers (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005), increasing polarization (Levendusky, 2013; Prior, 2013). At the same time, minority-interest media can amplify marginalized voices by raising participation among underserved groups (Oberholzer-Gee & Waldfogel, 2009) and by facilitating identity-based mobilization or radicalization (Serby, 2023). Where formal institutions are weak or unresponsive, the press can also act as a substitute public sphere in the Habermasian sense (Habermas, 2011), enabling debate, aggregating grievances, and holding elites to account (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Strömberg, 2004). The net effect is therefore ambiguous: a competitive press may either facilitate or dampen violent rebellion, depending on institutional, cultural, and economic conditions.

Despite their prominence in the Quebec historiography, newspaper sources have never been employed in ways that could speak to demand for rebellions. Newspapers in Quebec tended to be either wholly English, wholly French, or bilingual, and were typically aligned with specific political parties—or explicitly declared their neutrality (Théberge, 2022). This makes it possible to use newspaper circulation and content as a point of intersection with maps of ethnic tensions—especially when paired with census data on the ethnic composition of the regions in

which they were distributed. Similarly, census data for these areas can shed light on structural factors such as socio-economic conditions, degree of market integration (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019), and patterns of industrial development. The same sources can also be matched with data regarding land tenure regimes (Geloso et al., 2023) to see if seigneurial tenure amplified the demand for rebellions. The central implication of this approach is conditional: structural inequality creates the potential for rebellion, but the structure of newspaper markets affects whether that potential is realized. In districts characterized by seigneurial tenure, competitive newspaper markets should have been especially effective at transforming grievances into coordinated action, while more concentrated markets may have suppressed observable mobilization by raising coordination costs. Newspapers could have channeled concerns regarding socio-economic tensions or acted as a focal point to coalesce different parts of a potentially winning socio-economic coalition of disaffected classes or groups.

The press played a crucial role in articulating the economic grievances in political debate, transforming local complaints—about seigneurial obligations, public works funding awarded to English merchants, and banking policies favoring anglophone interests—into evidence of systematic colonial inequality. This editorial synthesis helped rural farmers and urban professionals recognize common interests despite their different material circumstances (Greer, 1993; Lamonde, 2000, 2013). Newspapers frequently leveraged one another to promote their affiliated parties (when they had one) and to vilify, often through insults, rival papers tied to opposing parties (Théberge, 2022).¹⁴

At the same time, the case of Quebec is particularly interesting for the broader economics literature. First, by the 1830s, it is clearly a polarized society with increasing violence. Second, the background is a semi-liberal institutional environment: there is a parliament that is elected

¹⁴For instance, Théberge (2022) recounts how the *Montreal Herald* insinuated that the *Patriotes* were racist toward the Irish after an Irish-born candidate was rejected in a Montreal election. In several key ridings, Irish voters were pivotal, and such insinuations proved both effective and ethnically divisive (pp. 40–41). Conversely, the *Patriotes* frequently targeted Scottish immigrants—particularly those engaged in the carrying trade and fur trade—with racist innuendos (p. 101). Théberge (2022) also emphasizes how newspaper competition operated: while papers never explicitly endorsed violence, they systematically amplified violence against their own partisans and minimized violence committed by them (pp. 99–103, 108, 125–126).

but its powers are limited. Yet, it is also an environment where there is a contest to transition to broader democracy while preserving key liberal features.¹⁵ As such, we have an episode of a transition to greater democracy on a highly polarized ethnic backdrop. In fact, it was *ultimately* a successful transition to democracy. In the wake of the rebellions, the British finally conceded (in 1848) ministerial responsibility and greater self-government to the colony. Ultimately, it allowed some of the colonies to merge as the Dominion of Canada in 1867 (full internal autonomy but foreign affairs remained in Britain’s domain). Few democratic transitions on polarized ethnic backdrops have been as successful as Canada’s (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; T. S. Aidt & Leon, 2016; Collier, 2009; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, 2004; Horowitz, 2000). Understanding how competitive media shaped political discourse and institutional development can therefore provide broader lessons for the relationship between press systems and democratic consolidation in divided societies.

3 Empirical Strategy

3.1 Rebellions Data

Our core aim is to express rebelliousness as a function of media competition. Fortunately, historians and genealogists have constructed rich datasets of rebellious events (via newspapers records, court documents, notarial documents, biographies, journals, and travelers’ books). Thanks to the compilation from Laporte (2004), we can measure the number of pro-*Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants after 1834—the period where rebelliousness ramps up after the 92 resolutions. Building (and completing) on the earlier work of Bernard (1983), Laporte classifies events into six categories: public assemblies (which were rebellious and violent), petitions and speeches against government policy, meetings of rebels, electoral nominations of *Patriote* politicians, clashes between *Patriotes* and loyalists, and “other” incidents. We restrict this analysis to

¹⁵The *Patriotes* had multiple elements of liberal/republican thought regarding monopolies, free trade, property rights, etc. Until 1837, they made little to no sound regarding republicanism and the official discourse of the main leaders remained largely within the colonial Overton window.

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(a) *Le Libéral* (31st Oct. 1837)

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(b) *Township Reformer* (8th Aug. 1837)

Figure 1: Two examples of agent lists from contemporary newspapers.

Patriote events, excluding loyalist events, as the latter were generally reactive and in some cases coordinated by the government. One advantage of using rebel events as a measure is that they are well-documented to be highly localized. In 1830s Quebec, low population density and high travel costs meant that popular unrest rarely spread far. Rioting and protest were typically confined to the immediate communities where residents lived, reinforcing the local character of the events. *Patriote* events per 1,000 is also the primary outcome used in Geloso & Kufenko (2019). That study additionally used rebel leaders—individuals later imprisoned, killed, or exiled—as an alternative measure, but we set it aside: counts of leaders capture elite mobilization rather than popular participation and, because many rebel leaders were also newspaper editors, the measure introduces collinearity with our key independent variable.

3.2 Newspaper Competitiveness and Partisanship

This study draws on a combination of historical newspaper sources, demographic and institutional data, and records of political unrest. The primary independent variable—local newspaper competition—is constructed from a dataset of 29 newspapers identified through Beaulieu & Hamelin (1973) and Wallace (1931), who document French- and English-language newspapers operating in Lower and Upper Canada during the early 19th century.¹⁶ For each newspaper, we collected information on its publication, political alignment (e.g., *Patriote*, Loyalist, Moderate), and distribution. The inclusion of papers from Wallace (1931) is an attempt to identify additional newspapers which could have coverage in Lower Canada despite being based in Upper Canadian towns.¹⁷ Digitized scans of newspapers were sourced from the *Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec* (BAnQ), *Canadiana.ca*, *Google News Archive*, and *Newspapers.com*. In most cases, these scans provided not only issues themselves but also subscription notices listing distribution agents and locales (see Figure 1). These agent lists provide a proxy for the geographic reach of each newspaper. By aggregating them across publications and matching sale points to contemporary subdistrict boundaries, we construct a local measure of newspaper availability and competition. Since newspaper presence is measured prior to the 1837–38 rebellions, using agent lists published before November 1837, this approach helps mitigate concerns of reverse causality.

To identify the impact of market concentration, our specification uses the the agents lists to construct a spatially modified Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) that incorporates market spillovers from neighboring subdistricts by measuring the concentration of newspaper agents around each subdistrict centroid. A linear decay function translates these distances into weights that equal 1 at the centroid itself and decline linearly to 0 at a predefined influence threshold R , with all agents beyond this threshold assigned weight zero. We have chosen $R = 50$ km

¹⁶For a full list of the newspapers used, agents' locations, and the dataset construction method, see our online appendix.

¹⁷It should be noted that Upper Canada had also a rebellion but the scale was small and did not amount to a serious insurrection (Guillet, 1968). There was no ethnic component to the rebellion in Upper Canada (Read, 1985).

for this analysis, based on the assumption of the average speed on horse for a person traveling eight hours a day, which is used as an estimate for the distance someone could receive same-day news.¹⁸ Formally, the weight for a subdistrict-agent pair is defined as

$$w_{ck} = \max \left\{ 0, 1 - \frac{d_{ck}}{R} \right\}, \quad (1)$$

where d_{ck} is the distance between subdistrict c , measured at the centroid, and agent k in kilometers. When multiple agents of the same newspaper fall within the circle of influence, only the largest weight among them is retained: $\max_{k \in K_i} w_{ck}$, where k and m index individual agents, K_i and K_j are the sets of agents for each newspaper. This ensures that newspaper title i is only counted once per centroid, with its effective presence determined by the closest—and therefore most influential—agent, rather than by cumulative counts of multiple agents.

After constructing these maximum weights, the strongest weight for each title is normalized by the sum of maximum weights across all titles to form market shares. The index for each subdistrict is then computed as

$$\text{HHI}_c = \sum_{i=1}^{N_c} \left(\frac{\max_{k \in K_i} w_{ck}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_c} \max_{m \in K_j} w_{cm}} \right)^2, \quad (2)$$

where N_c is the total number of distinct titles within R kilometers of the subdistrict centroid. The maximum weights are normalized into market shares by dividing by $\sum_{j=1}^{N_c} \max_{m \in K_j} w_{cm}$ (the sum of the maximum weights across all titles for each subdistrict). The HHI is bounded $(0, 1]$, such that higher values reflect a more concentrated local market dominated by one or a few titles, while lower values indicate a more competitive environment with multiple newspapers for sale. In our case, if media competition encouraged rebelliousness, a higher HHI should be associated with fewer *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants. If competition reinforced loyalty, greater market *concentration* should correspond to more *Patriote* events.

¹⁸John (1995) asserts the average speed for early 19th century American Postal Zone contractors was 4 miles (6.44 kilometers) an hour. At 8 hours, this is approximately 51.5km. Other radii of influence were tested with similar results in both magnitude and direction; see our online appendix for details.

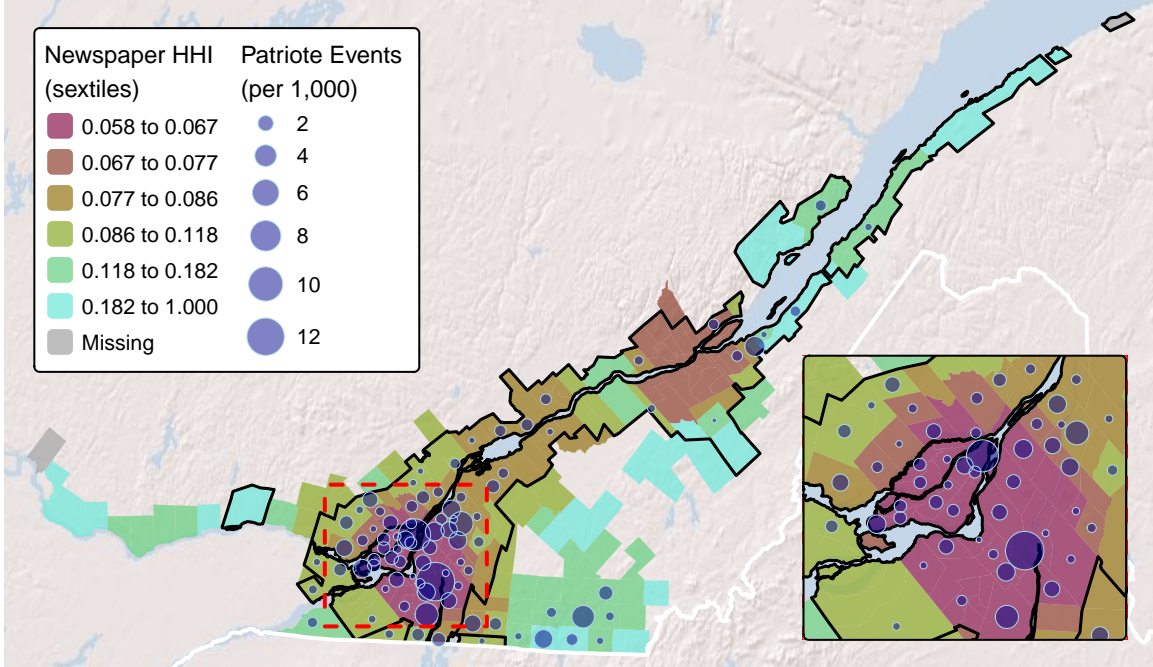


Figure 2: Distribution of newspaper competition in Lower Canada prior to the 1837–38 rebellions. Competition is measured using the spatially modified Herfindahl-Hirschman Index. Subdistricts with seigneurial tenure are outlined in black.

Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of newspaper concentration across subdistricts on the eve of the 1837–38 rebellions. Since one group of historians argue that the rebellions were more intense in seigneurial tenure areas because it heightened grievances against the *status quo*, we added black borders to denote subdistricts under seigneurial tenure, providing a visual cue to institutional variation across regions.

Not all competition is on the same margin. Loyalist newspapers competed against *Patriote* papers and also against other Loyalist outlets, while moderate newspapers adopted more neutral stances. This distinction matters because Théberge (2022) provides evidence that competition between pro-government and anti-government papers tended to foster violence (without openly advocating it), whereas neutral papers often attempted to call for moderation. We add a measure of partisan bias to capture the qualitative difference that might emerge. Each newspaper is assigned a partisan category $p \in \{\text{Loyalist, Moderate, Patriote}\}$. Partisan weights per subdistrict

are computed by taking the maximum weight of each newspaper within each partisan category:

$$W_{cp} = \sum_{i \in p} \max_{k \in K_i} w_{ck}, \quad (3)$$

where w_{ck} denotes the proximity-weighted influence of newspaper-agent k in each subdistrict. Total partisan weight for p is therefore the sum of each newspaper’s largest contribution within that subdistrict. The total partisan weight in each subdistrict is then normalized by the total weight across all partisan categories:

$$S_{cp} = \frac{W_{cp}}{\sum_p W_{cp}}, \quad (4)$$

which yields the partisan shares in each subdistrict, which are then transformed into a partisan bias index by

$$\text{PartisanBias}_c = (S_{Loyalist} - S_{Patriote}) \cdot (1 - S_{Moderate}), \quad (5)$$

which allows us to capture the partisan orientation of the local press environment by identifying both the difference in ideological alignment and the dilution effect of moderate newspapers, who may seek to reduce tension and avoid radical action.¹⁹

3.3 Specification and Controls

Demographic and economic data are drawn from Geloso & Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023), who provide information on land tenure systems, tax obligations, and institutional legacy indicators, including the presence and intensity of seigneurial tenure. A subset of the data include estimates for literacy rates derived from marriage records and signatures (Curtis &

¹⁹For example, suppose a subdistrict has six newspapers with the following partisan labels and maximized agent-weights: A (Loyalist, 1), B (Loyalist, 0.75), C (Loyalist, 0.5), D (Moderate, 0.9), E (Patriote, 1), and F (Patriote, 0.8). The summed weights by partisan group are 2.25 for Loyalist, 0.9 for Moderate, and 1.8 for Patriote. Dividing each group’s total by the sum of all weights (4.95) yields partisan shares of approximately 0.455, 0.182, and 0.364, respectively. The subdistrict will therefore have a bias score of 0.074—generally balanced, but with a slight lean toward loyalism. This procedure mirrors the construction of the HHI weights, ensuring that each title contributes to its partisan group according to its strongest local presence.

Geloso, 2025). Our empirical analysis uses cross-sectional ordinary least squares (OLS) models to estimate the effect of newspaper competition on the intensity of rebellious activity at the subdistrict level. The primary specification is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Patriote Events}_c = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{HHI}_{\text{News},c} + \beta_2 \text{SeigneurialTenure}_c + \beta_3 \text{HHI} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}_c + \\ & \beta_4 \text{HumanCapital}_c + \beta_5 \text{PartisanBias}_c + \mathbf{X}'_c \gamma + \varepsilon_c \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

In Equation 6, $\text{HHI}_{\text{News},c}$ represents the subdistrict-level newspaper concentration, measured using the spatially modified Herfindahl-Hirschman Index constructed in Equation 2, and is the primary variable of interest. The binary indicator $\text{SeigneurialTenure}_c$ captures the institutional divide between seigneurial and freehold tenure, and the interaction $\text{HHI} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}_c$ directly tests whether newspaper competition had a larger mobilizing effect in areas under more extractive institutions. HumanCapital_c is alternatively the number of students per 1,000 inhabitants per subdistrict or the literacy rate, entering as an additive control. We use either of these measures because the literacy rate is of high quality only for Catholic parishes (mostly settled under seigneurial tenure) and of weaker quality for the non-Catholic townships (entirely settled under British freehold tenure); thus, using literacy rates cuts the sample size by roughly 80 observations, creating a trade-off between efficiency (larger sample) and precision of control.²⁰ PartisanBias_c is included to assess whether the HHI effect reflects competition *per se* or instead the ideological orientation of the local press.

This implies a trade-off between efficiency (larger sample with school enrollment) and precision of control (smaller sample with literacy). The interaction term captures potential heterogeneity in the effect of newspaper competition according to local human capital. The inclusion of the binary seigneurial tenure indicator $\text{SeigneurialTenure}_c$ and bias term PartisanBias_c allows

²⁰Most importantly, shifting to the literacy curtails the ability to speak to the role of seigneurial tenure. The reason for this is that from an initial universe of 260 observations, only 174 have an associated literacy datapoint. Of those, 158 are seigneurial areas (90.8%). When its the number of observations conditional on covariates being available, the number falls to 142 out of 155 (91.6%). In contrast, in the wider universe of observations, 195 are seigneurial (75%). Thus, shifting to literacy seriously hampers the ability to inquire about the relation with seigneurial tenure.

for identification of additional institutional and political drivers of unrest. For robustness, we also estimate specifications restricted to seigneurial areas rather than controlling for them. In addition, we exploit a measure of the intensity of seigneurial tenure “rents per *arpent*”, proxied by the annual taxes (*cens et rentes*) that *censitaires* were required to pay per acre under *censive*. This enables us to test whether more exacting *seigneurs* generated higher levels of rebellion.

Controls \mathbf{X}'_c includes demographic and institutional controls such as Catholic share, “emigrants” per 1,000 inhabitants, the (log) reciprocal of travel cost to the nearest port, the number of inns and taverns per 1,000 inhabitants, daily grain wages, the log of total factor productivity (TFP), and the price gap with the largest local city (as a proxy for market integration which reduced the cost of rebellions as specified in Geloso & Kufenko (2019)). A brief comment is needed with respect to “emigrants”: This is a measure of the number of people who migrated from the British Isles (Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales) to Quebec in the five years prior to the census of 1831, and *not* (as one might assume) a measure of how many people left the colony. This variable is a strong measure of ethnolinguistic divide, as these recent *immigrants* to Quebec massively preferred to settle in English-speaking areas of cities and the countryside. And—with the exception of a share of the Irish—they were not Catholics. As such, especially when combined to the Catholic share of the population, this variable acts as a proxy for ethnic presence.

Finally, seigneurial tenure, daily grain wages, and inns and taverns are structurally collinear. Geloso et al. (2023) show that seigneurial districts had systematically fewer commercial establishments—including inns and taverns—and lower grain wages than freehold areas, so including all three simultaneously with the seigneurial dummy suppresses individual coefficients without adding information. In specifications where all three enter, we therefore report a variant that omits wages and inns and taverns. This concern does not apply to the seigneurial-subsample regressions, where the seigneurial dummy is absorbed by the sample restriction.

For inference, in the main article, we rely on robust standard errors. In our appendix, we replicate our results with (Conley, 1999) standard errors at the 10, 25, 50 and 100km distance-

radius (within which non-zero spatial correlation of residuals is assumed). Beyond that, observations are treated as uncorrelated. The average distance between subdistrict pairs in the colony is 177.7 km; given this, we set 50 km as the maximum distance within which non-zero spatial correlation is assumed. The Conley robustness estimates support the baseline results.

4 Results

Across specifications, HHI_{News} enters with a negative and statistically significant coefficient under heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Since higher values of HHI indicate more concentrated newspaper markets, subdistricts with more competitive press environments tend to exhibit higher levels of *Patriote* mobilization. Table 1 establishes the core result. Three complementary falsification checks follow: whether the HHI effect is mediated by human capital accumulation (Table 2), explained by the ideological content of the local press (Table 3), or is heterogeneous across institutional regimes (Table 4). The results are stable across specifications.

The primary identification concern is reverse causality: newspapers may have located in areas of pre-existing political demand, so that the observed association between competition and rebellion partly reflects demand-driven newspaper entry rather than a causal effect of press competition on mobilization. Three features of the design mitigate this concern without eliminating it. First, agent lists are measured before the 1837–38 uprising, so contemporaneous rebel activity cannot directly affect the newspaper network we observe. Second, if politically active areas nonetheless attracted more newspapers in the pre-rebellion period, this would artificially lower HHI in high-demand districts, biasing the competition coefficient toward a larger absolute value—making OLS estimates conservative. Third, the HHI coefficient does not shrink as controls accumulate; it grows slightly, which is the opposite of what upward omitted-variable bias would produce and suggests the remaining variation in press competition is orthogonal to the economic and demographic gradients captured by the controls. As a further robustness check, Appendix D reports instrumental-variable estimates using colonial

Table 1

Dependent Variable:	All Subdistricts				Patriote Events per 1,000			
	All Subdistricts		Patriote Events per 1,000		Seigneurial Subdistricts		Seigneurial Subdistricts	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Variables</i>								
HHI _{News}	-1.076*** (0.2301)	-1.297*** (0.3983)	-1.315*** (0.3977)	-1.675** (0.6716)	-1.281*** (0.3012)	-1.657*** (0.4859)	-1.556*** (0.5540)	-1.297** (0.5460)
Seigneurial Tenure			0.2880 (0.2706)	0.5070* (0.2977)				
Rents _{arpent} (ln)							0.1140 (0.1544)	0.1086 (0.1564)
Constant	0.6973*** (0.1082)	-1.473 (1.442)	-1.512 (1.440)	0.2946 (0.3883)	0.7822*** (0.1317)	-2.905 (2.165)	-3.582 (2.479)	0.7288 (0.5701)
Basic Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	
<i>Fit statistics</i>								
Observations	257	203	203	215	194	155	136	140
R ²	0.02476	0.11887	0.12275	0.03538	0.02480	0.13345	0.13716	0.08535
Adjusted R ²	0.02093	0.08254	0.08184	0.00755	0.01972	0.08597	0.07553	0.04408
RMSE	1.2387	0.82556	0.82375	1.1846	1.3478	0.81901	0.83921	0.85583

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

postal zone boundaries as an instrument for newspaper market structure; the first-stage F-statistics fall below conventional thresholds, precluding strong IV inference, but the IV point estimates are directionally consistent with the OLS results.

In Table 1, regressing *Patriote* events per 1,000 on HHI_{News} yields a negative and significant coefficient across all specifications.²¹ Crucially, the coefficient does not shrink as controls accumulate—it grows slightly—which is the opposite of what upward omitted-variable bias would produce. The controls absorb the most plausible economic confounders: commercial integration (price gap and log travel cost to port), social infrastructure (inns and taverns per capita), and agricultural productivity (TFP and grain wages). The HHI estimate survives their inclusion with no meaningful attenuation, indicating the remaining variation in press competition is not explained by any gradient captured by the controls. Restricting the sample to seigneurial subdistricts amplifies the effect, with full-controls estimates -23% larger in absolute value than in the full sample, providing an out-of-sample confirmation of the main result:

²¹Two subdistricts are too distant from any newspaper agent to register: Matane (to the far northeast), and Mansfield Township (to the far west). A third subdistrict (Wendover, near Drummondville) is dropped because of lack of rebellions data.

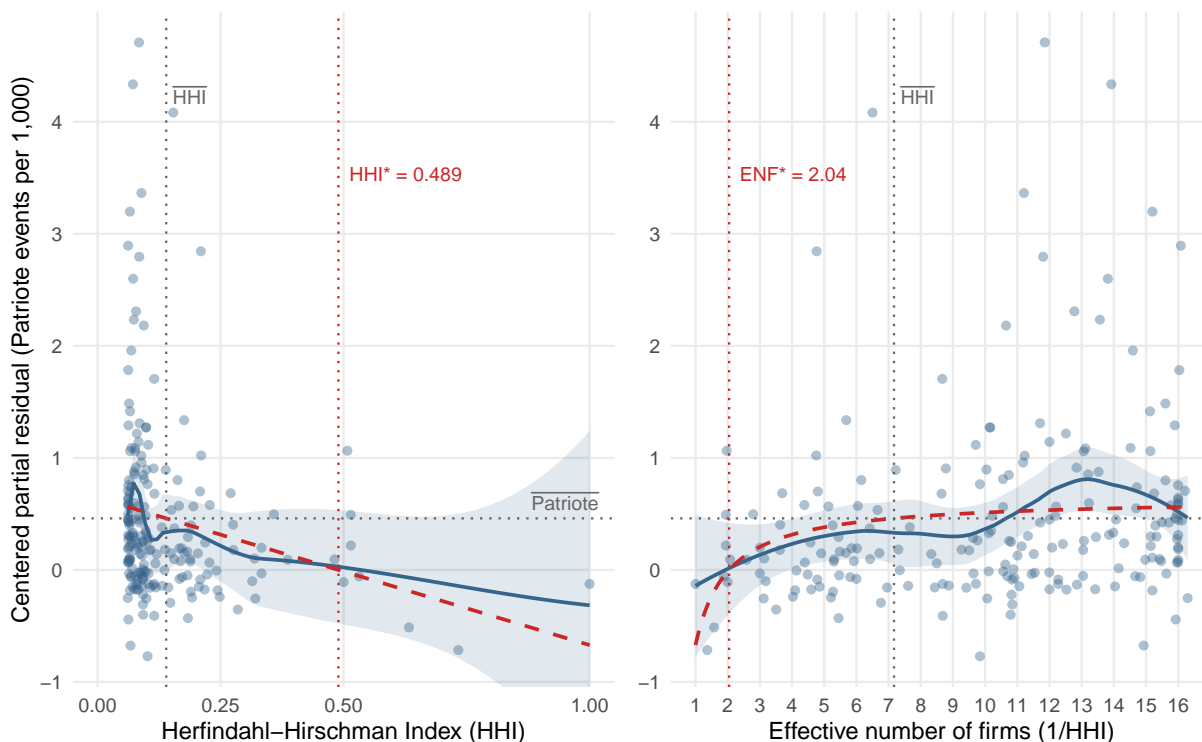


Figure 3: Centered partial residual plot for HHI

feudal-tenure districts, where institutionally grounded grievances were most concentrated, were also most responsive to press competition. To fix ideas about magnitude, consider the effect of a single newspaper entering the market. Entry into a monopoly market ($\text{HHI} = 1$, 1 firm) raises predicted *Patriote* events per 1,000 by 0.84—160% of the sample mean. The same entry at the median market (roughly 11 effective firms) adds only 0.013 events per 1,000 (2% of the mean). The competition–rebellion gradient is sharply convex: most of the aggregate effect is concentrated in transitions from monopoly or near-monopoly markets into modest competition.

Figure 3 presents centered partial residuals of *Patriote* events per 1,000 population against the district-level HHI, following the method of Larsen & McCleary (1972). The residuals are centered at the sample means of HHI and *Patriote* events so that both axes have a natural zero at the average district. The left panel plots residuals against HHI directly; the right panel rescales the horizontal axis as the effective number of firms ($\text{ENF} = 1/\text{HHI}$), which spreads out

variation in the competitive range. The dashed red line shows the OLS linear prediction, which slopes downward across both panels, confirming the negative relationship between newspaper concentration and rebellion intensity estimated in Table 1. The LOESS smoother (blue band) broadly tracks this linear prediction but reveals a modest nonlinearity: the negative association is steepest at low-to-moderate concentration (HHI below roughly 0.4, or more than 2.5 effective firms) and flattens at very high concentration, where few districts are observed. This convexity is consistent with decreasing marginal returns to informational variety: a district receiving its second newspaper roughly doubles the independent supply of voices, while a fifth entrant adds comparatively little to informational diversity. The magnitude analysis above—showing that the monopoly-to-duopoly transition accounts for most of the aggregate effect—reinforces this reading. The vertical red dotted line marks $HHI^* \approx 0.489$, the concentration level at which the model prediction crosses the sample mean of *Patriote* events; districts above this threshold are predicted to have below-average mobilization. Together, the two panels indicate that the estimated negative effect of newspaper concentration is not an artifact of functional form: it is visible in the raw partial residuals and is robust to whether competition is measured on the HHI or ENF scale.

Table 2 introduces human capital controls. If competition operated through gradual human capital accumulation—newspapers educating readers who subsequently demanded political reform—literacy and school enrollment would absorb the HHI coefficient when included jointly. Across all six columns—three for the full sample and three restricted to seigneurial subdistricts— HHI_{News} remains negative and significant, with estimates indistinguishable from those in Table 1. In the full sample the estimates range from -1.282 to -1.631; in the seigneurial subsample they cluster between -1.657 and -1.713. School enrollment and literacy enter with near-zero, insignificant coefficients throughout. This rules out the stock-of-knowledge channel and points toward an *activation* mechanism: press competition reduced the cost of learning that grievances were widely shared and coordinated mobilization opportunities, independently of whether newspapers raised the literacy rate. Among the controls, the price gap with the largest

Table 2

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000					
	All Subdistricts			Seigneurial Subdistricts		
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
HHI _{News}	-1.297*** (0.3983)	-1.282*** (0.4136)	-1.631*** (0.5583)	-1.657*** (0.4859)	-1.713*** (0.5020)	-1.663*** (0.5675)
Students _{per1,000}		0.0002 (0.0013)			-0.0009 (0.0019)	
Literacy (%)			0.0004 (0.0056)			0.0014 (0.0087)
Constant	-1.473 (1.442)	-1.492 (1.449)	-2.896 (1.969)	-2.905 (2.165)	-2.800 (2.193)	-3.820* (2.226)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	203	203	155	155	155	141
R ²	0.11887	0.11898	0.13875	0.13345	0.13506	0.13591
Adjusted R ²	0.08254	0.07790	0.08529	0.08597	0.08137	0.07654
RMSE	0.82556	0.82551	0.81862	0.81901	0.81825	0.83217

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

local city and log inverse travel cost to port are consistently negative, indicating that more commercially integrated and port-accessible subdistricts experienced less *Patriote* activity. Inns and taverns enter positively in the full sample, consistent with social infrastructure lowering the costs of collective action, though the coefficient loses significance in the seigneurial subsample. Human capital does not mediate the competition–rebellion relationship.

Table 3 tests the content channel against the market-structure channel: did the HHI effect reflect which side the local papers took, or simply how many competing outlets existed? The partisan bias index—which captures the balance between loyalist and *Patriote* editorial orientation—is statistically indistinguishable from zero in all six columns, with point estimates ranging from 0.017 to 1.684 and standard errors that dwarf them in every case. Controlling for bias leaves HHI_{News} essentially unchanged: it shifts from -1.297 to -1.289 in the full-sample baseline, and the preferred seigneurial-subsample estimates remain clustered between -1.410 and -1.515. The one exception is column 6, where adding literacy and partisan bias jointly to the seigneurial subsample on $N = 141$ observations produces -1.150; this reflects data constraints rather than genuine attenuation of the point estimate. The null on partisan bias amounts to a

Table 3

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000					
	All Subdistricts			Seigneurial Subdistricts		
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
HHI _{News}	-1.289** (0.5762)	-1.261** (0.5587)	-1.406** (0.6535)	-1.410* (0.7209)	-1.515** (0.6670)	-1.150 (0.7520)
Students _{per1,000}		0.0002 (0.0013)			-0.0009 (0.0018)	
Literacy (%)			0.0004 (0.0056)			0.0017 (0.0088)
Partisan Bias	0.0175 (0.9101)	0.0440 (0.8613)	0.6925 (1.541)	0.6745 (1.611)	0.5298 (1.495)	1.684 (1.973)
Constant	-1.475 (1.443)	-1.498 (1.447)	-3.081 (2.117)	-3.034 (2.261)	-2.909 (2.281)	-4.193* (2.410)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	203	203	155	155	155	141
R ²	0.11887	0.11899	0.13952	0.13407	0.13543	0.13921
Adjusted R ²	0.07779	0.07310	0.07977	0.08032	0.07539	0.07300
RMSE	0.82556	0.82551	0.81825	0.81872	0.81807	0.83058

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

falsification of the content channel: what mattered for *Patriote* mobilization was the *number* of competing voices, not their aggregate political direction. A district served entirely by loyalist papers was no less rebellious than one served by *Patriote* papers, provided enough outlets were competing. The null on partisan bias implies that competition itself, independent of editorial slant, is the operative channel.

Table 4 introduces the $\text{HHI} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}$ interaction to test whether the competition effect was concentrated in districts with institutionally legible grievances. Under seigneurial tenure, peasant households owed annual cash rents and labor obligations to seigneurs who were politically aligned with the colonial administration; tenure reform therefore required displacing the governing coalition rather than simply negotiating with a private landlord. This created a direct, spatially concentrated economic grievance that a competitive press could activate—the theoretical prior for a negative interaction. The interaction is negative and significant across the preferred specifications: -0.897 in the no-controls specification, -1.346 with full controls, -1.382 adding student enrollment, and -1.444 adding partisan bias. The consistency across columns 1–4

Table 4

Dependent Variable: Model:	Patriote Events per 1,000						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Variables</i>							
HHI _{News}	-0.3840** (0.1587)	-0.4001 (0.3831)	-0.2226 (0.7184)	-0.1062 (0.6831)	-5.487 (5.556)	-0.0470 (0.8081)	-7.461 (6.421)
Seigneurial Tenure	0.4103** (0.1844)	0.4922* (0.2874)	0.5085* (0.2951)	0.5251* (0.2954)	-1.025 (0.9016)	0.8102* (0.4143)	-0.9419 (1.027)
HHI × Seigneurial	-0.8968*** (0.3412)	-1.346** (0.6382)	-1.382** (0.6696)	-1.444** (0.6710)	4.173 (5.669)	-1.913* (1.055)	5.561 (6.433)
Students _{per1,000}				0.0005 (0.0013)		0.0014 (0.0018)	
Literacy (%)					0.0009 (0.0055)		0.0050 (0.0063)
Partisan Bias			0.3363 (0.9019)	0.4127 (0.8325)	0.5857 (1.607)	0.5022 (1.043)	1.349 (2.040)
Constant	0.3719*** (0.1287)	-1.869 (1.516)	-1.919 (1.526)	-1.994 (1.535)	-2.426 (2.334)	-0.2547 (0.6833)	0.4456 (1.339)
Basic Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
<i>Fit statistics</i>							
Observations	257	203	203	203	155	215	165
R ²	0.03494	0.12902	0.12936	0.13001	0.14652	0.04400	0.04633
Adjusted R ²	0.02350	0.08366	0.07921	0.07507	0.07439	0.00203	-0.00904
RMSE	1.2323	0.82079	0.82064	0.82033	0.81492	1.1793	1.2618

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***, 0.01, **, 0.05, *, 0.1*

is itself a robustness argument: the interaction survives accumulating demographic, economic, human capital, and partisan controls with no meaningful attenuation. The seigneurial main effect is positive and significant, ranging from 0.410 to 0.525, indicating that seigneurial districts had higher baseline rebellion intensity at any fixed level of press competition. Because HHI is a concentration index, a negative interaction coefficient implies that the pro-rebellion effect of competition is amplified in seigneurial districts. Using column 2 to illustrate: the marginal effect of HHI on rebellion is -0.400 in non-seigneurial subdistricts and -1.746 in seigneurial subdistricts, a ratio of roughly 4-to-1. This differential is not consistent with seigneurial status proxying for French ethnicity or Catholic religion: both are included in the basic controls (Catholic share and emigrant share), and the interaction survives their inclusion without attenuation. Column 6, which drops inns and taverns on $N = 215$ subdistricts, yields an interaction of -1.913, confirming the result is not driven by that control. Columns 5 and 7—using the literacy subsample ($N = 155$) and the stripped-plus-partisan specification ($N = 165$) respectively—produce large and un-

stable positive coefficients (4.2 and 5.6, both insignificant), reflecting collinearity among literacy, seigneurial status, and partisan press composition in those restricted subsamples. Columns 2–4 and column 6 are the preferred specifications.

The two-part decomposition identifies a complementarity between institutional conditions and informational infrastructure. Seigneurial tenure supplied legible, concentrated grievance: a landlord class whose political interests were directly opposed to peasant tenure reform, making mobilization against colonial authority and mobilization against landlords effectively the same act. A competitive press then activated those grievances—reducing the cost of learning that discontent was widely shared and disseminating information about petitions, assemblies, and mobilization opportunities. Neither channel alone was sufficient. Non-seigneurial townships with competitive press markets show only modest rebellion effects, consistent with a competitive press that has no politically concentrated grievance structure to amplify. Seigneurial districts under concentrated press markets show near-zero marginal HHI effects, consistent with a grievance structure that lacked the informational infrastructure to convert frustration into coordinated action. Both the institutional structure and the informational infrastructure had to be present simultaneously.

5 Conclusion

This study has examined how media competition shaped political mobilization in the lead-up to the Rebellions of 1837–38 in Lower Canada. Drawing on new geo-coded data on newspaper agents and records of Patriote activity, we find that subdistricts exposed to a greater variety of newspapers—regardless of their partisan alignment—experienced significantly higher levels of rebellious behavior. The effect of media competition was reliably stronger in areas where the seigneurial system persisted: the $\text{HHI} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}$ interaction is consistently negative and significant, indicating that competitive newspaper markets specifically amplified rebellion in feudal-tenure districts. Because HHI is a concentration index, a negative interaction coefficient

means that the pro-rebellion effect of lower concentration is amplified in seigneurial districts. Human capital—proxied by school attendance and literacy—is associated with lower rebellion intensity as an additive control, but does not significantly alter the way newspaper competition operated. The effects of competition held regardless of educational levels.

The mechanism linking media competition to rebellion appears to operate less through partisan persuasion than through the dynamics of information exposure and mobilization. The results show that the partisan alignment of newspapers mattered relatively little once overall competition was accounted for, suggesting that it was the coexistence and rivalry among outlets—rather than their individual editorial stances—that increased political salience. Subdistricts with more competitive newspaper markets likely offered residents greater opportunities to encounter political information, observe local dissent, and gauge broader participation, conditions that would make coordination among potential rebels easier. While the data do not permit direct measurement of coordination or communication flows, the observed association between competitive media environments and higher rates of *Patriote* activity is consistent with theories emphasizing the role of communication in overcoming collective action barriers. These findings align with rational-choice models of rebellion, which stress the informational and organizational constraints to mobilization, and with recent political economy studies that characterize media as a dual-use technology—capable of stabilizing or destabilizing political systems depending on the institutional context.

In historical terms, these results provide evidence relevant to all three major interpretive strands in the study of the Canadian rebellions. The findings are consistent with institutional and class-based explanations that have long emphasized the role of the seigneurial system and economic inequality in generating discontent. Entrenched institutional arrangements concentrated power in the hands of the colonial and seigneurial elite, creating structural conditions for rebellion (Bernier & Salée, 1995; Coates, 1999; Dechêne, 1988). The evidence here supports that interpretation while adding a critical intermediary: communicative infrastructure. Institutional grievance appears insufficient on its own; the observed pattern is consistent with a

competitive press that amplified discontent, diffused information about government action, and helped translate latent frustrations into organized political behavior. In this sense, media competition may have operated as a connective mechanism linking economic structure to mobilized protest—one that made coordination feasible where structural grievances had already made it desirable.

In the broader context, this study contributes to an ever-growing literature on how media environments interact with institutional and social structures to shape political outcomes. In ethnically and institutionally fragmented societies, competitive media can act as a catalyst for political activation rather than a neutral channel of information, especially where representative institutions are weak or contested. The Lower Canadian case is consistent with a press that was not merely a passive reflection of political conflict but an active participant in it—one whose competitive structure, more than its editorial content, shaped the conditions under which collective action became possible. By highlighting the intersection of institutional constraint, class division, and communicative infrastructure, this analysis contributes to a richer account of how information flows mediate the path from discontent to rebellion, and from rebellion to reform.

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