Did Newspaper Competition Promote Rebellion?

The Case of the 1837–38 Rebellions in Quebec

Patrick Crawford pcrawfo6@gmu.edu

Vincent Geloso vgeloso@gmu.edu

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Abstract

We study the relationship between media competition and political mobilization during the Quebec Rebellions of 1837–38. Using a new spatial dataset of newspaper agents, we test whether local press competition increased rebel activity independently of newspaper ideology. We find that greater media competition predicts mobilization in larger communities, especially in areas where seigneurial tenure persisted, suggesting that concentrated grievances became politically activated through competitive information networks. The results remain robust after controlling for literacy and school enrollment. Competitive media appear to have helped turn latent discontent into active rebelliousness.

Keywords: Rebellions, Media, Newspapers, Competition, Quebec, Canada

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1 Introduction

News media affects 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 & Burgess, 2002; Besley & Prat, 2006; Cooray et al., 2017; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2008; Sen, 1999). In polarized societies, it can also draw participants away from violence (see 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; Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Manacorda & Tesei, 2020; Mullainathan & 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 a particularly destabilizing configuration. 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). Which of these effects dominates depends on the institutional environment, which makes Lower Canada's combination of colonial oligarchy, ethno-linguistic polarization, and a competitive multilingual press an informative case.

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, 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 success 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 accused rebels, of whom 99 were condemned to death, although only 12 were ever hanged; 58 were transported to a penal establishment near Sydney, in Australia, and most of the others were released on bail or banished (Bernard, 1983, pp. 131–134). 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, in particular the 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. These newspapers spanned the full ideological spectrum—from radical *Patriote* to staunch loyalist, and in both French and English. Because papers of every stripe competed in the same local markets, our measure of competition counts competing outlets rather than recording which side they took; we measure the partisan balance of the local press separately, and control for the ethno-linguistic composition of each subdistrict through its Catholic share and its number of recent British immigrants per 1,000 inhabitants. Moreover, we measure the agent network in 1834, three years *before* the rebellions, in order to limit reverse causality. Finally, thanks to the cross-referencing with the census of 1831, we have a detailed array of control variables (Geloso et al., 2017; Geloso et al., 2023), including literacy rates linked to census subdistricts (Curtis & Geloso, 2025).

We find that media competition was linked to greater rebelliousness where three conditions came together. First, subdistricts with more competitive press markets saw more *Patriote* events (Table 1). Second, the association depended on scale. Competing papers went with larger markets, so competition and market size share the level association; but the association grows steeper as communities grow and is indistinguishable from zero in small parishes (Table 2; Figure 3, Panel A). That is what a coordination mechanism predicts, and it is harder to reconcile with an account in which market size raises the number of papers and rebellion additively. Third, the association was stronger where seigneurial tenure remained *de jure*: within seigneurial subdistricts the combined effect of competition is negative and significant, although the interaction with tenure is only marginally significant, while the intensity of feudal exactions within seigneurial estates did not matter (Table 4; Figure 3, Panel B; online appendix). The association does not run through literacy or the partisan slant of the local press (Table 3). Ideas circulated through newspapers of all stripes; where competition and partisan balance can be told apart, the number of competing outlets mattered and their ideology did not. Overall, rebellion intensity tracked institutions and media competition more closely than ethnicity.

Our results matter for three reasons. First, they show where media competition mattered for the rebellions: where a competitive press met concentrated grievance and a population large enough that coordination

required public information. Given the rebellions' role in Canada's path toward self-governed democracy, this suggests that media competition played a part in democratization. Second, they suggest ethno-linguistic factors have been overstated. Ethno-linguistic divisions largely overlapped with institutional grievances, and it was those grievances, amplified by a competitive press, that fed the rebellion more than the divisions themselves. Third, they connect explanations that historians have treated as rivals. 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 turned grievances into coordinated action, and where it could do so. On our reading, absent competing newspapers, low incomes and a regressive tenure system might have produced resignation rather than revolt. The rebellions were not inevitable; they emerged where economic hardship and institutional constraints met a competitive press in communities large enough for it to matter.

We contribute to the economics of media and collective action. Much of that work studies the arrival of a medium, such as radio (Armand et al., 2020; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014), mobile phones (Manacorda & Tesei, 2020) or an online social network (Enikolopov et al., 2020), or the spread of protest along rail and telegraph networks, in which local newspaper coverage was a key channel (García-Jimeno et al., 2022). We study competition among outlets that already existed. The evidence on newspaper competition comes mostly from voter turnout, and it does not favor competition: in the United States between 1869 and 2004, the first newspaper in a market raised turnout and a second or third had significantly smaller effects (Gentzkow et al., 2011), and in France between 1944 and 2014, newspaper entry reduced news provision and turnout in local elections (Cagé, 2020). In Lower Canada, by contrast, the number of competing titles went with rebellion, most strongly in larger communities. The outcome may explain the difference. Voting is an individual act, but rebellion requires coordination, and several rival papers reporting the same assemblies can create a common knowledge of discontent that a single paper cannot (Lohmann, 1994). We also bring a quantitative test to a historiography of the rebellions that has rarely used one (Section 2.2).

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, France formally ceded its main North American possession to the British in the 1763 Paris Treaty. The British thus began to rule a population of roughly 60,000 French-speaking Catholics (Geloso, 2015, p. 65). 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 soon settled on 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 (Lawson, 1994, pp. 49, 81, 123).

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 had rebranded itself the *Parti patriote* (Laporte, 2015, p. 99). Although most anglophones left the party as it radicalized (Laporte, 2015, p. 110), the *Patriotes* were not exclusively French: an English-speaking minority remained, including leaders such as Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan and the Nelson brothers (Laporte, 2015, p. 122; Ouellet, 1980, pp. 337–338).

Its main opponent was the *Parti bureaucrate*, which steadily declined in size. Nicknamed the "Clique du Château," it referred to a small group of wealthy individuals close to political power (Laporte, 2015, p. 78).

[1] Largely 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.

[2] The 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.

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 (*Lower Canada State Minute Book A*, 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. The Assembly used its exclusive right over money bills 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*, and frequently passed large petitions that it would then circulate to the British parliament to obtain support. One such petition, in 1827, gathered 87,000 signatures (Laporte, 2015, p. 47), a substantial figure against a population of 479,288 in the 1825 census (Department of Agriculture, Canada, 1876). On one occasion, the British government sided with the *Parti canadien* and recalled the Governor, who was sent to India instead (Laporte, 2015, p. 47). 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 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 77 of the 88 seats (Laporte, 2015, p. 55). 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 organizing local

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

[4]However, 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).

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, some 350 British regulars under Lieutenant-Colonel Gore marched on Saint-Denis, where Papineau had taken refuge, but they were repelled by about 200 poorly armed *Patriotes* under Wolfred Nelson (Laporte, 2015, p. 187). 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), a reading later taken up by the independence movement (Bernard, 1983; Collin, 2008). Groulx himself later rejected it, describing the rising as neither a race struggle nor a class struggle but a political one (Groulx, 1960). 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; Ouellet, 1980).[5]

Whereas the first camp is broadly 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; Lamonde, 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 (Courville, 2008, pp. 148, 152; Greer & Robichaud, 1989). On this reading, the economic crisis of the 1830s helps explain

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

why the rebellion broke out in 1837 rather than in another year, but not its nature or meaning (Greer & Robichaud, 1989, p. 346). 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).[6] 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 tenants (*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 them with a fixed number of workdays for no wage (*corvée*).

Of particular importance is the fact that *seigneurs* had been raising these different taxes on multiple occasions, to the discontent of colonists. For example, in September 1823, the inhabitants of the *seigneurie* of Baie-Saint-Antoine (Baie-du-Febvre) publicly announced their intention to petition the legislature of Lower Canada to authorize the appointment of three commissioners who would negotiate with the *seigneurs*, clarify the boundaries and ownership of communal lands, and establish reasonable annual dues. Their petition illustrates how colonists sought legislative intervention to clarify and regulate seigneurial obligations ("Le constitutionnel," 1823). Seven of the 92 Resolutions adopted by the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada in 1834 (Resolutions 56–62) attacked the imperial *Tenures Act* of 1825, protesting that it allowed *seigneurs* to become absolute owners of their unconceded lands, closing them to settlers, and that reform of seigneurial charges was a matter for the colonial legislature (Laporte, 2015, p. 107; Lower Canada. House of Assembly, 1834, pp. 310–338).

The *seigneurs* were generally aligned (though not perfectly) with the British and were a key target of disgruntlement within the population.[7]

While the British establishment was ambivalent about reforming (or abolishing) seigneurial tenure,[8] the *Patriote* rank and file was generally hostile to the institution and used it as a rallying object (Lamonde, 2000, pp. 234–235; Lamonde, 2013, pp. 196–197).[9] Seigneurial tenure allowed for *grievance legibility*; its burdens

[6]We 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.

[7]Bernier & 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).

[8]The issue was generally divided between those who wanted to keep it and those who wanted to abolish it with generous compensation. The latter group won out in 1854.

[9]Not 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* (Laporte, 2004, p. 128), which contributed to inter-rebel tensions (Lamonde, 2000, pp. 249–250; Lamonde, 2013, pp. 210–211).

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. *Seigneurs* were not subject to this tax. Most non-farm industries in the colony were either operated directly by the *seigneurs* or opened by partners to whom they ceded rights (Courville, 2008, pp. 133–134), because the tax constituted a major deterrent to industrial effort for anyone else (Geloso et al., 2023). Thus, while the direct burden fell on *censitaires*, 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 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. By 2003, the literature on the rebellions counted 1,641 articles, monographs, reference works, and archival catalogues (Larocque, 2015, p. 2), yet these works made little use of statistical methods, and almost none used them to test competing hypotheses against one another. A more recent discussion in Théberge (2022) confirms this; the most sophisticated use of econometric methods it identifies is Laporte (2004), who runs a bivariate regression of the number of *Patriote* activities (not scaled to population) on the Catholic share of a county, on fewer than 30 observations, and consequently does not test any rival hypothesis (p. 39). Without empirical validation, little progress can be made for any particular hypothesis.

Since then, a small econometric literature has begun to emerge. Carpenter & Brossard (2019) 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. They attribute this to where canvassing was concentrated; we read it as also suggesting that the tenure regime helped coordinate the

expression of grievances. However, their analysis uses few covariates and highly aggregated spatial units. Still, on our reading, it points to a socio-economic "demand" for rebellious activity. Geloso & Kufenko (2019) turn to the supply side of rebellion. Quebec's economy was becoming increasingly integrated with external markets (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019) and, within the colony, across regions (Geloso, 2024). Geloso and Kufenko 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 point to socio-economic factors as drivers of the rebellions. However, they do not speak to the relative ranking of other explanations.

We argue that media competition helps assess the relative importance of these explanations. By shaping perceived payoffs, it captures demand-side drivers of rebellion that earlier accounts struggle to measure; by lowering coordination costs, it also bears on the supply side. 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 bring competing explanations into a single framework.

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

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; Campante & Chor, 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, because prospect theory implies that people facing an anticipated loss become risk-seeking (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022, pp. 1401–1403; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, pp. 268, 279). Moral-economy approaches similarly stress violations of customary rights and perceived injustice as catalysts for collective violence (Scott, 1976), with historical evidence showing that subsistence shocks (Waldinger, 2024) and breaches in agrarian obligations (Blickle, 1981; Luebke, 1997) can trigger peasant revolt and demand for institutional change.

These perspectives treat rebellion as rooted in underlying social and economic grievances. Empirical work

on civil conflict points to weak state institutions as a driver of instability (Blattman & Miguel, 2010; Fearon & Laitin, 2003), and shows that unrest triggered by local economic shocks spreads by diffusion (T. Aidt & Leon-Ablan, 2022). 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 widespread dissatisfaction may remain latent absent mechanisms that resolve uncertainty about others' participation and reduce 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), and protest can itself reveal discontent that was widely held but hidden (Lohmann, 1994). 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 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, pp. 96, 260, 268; Lamonde, 2000, p. 143; Lamonde, 2013, p. 117). In other words, newspapers might have reduced the cost of political coordination.

Media is a "dual-use" technology whose effects depend on context, so theory does not sign the effect of press competition on rebellion. Competition can push outlets toward positions more extreme than their readers' (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005) and polarize audiences, at least among the politically engaged (Levendusky, 2013; Prior, 2013); it can raise participation among underserved groups and support identity-based mobilization (Oberholzer-Gee & Waldfogel, 2009; Serby, 2023); and where formal institutions are weak, the press can act as a substitute public sphere (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Habermas, 1989; Strömberg, 2004). Whether a more competitive press facilitated or dampened violent mobilization is therefore an empirical question.

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 intersect newspaper circulation and

content with census data on ethnic composition, market integration (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019), and land tenure regimes (Geloso et al., 2023). 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, and how much it does depends on two features of a place, its grievances and its scale. First, 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. Second, extending the idea that public action can reveal discontent that was widely held but hidden (Lohmann, 1994), one would expect a condition of scale: where a community was small enough for residents to observe one another directly, public information would have added little, so competition among papers should matter most where many potential participants could not otherwise learn of one another's discontent. 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 was central to articulating the economic grievances in political debate, transforming local complaints—about seigneurial obligations and banking policies favoring anglophone interests (Greer, 1993, p. 130)—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; Lamonde, 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).[10] *Patriote* papers such as *La Minerve* and the *Vindicator* championed constitutional liberty and popular sovereignty, while loyalist organs such as the *Montreal Herald* and the Sulpician-funded *L'Ami du peuple, de l'ordre et des lois* defended imperial connection and social order (Lamonde, 2000, pp. 142, 146). The press was polarized within the French-language camp as well: *La Minerve* was set against the more moderate *Le Canadien* (Lamonde, 2000, pp. 142–143).

At the same time, the case of Quebec is particularly interesting for the broader economics literature. By the 1830s, it is a polarized society with rising violence set against a semi-liberal institutional environment (an elected parliament with limited powers) contesting a transition to broader democracy while preserving key liberal features.[11] It was *ultimately* a successful transition: the British conceded ministerial responsibility

[10]For 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).

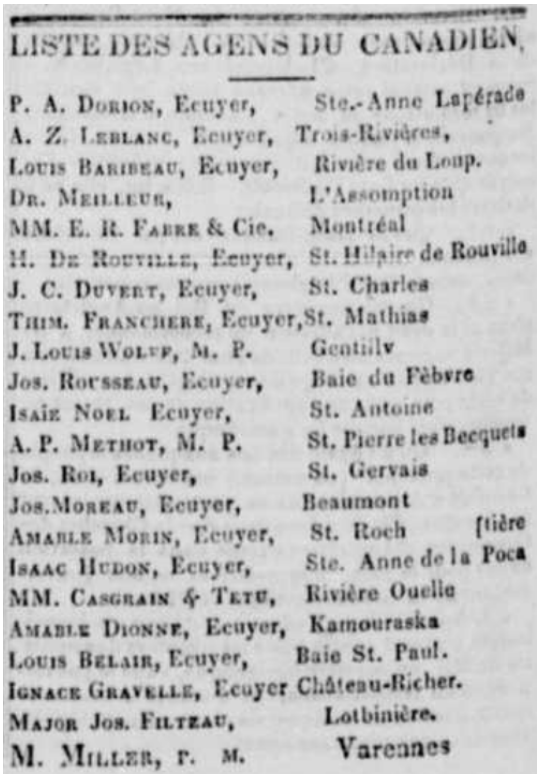
[11]The *Patriotes* had multiple elements of liberal/republican thought regarding monopolies, free trade, property rights, etc. Until 1837, they made little to no sound regarding republicanism and the official discourse of the main leaders remained largely within the colonial Overton window.

and greater self-government in 1848, and some of the colonies merged as the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Few democratic transitions on polarized ethnic backdrops have been as successful as Canada's (see Horowitz, 2000; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; T. S. Aidt & Leon, 2016; Collier, 2009; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, 2004). 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

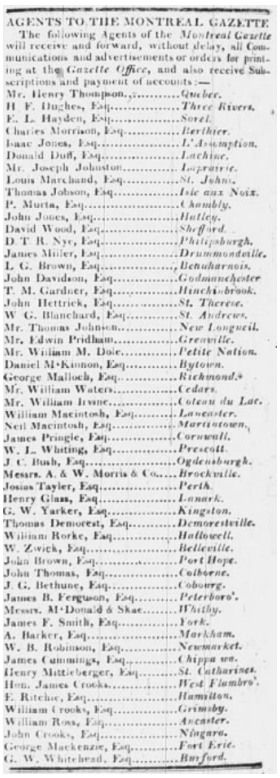
Our core aim is to express rebelliousness as a function of media competition. Fortunately, historians and genealogists have constructed rich datasets of rebellious events (via newspaper records, court documents, notarial documents, biographies, journals, and travelers' books). Thanks to the compilation from Laporte (2004), we can measure the number of pro-*Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants between the tabling of the 92 Resolutions in early 1834 and the Montreal riot of November 1837, the period in which rebelliousness ramped up. Building on the earlier work of Bernard (1983), Laporte classifies these activities into six categories: public assemblies, nominations and elections to committees, petitions and declarations, meetings, commemorations (feasts, banquets, and processions), and other activities (Laporte, 2004, p. 50). We restrict this analysis to *Patriote* events, excluding loyalist events, as the latter were generally reactive and in some cases coordinated by the government (Laporte, 2004, p. 49). One advantage of using rebel events as a measure is that they are well-documented to be highly localized (Greer, 1993, p. 42; Greer & Robichaud, 1989, p. 348; Laporte, 2015, p. 27). Rural Lower Canada had a low population density, which made rebellious activity hard to coordinate (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019, p. 264); for Greer (1993, p. 19), the challenging question is how the habitants "managed to break out of their atomized isolation." Mobilization nonetheless spread between neighboring areas: rebellion in neighboring subdistricts raised the probability of rebellion in a given one (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019, p. 274). Local events thus had to be linked across a thinly settled colony, the coordination problem that a competitive press could help solve. *Patriote* events per 1,000 is also the outcome measure in Geloso & Kufenko (2019), who use it alongside an indicator for any event. That study also used rebel leaders, those "arrested or wanted for arrest" (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019, p. 270), 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.



LISTE DES AGENS DU CANADIEN.

P. A. Dorion, Ecuyer,	Ste.-Anne Lapérade
A. Z. Leblanc, Ecuyer,	Trois-Rivières,
Louis Baribeau, Ecuyer,	Rivière du Loup.
Dr. Meilleur,	L'Assomption
MM. E. R. Fabre & Cie.	Montréal
H. De Rouville, Ecuyer,	St. Hilaire de Rouville
J. C. Duvert, Ecuyer,	St. Charles
Thim. Franchere, Ecuyer,	St. Mathias
J. Louis Wolff, M. P.	Gentilly
Jos. Rousseau, Ecuyer,	Baie du Fèbvre
Isaïe Noel Ecuyer,	St. Antoine
A. P. Methot, M. P.	St. Pierre les Becquets
Jos. Roi, Ecuyer,	St. Gervais
Jos. Moreau, Ecuyer,	Beaumont
Amable Morin, Ecuyer,	St. Roch [tière
Isaac Hudon, Ecuyer,	Ste. Anne de la Poca
MM. Casgrain & Tetu,	Rivière Ouelle
Amable Dionne, Ecuyer,	Kamouraska
Louis Belair, Ecuyer,	Baie St. Paul.
Ignace Gravelle, Ecuyer	Château-Richer.
Major Jos. Filteau,	Lotbinière.
M. Miller, P. M.	Varennes

(a) *Le Canadien* (14th Mar. 1834)



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G. W. Whitehead, Esq.	*Burford.*

(b) *Montreal Gazette* (24th Dec. 1832)

Figure 1: Two examples of agent lists from contemporary newspapers. Each list identifies the towns where the newspaper maintained a subscription agent; these agent locations are geocoded and used to construct the distance-weighted HHI_{News} measure described in the text.

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 34 newspapers in the September 1834 network and 29 in the October 1837 network (online appendix), 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.[12] 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.[13] 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). Agents sold

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

[13] Upper Canada also had a rebellion, but the scale was small and did not amount to a serious insurrection (Guillet, 1968). There was little ethnic component to the rebellion in Upper Canada (Read, 1985).

subscriptions, along with advertising and job printing, and collected debts for the newspaper (Vos & Li, 2024), so their listed locations mark where a paper was sold and read. These agent lists therefore 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. Our primary specification measures this network before October 1834—the date of the last election and roughly three years before the uprising began. A contemporaneous cross-section built from agent lists published just before November 1837 is a robustness check. Measuring newspaper presence before the rebellion in either case helps mitigate concerns of reverse causality.

To identify the impact of market concentration, our specification uses 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 for this analysis, based on the typical speed of the mail stagecoach over eight hours of travel a day, which is used as an estimate for the distance someone could receive same-day news.[14] Formally, the weight for a subdistrict-agent pair is defined as

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

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 indexes individual agents and K_i is the set of agents of newspaper i. 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

$$\mathrm{HHI}_{News,c} = \sum_{i=1}^{N_c} \left(\frac{\max_{k \in K_i} w_{ck}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_c} \max_{m \in K_j} w_{cm}} \right)^2, \tag{2}$$

where N_c is the total number of distinct titles within R kilometers of the subdistrict centroid, and m indexes the agents in K_j, the set of agents of title j. The maximum weights are normalized into market shares by

[14] John (1995, p. 91) reports that on the principal routes of the early nineteenth-century American postal system, mail stagecoaches rarely averaged more than 4 miles (6.44 kilometers) an hour. At 8 hours a day, this is approximately 51.5 km. Other radii of influence were tested with similar results in both magnitude and direction; see our online appendix for details.

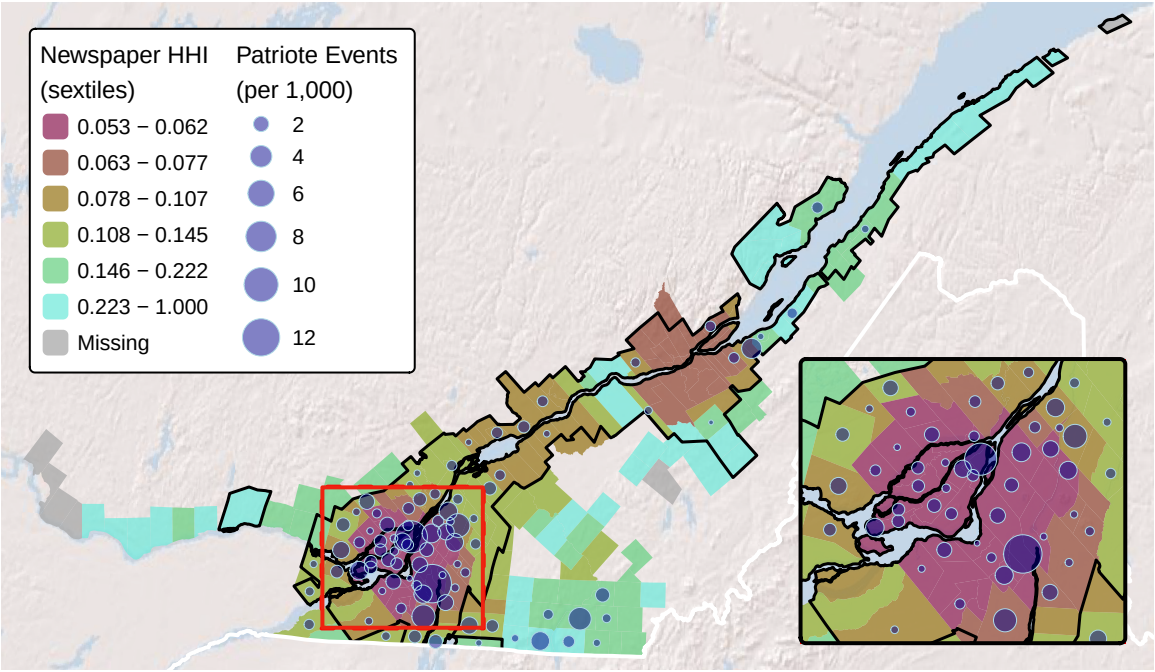


Figure 2: Newspaper competition and *Patriote* events in Lower Canada, September 1834 (the primary specification's pre-rebellion network). Subdistricts are shaded by sextile of the spatially modified Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI_{News}); darker shades are more competitive markets, and grey marks subdistricts with no value. Circles are scaled to *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants. Subdistricts with seigneurial tenure are outlined in black. The red box marks the Montreal region, enlarged in the inset. Newspaper agent locations from contemporary agent lists; events from Laporte (2004), matched to 1831 census subdistricts.

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.

Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of newspaper concentration across subdistricts as of the September 1834 network used in our primary specification, roughly three years before the outbreak of the 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 $p \in \{\text{Loyalist}, \text{Moderate}, \text{Patriote}\}$. Partisan weights per subdistrict are computed by taking the maximum weight of each newspaper within each partisan category:

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

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:

$$\mathrm{S}_{cp} = \frac{W_{cp}}{\sum_p W_{cp}}, \tag{4}$$

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

$$\text{PartisanBias}_c = (\mathrm{S}_{c,\text{Loyalist}} - \mathrm{S}_{c,\text{Patriote}}) \cdot (1 - \mathrm{S}_{c,\text{Moderate}}), \tag{5}$$

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.[15]

3.3 Specification

Demographic and economic data are drawn from Geloso & Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023); the latter also 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 & Geloso, 2025). Our empirical analysis uses cross-sectional ordinary least squares (OLS) models to estimate the association between newspaper competition and the intensity of rebellious activity at the subdistrict level, with the September 1834 newspaper network as the primary measure of $\text{HHI}_{News,c}$ and the October 1837 network reported as a robustness cross-section

[15] For 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.

throughout. The general specification, of which each table estimates a subset, is:

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

In Equation 6, the outcome is *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants of subdistrict c, and $\text{HHI}_{News,c}$ 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 $\text{HHI}_{News,c} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}_c$ tests whether the association between newspaper competition and rebellion was stronger in areas under more extractive institutions. HumanCapital_c is alternatively school enrollment—pupils per 100 children aged 5–14 in each subdistrict, from the 1831 census (House of Assembly of Lower Canada, 1832, app. O.o.; constructed as in Geloso et al., 2017, p. 177)—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 available subdistricts from 260 to 173 and the fully controlled sample from 202 to 155, creating a trade-off between efficiency (larger sample) and precision of control.[16] PartisanBias_c is included to assess whether the HHI effect reflects competition *per se* or instead the ideological orientation of the local press.

To test the scale condition, we interact $\text{HHI}_{News,c}$ with the log of the subdistrict's 1831 population, $\ln \text{Pop}_c$, and alternatively with the log of the population living within 50 km, both centered at their sample medians:

$$\textit{Patriote}\ \text{Events}_c = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1\,\text{HHI}_{News,c} + \alpha_2 \ln \text{Pop}_c + \alpha_3\,\text{HHI}_{News,c} \times \ln \text{Pop}_c + \mathbf{X}_c'\delta + u_c \tag{7}$$

Because population is centered, α_1 is the association at the median subdistrict, and a negative α_3 means that more competition (lower HHI) goes with more rebellion the larger the community. If market size raised both the number of papers and rebellion only through additive effects of population, α_1 and α_3 would be zero once population is held fixed, while a coordination account predicts $\alpha_3 < 0$. A negative α_3 is therefore harder to reconcile with an additive market-size account, although it could also arise if market size affected rebellion nonlinearly.

The inclusion of the binary seigneurial tenure indicator $\text{SeigneurialTenure}_c$ and bias term PartisanBias_c

[16] Most 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 subdistricts, only 173 have an associated literacy datapoint. Of those, 158 are seigneurial areas (91.3%). Conditional on covariates being available, the number is 141 out of 155 (91.0%). 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.

allows 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.

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. The design's principal defense against this concern is temporal separation. The primary specification measures the newspaper network in September 1834—agent lists published roughly three years before violence broke out in November 1837, and well before the Russell Resolutions triggered the escalation that preceded it—so rebel activity after September 1834 cannot affect the network we observe. The event counts do include the first months of the period, from the tabling of the 92 Resolutions in early 1834, which predate the network; they are not dated by subdistrict, so we cannot exclude them.

We also run the same specifications on a contemporaneous cross-section built from the October 1837 network. Its estimates have the same sign as the 1834 results in Section 4, of similar magnitude in the main specifications and smaller in the partisan-bias and seigneurial-interaction tables. The effect of HHI within seigneurial subdistricts is negative and significant in both years (Table 4; 1837 estimates in the online appendix). This is what we would expect if the underlying relationship is stable rather than an artifact of demand-driven entry just before the uprising. If politically active areas nonetheless attracted more newspapers in the pre-rebellion period, entry would mechanically depress measured HHI in those districts and bias the OLS coefficient in the same (negative) direction as our estimate, so the sign of the result cannot by itself rule this channel out; the 1834 timing and the stability of the estimate in the 1837 network are our responses to it.

We also report Oster (2019) bounds in the online appendix. They show that selection on unobservables comparable to the selection on our original controls would not move the HHI coefficient toward zero. They do not speak to market size, an observable that shares the level association with competition and that we examine directly (Equation 7; Table 2). The online appendix also reports postal-zone IV estimates. The instruments are weak and the exclusion restriction is exposed, since they mainly contrast the seigneurial core with the rest of the colony; weak-instrument-robust confidence sets exclude zero in most specifications, but we read the IV results only as consistent with the sign of the OLS estimates. Because larger markets sustained more titles, competition also travels with the size of the surrounding market; Section 4 shows that the two share the level association and that the effect of competition rises with scale, as a coordination mechanism implies.

3.4 Controls

The control vector $\mathbf{X}_c'$ includes demographic and institutional controls such as Catholic share, "emigrants" per 1,000 inhabitants, the log inverse 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 absolute gap between the subdistrict's 1831 wheat price and the price in the city of its judicial district (Montreal, Trois-Rivières, or Quebec), a proxy for market integration, which lowered the cost of rebellion (Geloso & Kufenko, 2019, p. 265). The "emigrants" variable measures 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 with 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 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. In the online appendix, we replicate our results with Conley (1999) standard errors, which allow the residuals of subdistricts within 50 km of each other, the bandwidth of the HHI, to be correlated and treat observations farther apart as uncorrelated; the average distance between subdistrict pairs in the colony is 177.7 km. The Conley estimates support the HHI results in Table 1 and Table 3; for the interaction in Table 4 they are unstable (see the online appendix).

4 Results

In nearly all specifications of Table 1 and Table 3, and in the combined HHI + HHI × Seigneurial row of Table 4, HHI_{News} enters with a negative and statistically significant coefficient under heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors (the exception is the full-sample specification with partisan bias; Table 3, column 3). It does not survive a control for the population of the surrounding market (Table 2). Since higher values of

Table 1: Newspaper competition and *Patriote* events.

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000						
	All Subdistricts				Seigneurial Subdistricts		
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Variables							
HHI_{News}	-1.170***	-1.453**	-1.450**	-1.944*	-1.234***	-1.937***	-2.714*
	(0.3337)	(0.6662)	(0.6653)	(1.032)	(0.2918)	(0.6469)	(1.448)
Seigneurial Tenure			0.2581	0.4820*			
			(0.2636)	(0.2893)			
Basic Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls		Yes	Yes			Yes	
Fit statistics							
Observations	253	202	202	214	194	155	166
R^2	0.024	0.116	0.119	0.034	0.027	0.140	0.041

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

Outcome is *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants. Newspaper competition (HHI_{News}) is measured using the September 1834 agent-list network. Columns 1–4 use the full sample; columns 5–7 restrict to seigneurial subdistricts. The seigneurial dummy is constant within the seigneurial-only subsample and is therefore omitted from columns 5–7. Basic controls are the Catholic share, emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants, log inverse travel cost to the nearest port, and the price gap with the district city; economic controls add inns and taverns per 1,000 inhabitants, the daily grain wage, and log TFP. Of the 260 subdistricts, 6 are reached by no newspaper agent within 50 km (Matane, in Rimouski district, and five townships in the Ottawa and Mégantic districts) and 1 (Wendover) has no rebellion or population data, leaving 253 in column 1. The sample falls from 253 subdistricts in column 1 to 202 in column 3 because the price gap, grain wage and TFP are unavailable for some subdistricts. Sources: *Patriote* events from Laporte (2004); newspaper agents from the agent lists printed in each paper (online appendix); population and controls from the 1831 census as compiled by Geloso and Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023).

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. Table 2 then asks whether HHI simply measures market size, Table 3 whether the association runs through human capital or the ideological content of the local press, and Table 4 whether it differs across institutional regimes.

In Table 1, regressing *Patriote* events per 1,000 on HHI_{News} yields a negative coefficient in every specification, from -1.170 to -2.714. The coefficient does not shrink as controls accumulate (and the sample narrows): it grows by about a quarter, from -1.170 to -1.453. The controls absorb the most plausible economic confounders other than market size, which we examine below: commercial integration (price gap and log inverse travel cost to port), social infrastructure (inns and taverns per capita), and agricultural productivity (TFP and grain wages). The HHI estimate remains negative and significant once these gradients are held fixed. The proxies for ethno-linguistic composition, the Catholic share and recent British emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants, are small and mostly statistically insignificant, and replacing the Catholic share with an index of ethnic fractionalization leaves the HHI estimate negative and significant (online appendix). Restricting the sample to seigneurial subdistricts strengthens the estimate: with full controls it is 34% larger in absolute value than in the full sample (Table 1, columns 3 and 6), consistent with feudal-tenure districts, where institutionally grounded grievances were most concentrated, being most responsive to press competition. To fix ideas about magnitude, take the basic-controls estimate (Table 1, column 4). Moving from the 75th to the 25th percentile of HHI_{News} across subdistricts (from 0.174 to 0.071, roughly 6 to 14 equally sized titles) goes

with 0.20 more *Patriote* events per 1,000, 38% of the sample mean. Because this level association does not survive a control for the size of the surrounding market (Table 2), these magnitudes describe the pattern in the data rather than the consequences of entry.

We also tested two features of how Table 1 is built. Because HHI_{News} treats every title as the same size, we weighted each title by its advertising rate, a proxy for circulation; and because the price-gap control compares each subdistrict with a single reference city, we replaced it with gaps to neighboring subdistricts. The HHI coefficient stays close to its unweighted value when papers without an observed rate are assigned an average rate, although it falls by more than half when they are dropped, which reflects which papers enter the index rather than the rates themselves. With price gaps built from all neighbors it ranges from -1.676 to -1.510 and is significant at the 5% level (online appendix).

A plot of the partial residuals (online appendix) shows a single subdistrict at HHI = 1, Le Bic, the only subdistrict in the fully controlled sample served by one newspaper. Dropping it leaves the coefficient essentially unchanged (-1.471 against -1.450) but widens its standard error, so that it is not statistically significant; dropping all subdistricts with HHI of 0.4 or more, capping HHI at its 95th percentile, or using its logarithm keeps it significant at the 5% level (online appendix).

Newspaper competition and market size went together in Lower Canada: log population within 50 km alone explains 41% of the variation in HHI_{News} in the fully controlled sample. Table 2 therefore adds the log of each subdistrict's own population and of the population living within 50 km, both centered at their sample medians. Own population leaves the HHI coefficient negative (-1.169, significant at the 10% level). Population within 50 km takes it from -1.450 to 0.069, with an almost unchanged standard error (0.757 against 0.665). Competition and market size thus share the level association. That is what one would expect if large markets did two things at once: they sustained several competing papers, and they gave those papers an audience large enough to mobilize.

The evidence that competition itself mattered lies in how the association varies with scale. If market size alone drove both the number of papers and rebellion, and did so additively, competition would add nothing once size is held fixed, at any population. Instead, the HHI gradient becomes steeper as places grow. Interacting HHI with log own population (Equation 7; Table 2, column 3), the HHI coefficient at the median subdistrict (about 1,670 inhabitants) is -2.32 and grows in absolute value with population. It is significant at the 5% level above roughly 860 inhabitants, a range that contains 150 of the 202 subdistricts, and is indistinguishable from zero in smaller places (Figure 3, Panel A); the pattern is similar with basic controls and with the 1837 network. The interaction with population within 50 km is also negative and significant at the 10% level (column 5), and the own-population interaction holds when population within 50 km is controlled; the online appendix reports the marginal effects from this and the other specifications. Entered

together, the two interactions cannot be told apart (online appendix), so the data do not say whether the gradient runs through a subdistrict's own population or through the population around it. Either way it is an interaction of competition with scale, which an additive market-size account does not produce; the online appendix reports checks with nonlinear market-size terms. This is the pattern a threshold model of collective action implies. Public evidence that discontent is shared (Lohmann, 1994) adds little in a parish small enough for neighbors to know one another's grievances, and matters most where potential participants are too many to observe one another directly. Our reading is that, in larger communities, competing newspapers supplied that evidence.

Distance to the cities overlaps with competition in the same way. Adding the log distance to Montreal or Quebec lowers the 1834 HHI coefficient from -1.45 to -1.03, with an almost unchanged standard error (0.678 against 0.665), so that it is not statistically significant; with the 1837 network it falls from -1.36 to -1.05 and remains significant at the 5% level (online appendix). Subdistricts near the cities had both larger markets and more competing papers, and this check cannot tell the two apart. Of the remaining checks, population within 50 km absorbs the HHI level coefficient even when the subdistrict's own population is excluded from it, and a Poisson model of event counts, which removes population from the outcome's denominator, confirms the own-population interaction with the 1834 network (significant at the 5% level), our primary measure, though not with the 1837 network. The association is concentrated in the half of the colony nearest Montreal and Quebec, where markets were largest (the difference between the halves is significant at the 10% level). It is not explained by access to a *Patriote* paper. Splitting HHI by political camp suggests that it runs mainly through competition between papers of opposed camps, which is what a common-knowledge mechanism implies when rival papers report the same assemblies and petitions; because between-camp concentration is highly correlated with HHI, the split is suggestive (online appendix).

Table 3 asks whether the association runs through two indirect channels. 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. They do not: in the columns that add them (1–2 and 5–6), HHI_{News} remains negative and significant. With school enrollment the estimate is close to its value without a human-capital control (-1.432 against -1.453 in the full sample, -1.965 against -1.937 in the seigneurial subsample); with literacy it is larger (-2.704 and -2.734), on samples cut to 155 and 141 subdistricts. School enrollment and literacy enter with near-zero, insignificant coefficients throughout. This is evidence against the stock-of-knowledge channel and is consistent with an *activation* mechanism, in which press competition lowered the cost of learning that grievances were widely shared and of coordinating mobilization, independently of whether newspapers raised the literacy rate (Lohmann, 1994). Human capital does not mediate the competition–rebellion relationship.

Table 2: Newspaper competition and market size.

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000				
Model:	Baseline (1)	+ Population (2)	HHI × Population (3)	+ Pop. 50 km (4)	HHI × Pop. 50 km (5)
Variables					
HHI_{News}	-1.450**	-1.169*	-2.324**	0.0689	-1.334
	(0.6653)	(0.6942)	(1.044)	(0.7569)	(1.221)
HHI × Log Population			-1.049**		
			(0.4632)		
HHI × Log Population within 50 km					-1.127*
					(0.5781)
Log Population		0.2141***	0.4028***	0.1667**	0.2096***
		(0.0718)	(0.1241)	(0.0692)	(0.0758)
Log Population within 50 km				0.3852***	0.5120***
				(0.1201)	(0.1412)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics					
Observations	202	202	202	202	202
R^2	0.119	0.153	0.171	0.197	0.210

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

Outcome is *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants. Newspaper competition (HHI_{News}) is measured using the September 1834 agent-list network. All columns include the full control set and the seigneurial dummy of Table 1, column 3 (not shown), and use the same 202 subdistricts; column 1 reproduces that column. Population variables are logs centered at their sample medians (1,670 inhabitants for own population and 55,020 within 50 km), so in columns 3 and 5 the HHI coefficient is the effect at the median subdistrict. Population within 50 km ("Pop. 50 km" in the column headers) sums the 1831 census population of all subdistricts whose centroid lies within 50 km of the subdistrict's centroid, including its own. Sources: *Patriote* events from Laporte (2004); newspaper agents from the agent lists printed in each paper (online appendix); population and controls from the 1831 census as compiled by Geloso and Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023).

Table 3: Human capital and partisan content as channels.

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000							
	All Subdistricts				Seigneurial Subdistricts			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Variables								
HHI_{News}	-1.432**	-2.704***	-1.350	-3.769***	-1.965***	-2.734***	-3.032**	-3.950***
	(0.6710)	(0.7987)	(1.526)	(1.366)	(0.6586)	(0.8744)	(1.366)	(1.432)
Partisan Bias			-0.2048	2.213			2.117	2.645
			(2.077)	(1.951)			(2.177)	(2.134)
School Enrollment	0.0003				-0.0007			
	(0.0013)				(0.0019)			
Literacy (%)		0.0013		0.0015		0.0025		0.0036
		(0.0054)		(0.0053)		(0.0085)		(0.0083)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics								
Observations	202	155	202	155	155	141	155	141
R^2	0.117	0.156	0.116	0.161	0.141	0.150	0.145	0.157

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

Outcome is *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants. Newspaper competition (HHI_{News}) and the partisan bias index (loyalist minus *Patriote* share, dampened by the moderate share) are measured using the September 1834 agent-list network. All columns include the control set of Table 1, column 2 (not shown); columns 1–4 use the full sample and columns 5–8 restrict to seigneurial subdistricts. Columns 1–2 and 5–6 add school enrollment or literacy; columns 3–4 and 7–8 add the partisan bias index, alone or with literacy. The online appendix reports every coefficient and the specifications that combine partisan bias with school enrollment. Basic controls are the Catholic share, emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants, log inverse travel cost to the nearest port, and the price gap with the district city; economic controls add inns and taverns per 1,000 inhabitants, the daily grain wage, and log TFP. School enrollment is pupils per 100 children aged 5–14 in the 1831 census; literacy is from Curtis and Geloso (2025). Sources: *Patriote* events from Laporte (2004); newspaper agents from the agent lists printed in each paper (online appendix); population and controls from the 1831 census as compiled by Geloso and Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023).

Among the controls (reported in the online appendix), the price gap with the district city and log inverse travel cost to port are consistently negative. Because a larger price gap means that a subdistrict was less integrated with its district city's market, the first indicates that more commercially integrated subdistricts experienced more *Patriote* activity; the second indicates that subdistricts with better access to a port experienced less. 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.

The partisan-bias columns of Table 3 test the content channel against the market-structure channel: did the association reflect which side the local papers took, or 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 four columns that include it, with point estimates from -0.205 to 2.645. Adding the bias index leaves the full-sample point estimate for HHI_{News} nearly unchanged (from -1.453 in Table 1, column 2, to -1.350), but its standard error more than doubles and the coefficient is no longer statistically significant (column 3): in the full sample the two indices are highly correlated ($r = 0.86$), so the data cannot separate them precisely. In the seigneurial subsample, HHI_{News} remains negative and significant: -3.032 in column 7 and -3.950 in column 8, where literacy restricts the sample to $N = 141$. Where HHI remains precisely estimated alongside the bias index—in the seigneurial subsample and in the literacy-restricted full sample (column 4)—the null on partisan bias is evidence against the content channel: the association with *Patriote* mobilization runs through how many competing outlets a market had, not through their aggregate political direction, although, as Table 2 shows, in levels the number of competing outlets cannot be separated from the size of the market. In the larger full-sample specification (column 3) the collinearity leaves the test uninformative.

We also interacted HHI_{News} with the partisan bias index and split it into French- and English-language competition indices (online appendix). The interaction is indistinguishable from zero in every specification except the small literacy-restricted sample ($N = 155$), where its sign flips between the 1834 and 1837 networks, and both language indices enter negatively, so the association is not confined to the French-language press. With the null on human capital in Table 3, these results point away from literacy and partisan content as channels: the evidence favors market structure over content, with the caveat that, in levels, market structure cannot be told apart from market size.

Table 4 introduces the $\text{HHI}_{News} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}$ 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

Table 4: Newspaper competition and seigneurial tenure.

Dependent Variable:	Patriote Events per 1,000				
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Variables					
HHI × Seigneurial	-2.458	-3.801*	-3.805*	-3.895*	-4.053
	(1.951)	(2.131)	(2.132)	(2.145)	(2.552)
HHI_{News}	1.224	1.704	1.634	1.726	0.5725
	(1.929)	(2.096)	(2.545)	(2.568)	(2.838)
Seigneurial Tenure	0.7201*	0.9054**	0.9087**	0.9332**	1.181**
	(0.4060)	(0.4475)	(0.4428)	(0.4465)	(0.5721)
Partisan Bias			0.1455	0.1935	1.647
			(1.831)	(1.797)	(2.251)
School Enrollment				0.0007	0.0015
				(0.0013)	(0.0017)
Basic Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Econ. Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	
HHI + HHI × Seigneurial	-1.234***	-2.097***	-2.171*	-2.169*	-3.480*
	(0.2926)	(0.6007)	(1.194)	(1.194)	(1.963)
Fit statistics					
Observations	253	202	202	202	214
R^2	0.036	0.145	0.145	0.146	0.054

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

Outcome is *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants, full sample. Newspaper competition (HHI_{News}) is measured using the September 1834 agent-list network and interacted with the seigneurial tenure dummy. Column 1 has no controls; column 2 adds the basic and economic controls; columns 3 and 4 add to column 2 partisan bias, and partisan bias and school enrollment; column 5 uses the basic controls with partisan bias and school enrollment. The specifications that add literacy are reported in the online appendix. HHI + HHI × Seigneurial is the effect of HHI_{News} in seigneurial subdistricts, with its standard error and significance from a Wald test of $\beta_1 + \beta_3 = 0$ (coefficients on HHI_{News} and HHI × Seigneurial, numbered as in the specification equation). Columns 2–5 are the preferred specifications. Basic controls are the Catholic share, emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants, log inverse travel cost to the nearest port, and the price gap with the district city; economic controls add inns and taverns per 1,000 inhabitants, the daily grain wage, and log TFP. Sources: *Patriote* events from Laporte (2004); newspaper agents from the agent lists printed in each paper (online appendix); population and controls from the 1831 census as compiled by Geloso and Kufenko (2019) and Geloso et al. (2023).

competitive press could activate—the theoretical prior for a negative interaction. The interaction is negative in the preferred specifications but only marginally significant (significant at the 10% level in columns 2–4 and not statistically significant without controls): -2.458 in the no-controls specification, -3.801 with full controls, -3.805 adding partisan bias, and -3.895 adding partisan bias and school enrollment. Because HHI is a concentration index, a negative interaction coefficient implies that the association between competition and rebellion is stronger in seigneurial districts. The point estimate is stable across columns 2–4: it does not attenuate as human capital and partisan controls are added to the full control set, although it is imprecisely estimated throughout.

The seigneurial main effect is positive, ranging from 0.720 to 0.933 (significant at the 5% level in columns 2–4 and at the 10% level without controls); because of the interaction, it measures the seigneurial–township difference only at HHI = 0, a point outside the data, and we evaluate that difference across the observed range of HHI below. The bottom row of Table 4 reports the linear combination $\hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_3$, the HHI coefficient within seigneurial subdistricts. With full controls (column 2) it is -2.097 (standard error 0.601, significant at the 5% level), against 1.704 in freehold townships (not statistically significant): the association between competition and rebellion is concentrated in seigneurial districts (Figure 3, Panel B). Across the specifications, $\hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_3$ is negative in every column, significant at the 5% level in two of the five columns and at the 10% level in all five. Re-estimating the table with the October 1837 network gives a combined effect of the same sign and somewhat smaller size, significant at the 5% level in all five columns, so it does not depend on the year chosen for the primary specification (online appendix).

The interaction does not attenuate when Catholic share and emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants are controlled, so it does not reflect differences in their levels. Column 5, which uses the basic controls only (dropping inns and taverns, grain wages, and TFP) together with partisan bias and school enrollment on $N = 214$ subdistricts, yields a similar point estimate (-4.053, not statistically significant), so the point estimate does not depend on those controls. Adding literacy to either control set produces unstable, insignificant positive coefficients in much smaller samples, reflecting collinearity among literacy, seigneurial status, and partisan press composition (online appendix). Within seigneurial subdistricts, the intensity of seigneurial dues, measured by log rents per *arpent*, is small and statistically insignificant in every specification that includes it (online appendix).

Read from the other side, the same interaction implies that seigneurial subdistricts had 0.62 more *Patriote* events per 1,000 than comparable freehold townships in the most competitive markets where both tenures are observed (significant at the 10% level; HHI = 0.076, about 13 equally sized titles), a difference that shrinks as markets concentrate and reaches zero at HHI $\approx$ 0.24, roughly 4 equally sized titles.

Read together with the market-scale results, the seigneurial decomposition in Table 4 and Figure 3 describes a conjunction of conditions rather than a test of two separate channels. Seigneurial tenure supplied

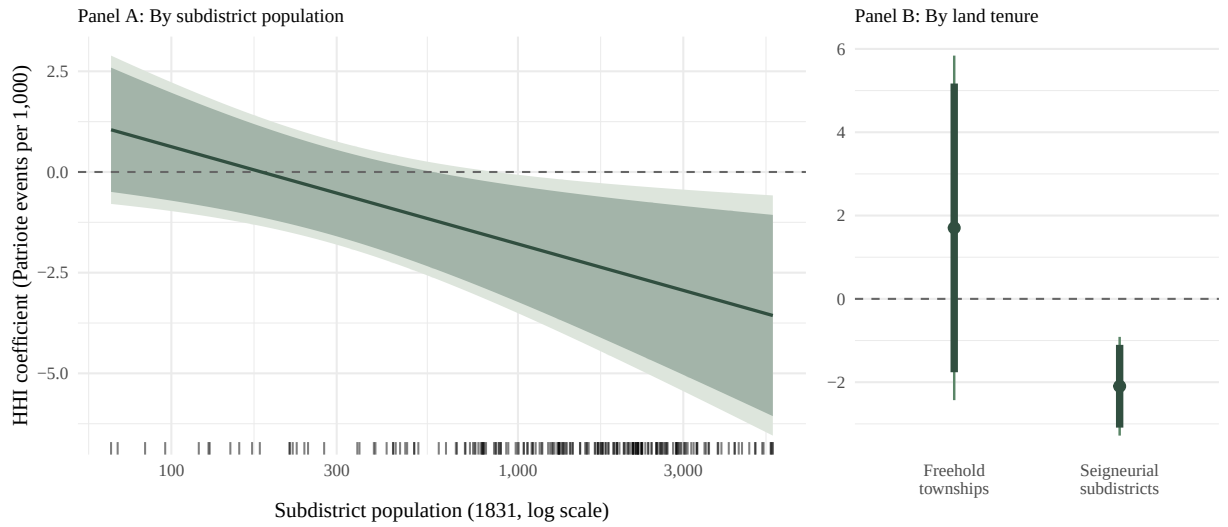


Figure 3: Where newspaper competition was associated with rebellion (September 1834 network, full controls). Both panels show the coefficient on HHI_{News} in *Patriote* events per 1,000; a more negative value means that more competition (lower HHI) is associated with more *Patriote* events, and the dashed line marks zero. Panel A: by subdistrict population, from Table 2, column 3 (the HHI coefficient plus the HHI × log population coefficient times log population, centered at the median); the dark and light bands are 90% and 95% confidence intervals, tick marks show the populations of the subdistricts in the estimation sample, and the axis is on a log scale. Panel B: by land tenure, from Table 4, column 2; the freehold-township estimate is the HHI coefficient and the seigneurial estimate is the linear combination HHI + HHI × Seigneurial; thick and thin bars are 90% and 95% confidence intervals. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Data: *Patriote* events from Laporte (2004); newspaper agents from the September 1834 agent lists; population from the 1831 census.

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. Where that grievance existed, a competitive press activated it, by lowering the cost of learning that discontent was widely shared and by spreading information about petitions, assemblies, and meetings. Such notices appeared in the press well before the rebellions; the 1823 notice by the inhabitants of Baie-Saint-Antoine announcing their petition on seigneurial dues (Section 2.2) appeared in *Le Constitutionnel* (1823). The pattern resembles the finding of Manacorda & Tesei (2020) that mobile phones raised protest in Africa only during economic downturns, when reasons for grievance emerged. In townships, the HHI coefficient in the preferred specifications is positive (0.57 to 1.73 in columns 2–5) but imprecisely estimated, and in concentrated press markets seigneurial subdistricts were no more rebellious than comparable townships. Seigneurial tenure, competitive newspaper markets, and large surrounding markets coincided in the hinterlands of Montreal and Quebec: the half of the colony nearest the two cities is 97% seigneurial and has a median of about 84,000 people within 50 km. The seigneurial interaction and the scale gradient of Table 2 therefore describe the same places, and they tell one story: grievance supplied the motive, scale supplied the numbers, and a

competitive press connected the two. Press competition was associated with rebellion where all three were present together.

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 competition mattered where three conditions met. Subdistricts exposed to a greater variety of newspapers experienced more rebellious behavior (a move from the 75th to the 25th percentile of HHI goes with 0.20 more *Patriote* events per 1,000 inhabitants, 38% of the sample mean), and the association grew with the size of the community: competing papers went with larger markets, and competition was associated with rebellion in populous places but not in small parishes. The association was also larger in areas where the seigneurial system persisted: restricting the sample to seigneurial subdistricts yields an estimate 34% larger in absolute value than in the full sample, and the $\text{HHI}_{News} \times \text{SeigneurialTenure}$ interaction is negative, though only marginally significant. Because HHI is a concentration index, a negative interaction coefficient means that the association between lower concentration and rebellion is stronger in seigneurial districts. Human capital—proxied by school enrollment and literacy—has no significant association with rebellion intensity once press competition is accounted for, and adding it as a control does not absorb the competition effect. These conditions coincided in the populous seigneurial hinterlands of Montreal and Quebec, where large markets both sustained competing papers and supplied the numbers that coordinated mobilization required.

The mechanism linking media competition to rebellion appears to operate through the dynamics of information exposure and mobilization more than through partisan persuasion. Partisan alignment is never significantly associated with rebellion once competition is accounted for, although in the full 1834 sample the two are too closely correlated to separate; this suggests that the coexistence and rivalry among outlets increased political salience, whatever their individual editorial stances. 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 the political economy studies reviewed in Section 2.3 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 two intermediaries: scale and communicative infrastructure. Institutional grievance was insufficient on its own. On our reading, it turned into rebellion where communities were large enough that residents needed public information to learn how widely discontent was shared, and where a competitive press supplied it, amplifying discontent, diffusing information about government action, and translating 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 a literature on how media markets, elections, and political violence interact in ethnically and institutionally divided societies. In such settings, competitive media can act as a catalyst for political activation, especially where representative institutions are weak or contested. The Lower Canadian case is consistent with a press that took an active part in political conflict, and whose competitive structure marked where collective action became possible. Institutional constraint, class division, and communicative infrastructure together offer a richer account of how information flows mediate the path from discontent to rebellion, and from rebellion to reform.

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