Marching on the Bastille: Local Organizational Capacity and Conflict in Revolutionary France

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Note: This is a rough draft of the paper, part of our larger article and book project on war and political change. All comments welcome, but please do not cite or circulate without our permission.
Introduction

On July 14 1789, an angry crowd of Parisians tried to storm the Bastille, the forbidding fortress and jail for political prisoners in the heart of the French capital. Their initial attempts were unsuccessful. The crowd entered the outside courtyard but was fired upon by the guards inside, who were protected by thick, high walls, and the drawbridge and sturdy gates separating the inner from the outer citadel. The crowd’s leaders then enlisted the help of soldiers from the Gardes Français regiment, many members of which had defected from their units over the previous weeks. One of these soldiers, a veteran artilleryman named Claude Marneur, brought up captured cannons from the Invalides and arranged them directly in front of the Bastille’s main gates, which they could have easily blown apart (Doyle, 2002: 109-110). The Governor of the Bastille, recognizing that resistance was useless at that point, surrendered the fortress to the crowd. The French Revolution had begun.

This was not the artilleryman Claude Marneur’s first experience with revolution. Nine years earlier, as a twenty one year old soldier, Marneur had travelled to the American colonies with his battalion of artillery from the Auxonne Regiment, part of the Comte de Rochambeau’s French expeditionary force that fought with the American colonists in their fight for freedom against Britain. The French committed over 9,000 men to the war from 1779-83, with two major expeditionary forces led by Rochambeau and D’Estaing, as well as dozens of ships. D’Estaing’s force fought in the unsuccessful siege of Savannah in 1779, while Rochambeau marched his army from Newport RI all the way to Virginia, where French artillery and knowledge of siege warfare was crucial to the decisive victory of the war at Yorktown.

How did Claude Marneur’s service in the Americas from 1780-1783 affect his participation in the Revolution? More generally how did the experience of the French forces in combat, and on the side of the American Revolution, affect their subsequent political organization and participation back home in France? In this paper, part of our larger project on military combat, and its effect on veterans’ subsequent organization, skills and political behavior, we try to assess whether the combat experience of the French army in the Americas from 1779-1783 affected veterans’ participation in the French Revolution.

We begin by laying out the broader theoretical connection between military service, skill acquisition and subsequent political behavior, following from our earlier work (Jha and Wilkinson, 2012). We then describe the existing qualitative literature linking the American War of Independence to the French Revolution, and some of the potential methodological challenges involved in testing for the links between service in the Americas and subsequent activity in the French Revolution. Then we outline our own data and research strategy, dealing in particular with the challenges of accounting

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3 See Jha and Wilkinson (2012).
for selection effects and possible competing explanations, for example those based on ideology or economic shocks.

To be clear, our claim here is not that France’s military expedition to the Americas caused the entire French Revolution, which was clearly a complex multi-causal event in which domestic crises also loomed large. But we argue that the French experience in the American war was important, and that it led to those who participated playing a disproportionate role in the revolutionary events that followed.

**The Theoretical Link between War and Subsequent Political Action**

Several important accounts of democratization highlight the role of external shocks in altering the capacity of the disenfranchised to press elites for political concessions (e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006: Ferejohn and Rosenbluth, 2016). These accounts often focus on political or economic crises that lead to the increased negotiating power of the disenfranchised, but generally do not consider how wars and military service might alter the skills and capacities of those who fight in a way that affects their ability to demand political change. There are a few exceptions however. Suzanne Mettler (2002) has looked at how one important post-war policy in the USA, the GI bill, altered organizational capacity, civic engagement and progressive politics after 1945. And Carles Boix (2003) briefly mentions that wartime service might have given soldiers military skills that increased their political leverage. But overall little attention has been paid to looking at how the direct experience of war, and skills gained in war, translate into post-war political change.

We argue in Jha and Wilkinson (2012), using evidence from 1940s India and Pakistan, that wars represent one of the most important, perhaps the most important, shocks to the capacity of the disenfranchised to press for political change: “…wars provide a common environment where previously disenfranchised groups have historically gained and continue to be likely to gain the organizational skills to engage in collective action to alter political institutions (Jha and Wilkinson, 2012).” We show in that paper that combat experience in the Indian Army from 1939-45 played an important role in providing veterans with the military skills and organizational abilities that were then deployed, district by district, in the ethnic cleansing that accompanied the Indian partition of 1947.

The particular skills that soldiers learn will differ depending on the kind of war being fought, and there is clearly a difference between the organized drills and mass movements of the 17th and 18th century, the trench warfare of World War 1, and the anti-insurgency combat of post-invasion Iraq. But across these different environments we can still identify certain common elements. First, and perhaps to state the obvious, men and women become much more skilled in weapons and tactics when they are deployed in combat, as compared to training. Military historians are unanimous that training is no substitute for actual combat use of tactics and weapons. Second, soldiers in front-line combat are exposed to new situations—different from their textbook combat manuals—and are forced as groups and as individuals to constantly improvise and improve their combat techniques in

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5 As John Ellis puts it, ‘the only really effective combat training was that received on the battlefield itself…”bb (Holmes, 1985: 53). See also Muir (2000) and Powell (2010).
order to survive (Powell, 2010:131,43). Soldiers in combat learn how to quickly divide complex battle objectives into smaller discrete tasks, and to quickly create small hierarchical organizational structures that are most effective in getting the job done. French and British forces in the Napoleonic wars quickly developed better drills to maneuver in battle as well as improved tactical formations (e.g. infantry squares) because these proved much more effective than the book drills and formations they had received in training.6 Third, combat veterans develop a high degree of unit and organizational cohesion, as well as networks throughout the service, and these can be imported home after the war is over.7

The effect of the skills that veterans acquire will also vary a great deal depending on the context in which they return. Chris Blattman's work on abducted child soldiers in Uganda for instance finds relatively benign effects of combat in the post-civil war environment in that country, with veterans displaying greater degrees of democratic participation. But these veteran outcomes could be very different, we might speculate, in the crisis environments of post-World War 1 Germany or Russia, or post WW2 India.8 In France likewise, the combined political and economic crisis of 1788-1789 might have led to different possibilities for veteran political activity than earlier in the 18th century.

The Connection between Service in the Americas and the French Revolution

Most previous work on a possible connection between the men who fought for France in the cause of American independence and the Revolution has focused on the role of ideology acquired through exposure to a different environment and the pressure of war rather than to the human capital that military service and combat might create. McDonald for instance describes how “It has been commonplace in the history of modern Europe for a body of soldiers, serving in the army of a despot, to visit in their campaigns much more progressive and enlightened countries, and, on their subsequent return and discharge, to be quite radical in their views (McDonald, 1951: 158).”

Scholars have been divided however on whether the likely effect of ideology was greater on members of the officer class, almost entirely noble, or on the mass of the French army, drawn from peasants, artisans and townsmen. Rochambeau’s officers mixed much more with members of the colonial elite and leaders of the revolution than did the men, and H. Morse Stephens argued that these experiences had long lasting effects:

The most distinguished and accomplished young officers, who might under other circumstances have warmly welcomed the reforms of the Comte de Saint-Germain, soon had their loyalty affected by their service in America during the War of Independence. After service side by side with the American colonists, who were fighting to overthrow the authority of a king, they lost respect for their own monarch, and brought home to France very advanced ideas as to the obedience they owed him. This feeling may be seen, not only in the behavior and attitude of Lafayette, but in that of Rochambeau, the Vicomte de Noailles, the Lameths, the Prince de Broglie, Custines, and all the officers who had served in America, except the Vicomte de Mirabeau. (Stephens, 1886)

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6 Rory Muir, Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon (Yale 2000) p. 75.
8 Cite Robert Gewirth's work on Freikorps.
Several of the senior officers who fought in the Americas played a significant role in the Revolution, despite the fact that fewer than 5% of all French officers had served in America. No fewer than five of the 20 Members of the Military Council of Revolution and three Marshals of France were American veterans, including Alexandre de Beaufharnais (the Empress Josephine’s first husband), who was also the President of the National Assembly in 1791 (Stephens 1886). Several of the members of the Assembly who destroyed the privileges of the Feudal regime in several days and nights of debate in August 1789 were also veterans of the American war (Lefebvre, 1947: 162-64; Doyle, 2002: 115-18).

As well as the contribution of officers, scholars have also focused on the role of the ordinary soldiers, far greater in number, in the three hundred peasant revolts against feudalism that spread throughout France in the spring and early summer of 1789, even before the assault on the Bastille. Forrest McDonald, writing at the height of the Cold War in 1951, argued that the 8,000 soldiers who fought in the land campaigns in the Americas had been deeply influenced, not so much by larger ideals of liberty, equality and constitutionalism, but by the example of “unfettered free and private property at its glorious best”:

…they had an opportunity to see—or, more accurately, they could not miss seeing—the practical realization of the concept that had been missing in all the pre-Revolutionary jacqueries. Landing at Newport, Rhode Island, in July of 1780, and marching across southern Connecticut, through White Plains, New York, across the Hudson River and through Jersey to the Delaware River, and thence to the neighborhood around Philadelphia, they saw literally thousands of small, rich farms. They saw even the lowest of the American peasants—the small farmers—in possession of from 40 to 200 acres of well-cultivated land, and because of the increased demand for farm products occasioned by the need for supplying the armies, these farmers, at the exact moments the French saw them, were enjoying the greatest wave of prosperity they had ever experienced. In short, the French peasants saw the institution of absolutely free and unfettered private property at its glorious best (McDonald 1951).

McDonald collected evidence to show that areas of France with greater numbers of veterans of the American war had significantly more agrarian unrest in France in 1789 than areas with fewer veterans (McDonald, 1951). Using data from a massive census of French veterans done to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the American Revolution, Forrest carried out a bivariate analysis (see map from his article below) where he overlaid dots representing concentrations of 10 French veterans over a map demonstrating the areas of greatest agrarian protest and violence from March-June 1789, using data collected from four major French histories. He argued that the map showed clearly that “wherever there was a large number of veterans—150 to 500—in a concentrated area, that area was radical (McDonald, 1951: 161).”
The mechanism, he argued, was that “On their subsequent discharge and return to their homes in France, these soldiers spread the idea they had seen in practice. When, in 1789, financial crisis, general discontent, and the weakness of the monarchy combined to make revolutionary action possible in France, these veterans formed the dynamic element in a movement which guaranteed the completion of the Revolution by the destruction of economic feudalism (McDonald 1951: 161).”

McDonald’s interpretation was challenged almost immediately. The eminent French historian Jacques Godechot, writing two years after the article came out, argued that McDonald’s correlation was likely the result of selection effects and the omission of key variables from the analysis. Soldiers were recruited from “…the poorest provinces that provided most of mercenaries in the royal army. This poverty had social and economic causes: the weight of feudal rights and tithes, overpopulation.
These same causes are at the root of the agrarian revolts (Godechot, 1953: 294). More recently Scott (1998) points out that many of the ordinary French soldiers were not in fact peasants, as McDonald thought, but were artisans and townsmen, making a clear connection between army service and the peasantry more complicated than McDonald had thought.

So far there has been no multivariate test of McDonald’s hypothesis or of the role of veterans in the French Revolution. In fact the sole multivariate econometric study of the Revolution of any kind of which we are aware was done only very recently by Maria Waldinger (2016). Many historians, from Lefebvre (1947) to Doyle (1998), have argued that the terrible drought of 1788 created severe stress in the French countryside, including a massive increase in the price of wheat and bread, and severe knock-on recessions in industries such as weaving that relied on expenditures that were now diverted to food purchases. Waldinger finds that areas that have higher average temperatures tended to have more revolts. One drawback of her approach is she does not look at shocks, simply at places that have different temperatures. Naturally, places with higher temperatures often differ along many other dimensions as well.

Our Observable Implications/Hypotheses

If military experience provides the organization and skills to make the pursuit of change more likely, we ought to see a relationship both between the number of returned veterans in a region and the levels of political protest, controlling for other likely causes such as economic shocks or the overall level of wealth and inequality in a region.

Data Approach

In this paper we test our hypotheses about the role of veterans in the French Revolution with two types of data: 1) Veteran data on the different geographic units in France to see whether higher percentages of US combat veterans have higher levels of the expected political mobilization after the war; 2) Individual level data on all those who served in the French National Assembly from 1789—which allows us to determine whether veterans in general, and American combat veterans in particular, had different political behavior from others who were similar to them in terms of class and regional origin. We are fortunate that good data exist on veterans who served in the Americas from 1779-83 as well as the characteristics of the French Army at this time:

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9 Translation mine.
10 Lefebvre points out that in the wine-producing areas, the crisis was made more severe by abundant grape harvests in the previous years, which had reduced the price of wine just as the price of grain was sharply increasing (Lefebvre, 1947: 104).
11 We are currently coding data on the 1000+ members of the National Assembly and their voting records in the early 1790s. Future iterations of this paper will have data analyzing how military and combat experience affected subsequent political action in the National Assembly.
• Lists of all French soldiers who fought—and their hometowns—prepared from original army and navy records by the French government in 1903, reprinted in the US in 1905 (France, Ministère des affaires étrangé (1905).

• More detailed biographical information on the officers who fought, from Bodinier (1982)

• Lists of all French casualties in the war (Dawson, 1936)

• Records of some soldiers and sailors not included in the above two sources, collected by a group of historians who aggregate records of Lafayette’s and the French government’s role in the War of Independence: http://www.francegenweb.org/lafayette/

Using these data we can create a variable `numvets` that measures the number of American war veterans recruited from each bailliage.

We also use data on recruitment patterns in the French Army as a whole by region in the pre-revolutionary period, drawn by Scott from sample data in the military archives (Scott: 1968, 1978). These data enable us to see whether there is a difference between the behavior of veterans who fought in the Americas and those who did not, and assess whether unusual recruitment patterns might be driving any relationship we find between military experience and outcomes.

• `numscottsoldiers1789indept`: The number of French soldiers recruited from a particular department in 1789 (Scott, 1968).¹²

Matching Data to Units

One challenge in creating datasets for this period is that different kinds of data are available for different units and boundaries, which do not overlap with each other. In particular the Ancien Regime bailliage administrative units were all reformed as a result of the revolution, making it difficult to match the post-revolutionary outcome data to the pre-revolutionary boundaries.

We geocode the 1789 bailliage data from maps in Brette (1904). Because the first French census was only carried out after the revolution there are no socio-economic data of any kind currently available for these bailliage units prior to the revolution. To solve this problem we geocode all the available pre-1789 and post-1789 town and regional data from France and then merge it with these bailliage level data.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Indicators

No systematic French census was carried out prior to the Revolution so we are therefore forced to look for good alternative measures for socio-economic variables. There are, fortunately, relatively good estimates for the total populations of different towns and districts (Dupâquier, 1988; Scott, 1968):

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- Urban Population popurban_1789

Data on other theoretically relevant socio-economic variables such as the relative wealth and poverty of different districts are not, however, available. In their absence we turn to what we regard as the best available proxy, systematic regional data on the height of recruits to the French armed forces in the 18th century, originally collected by the Comte de Buffon in the 19th century. Of course given that the French army regiments had minimum height requirements these data do not provide a fully representative picture of all heights within a region, but Komlos et al demonstrate (2003) that these data can be used as a reasonable proxy for the socio-economic welfare of all the regions that produced recruits. Because the Komlos data are too broadly aggregated for our purposes we use the original Buffon data, geocoded to match with our existing bailliage units.

- Soldier Height data: The original Buffon data we use here are available at the following website [http://www.buffon.cnrs.fr/index.php?lang=en#hns](http://www.buffon.cnrs.fr/index.php?lang=en#hns).

**Data on Ideological opposition to French Regime**

- Number of School professors in each secular school 1789 (numschoolprofs Seculiers) from *Localités Pourvues d’un Etablissement d’Enseignement Secondaire en 1789 et 1812*

**Economic Shock**

The shortages and huge price increases in the price of grain that afflicted France after the disastrous storms of July 1788, and the subsequent cold winter, have long been identified as an important cause of the Revolution (Labrousse 1951; Doyle 2002). The price of bread rose sharply from 1788-1789 to constitute two thirds or more of workers’ and peasants’ wages, the highest level in more than two decades (Doyle 86-87, 109). Not surprisingly this extreme high cost of food led to a collapse in demand for other products, and a wider industrial collapse in industries like weaving (Doyle, 86-87). This in turn led to riots, at first in towns whose grain had been diverted to supply the capital and then gradually, between May and June, moving closer to Paris itself.

In an important 1991 paper in *Annales*, David Weir and Jean-Francois Sené collected salary and wheat price data from different regions before the revolution to test the thesis of Labrousse that the sudden and dramatic change in the price of wheat and bread, relative to wages, was an important cause of revolution in 1789 (Weir and Sené). We use the same wheat data here, matched by us to

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local districts, to test whether this economic shock thesis has any merit.\footnote{Weir, David R. and Jean-Francois Sené, “Les crises économique et les origins de la Revolution Française,” \textit{Annales: Histoires, Sciences, Sociales} 46, 4, (Jul-Aug 1991), pp.917-947. Weir and Sené argued that the weather crisis did have a major impact, but they argued against Labrousse’s earlier view that it had this impact in part by causing a major industrial depression.} We operationalize this as the change in grain and bread prices in 1788-89.

- \( W_{p\_88-89\_mean} \) is the average wheat price in 1788-89. These are estimated using a kriging method over the Weir wheat dataset, which is in turn based on Labrousse’s data.

\textbf{Region}

- Regional fixed effects.

\textbf{Outcome Variables measuring Political Protest and Revolt}

We collect a number of measures that track different kinds of revolutionary activity in 1789: 1) peasant radicalism and revolts; 2) demands for political and economic reforms in the \textit{Cahiers de Doléances}; 3) the presence in a town or region of the Political Clubs which were founded to protect the gains of the Revolution and demand further political change.

\textit{Peasant Radicalism in 1789 (varname: Revolt)}

As already discussed, the historian Forrest McDonald (1951) created a dataset, based on the work of four historians of the French Revolution (Hyslop, 1934; Aulard, 1909; Lefebvre, 1947; Herbert, 1921), which tracked all agrarian revolts that occurred in 1789. The original dataset is lost but we went back to these works, coded the events in each of them, then combine them to create a measure, \textit{Revolt}, which tracks the reported events in each location in 1789. We then match these to each \textit{bailliage}.

\textit{Political Opinion as measured in the Cahiers de Doléances of 1789 (t\_cons)}

The \textit{Cahiers de Doléances of 1789} were prepared by members of each of the estates (Nobles, Clergy, and Third Estate) in each region of France during 1789 to be presented to the Estates General. They represent one of the primary sources for measuring political opinion in France just prior to the revolution and have been extensively coded and analyzed by historians ever since Beatrice Hyslop’s pioneering effort in Hyslop (1934). Although the cahiers are by no means an unbiased view of French ‘public opinion’ of the time, especially for noble and clergy petitions which were more likely to be ‘captured’ by local cliques, they still represent one of the best sources of views about reform of the monarchy. This is especially true for petitions from the Third Estate. Tackett, who has extensively studied their representativeness, argues that they “represent primarily the grievances of a
relatively homogeneous group of urban, non-privileged notables. It is these cahiers, in my opinion, which present the best possibilities for a regional analysis of opinion in France in 1789.\textsuperscript{15}

We use the massive \textit{French Revolution Analysis System} dataset created by Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff and described in their 1988 book \textit{Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doléances of 1789}. This categorizes all the thousands of Cahiers of 1789 by type of demand, for instance whether made by nobles, the clergy or Third Estate and then by whether the demands were to reform the economic system, tithes, government and noble privileges, courts, monarchy, etc. The raw data from this effort were kindly provided to us by Professor John Markoff, and have been recoded and matched by us to the bailliage level.

We code these variables, according to the local estate assembly that made the demands (third estate, noble, clergy, as well as the nature of the demands, whether constitutional (cons), military (milit), etc. For example:

- T\_cons\_esta: Third estate demands from place X to establish a constitution.
- T\_milit: Third estate demands from place X for military reforms.
- N\_milit: Noble estate demands from place X for military reforms.
- T\_econ\_agric: Third estate demands for the reform of the agricultural economy and taxation systems.

In Figures 2-4, below, we display maps demonstrating the bivariate correlations of these variables together with the relative density of veterans of the American wars. Veterans of the American wars were, like the army as a whole, drawn disproportionately from the north and east of the country (Scott, 1998).

Figure 2: Third Estate Demands for Reform of the Estates General in the \textit{Cahiers}

Figure 3: Third Estate Demands for Reform of the Estates General in the *Cahiers*
Figure 4: Noble Demands for Reform of the Military in the Cahiers
Figure 5: Third Estate Demands for Reform of the Agricultural Economy in the *Cahiers*
Political Clubs (1789-90)

In late 1788 the long-time Ancien Regime ban on political clubs was lifted. Doyle describes how, as a result, these clubs grew in number from just a few dozen in February 1789 to 152 in August, after the fall of the Bastille, and more than 200 clubs by November 1789. These clubs played an important role in the Revolution. They defended the immediate gains of the Revolution against the old order, tried to enlist supporters to the cause by organizing events locally, and they pressed Paris for more radical changes (Doyle, 2002: 90, 142-143). We use data from the Atlas de La Revolution Francaise on the geographic distribution of these clubs by the end of 1789 as an indicator of the intensity of Revolutionary activity in the two and a half years of the Revolution.

- Political club: the presence and number of political clubs in each town by the end of 1792:

Statistical Analysis

Below we provide three initial sample regressions, the first examining the effect of the number of American veterans (numvets) in each bailliage on the number of peasant revolts in 1789, the second examining the effect of the number of vets on grievances as reported in the cahiers, and the third looking at the effect of the number of veterans on the number of the political clubs which formed the most important mobilizational arena in each town in the Revolution. We also include controls for the population of each department (popestpdc1791), and the urban population of each area (popurban), as well as its area (bailliage_area) and agricultural potential (wheatsuit_mean is the mean agricultural suitability for wheat). We include measures of the number of school professors (numschoolprofs) and secular professors in each bailliage to provide at least some measure of the ideological predisposition of a region towards reform and revolution. Given the count nature of our data we use a negative binomial model. Each regression is clustered at the region/province level and includes regional/provincial fixed effects.

Across all these models and different outcome variables, the number of American veterans in a region is associated with higher levels of political protest, whether peasant revolts, the presence of political clubs, or cahiers demanding political reforms. The number of ‘secular’ teachers in a town before the revolution is also positively associated with higher levels of protest and revolt in all models, at between the 90% significance level. Perhaps most interestingly, in all three regressions the total number of all French soldiers recruited from a region is significant and inversely correlated to the outcome measures of revolts and the number of political clubs, demonstrating that the overall number of veterans in a region and military service in general is not associated with revolutionary activity.16

Interestingly in these initial models, with a richer set of political and social variables than in Waldinger, we find that the wheat price shock of 1788-89 does not seem to be associated with peasant revolts, or third estate constitutional demands, or the number of political clubs.

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16 The regression takes the form: nbreg revolt numvets popestpdc1791 numscottsoldiers1789indept popurban_1789 numschoolprofs c_seculiers wheatsuit_mean barea wp8889_mean wp8187_mean wp2650_mean i.region1789, cluster(region1789)
### Regression 1: Dependent Variable Peasant Revolts 1789

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: # Revolutionary Incidents in Baillage</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimation</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>OLS</td>
<td>OLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province FE</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of American War Veterans Born in Baillage</td>
<td>1.026*** (0.006)</td>
<td>1.023*** (0.007)</td>
<td>1.019** (0.009)</td>
<td>0.014* (0.007)</td>
<td>0.015* (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population in Department</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Soldiers in Department 1789 (Scott)</td>
<td>0.961*** (0.007)</td>
<td>0.969*** (0.009)</td>
<td>0.959** (0.017)</td>
<td>-0.007*** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.009*** (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population in Baillage</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># High School Professors</td>
<td>1.106*** (0.028)</td>
<td>1.011 (0.055)</td>
<td>0.962 (0.069)</td>
<td>-0.007 (0.020)</td>
<td>-0.014 (0.021)</td>
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<tr>
<td># Secular High Schools</td>
<td>1.517 (0.420)</td>
<td>1.604* (0.393)</td>
<td>0.185** (0.070)</td>
<td>0.190** (0.078)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wheat suitability</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baillage area</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wheat Price 1788-89</td>
<td>0.897 (0.072)</td>
<td>0.971 (0.114)</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Wheat Price 1781-87</td>
<td>1.345 (0.261)</td>
<td>1.096 (0.331)</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.043</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Wheat Price 1726-50</td>
<td>0.725 (0.184)</td>
<td>0.941 (0.382)</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>0.071</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>367</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.261</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Robust SE in parentheses, clustered at 1789 province level

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
### Regression 2: Dependent Variable: Third Estate Constitutional Demands 1789

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome: # 3rd Estate Cahiers Calling for Reform of Est-Gen.</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimation</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>neg. binomial (IR)</td>
<td>OLS</td>
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<td>1.009***</td>
<td>1.007*</td>
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Robust SE in parentheses, clustered at 1789 province level

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
### Regression 3: Dependent Variable Number of Political Clubs 1789-92

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<td>0.680</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Robust seform in parentheses  
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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**Qualitative data on the role of veterans in the revolution**

Both officers and men who served in the Americas had ample opportunity to discuss their ideas and experiences, and organize and mobilize for political action after their return to France in 1783. Ordinary soldiers enlisted for eight years and many retired after their initial period of service. Even among those who stayed in the army, there were many opportunities for them to discuss their experiences with those in their families, workplaces and home communities. Officers, most of whom were nobles, were granted seven and a half months “semester” leave every two years to return to their home regions. Enlisted men were granted six and a half months of leave every five years.
Even when not on leave, serving troops were frequently billeted in nearby communities due to the shortage of barrack space, and were also often forced to take second jobs in various trades and industries, due to the low rates of military pay (Scott, 1978: 43-44). Most soldiers were not in fact peasants (pace McDonald) but artisans and shopkeepers, especially from the clothing, textile, building and metal trades (Scott, 1978: 17-18). Only 20-25% of soldiers were peasants according to Scott’s samples (1978: 17-18). Half of all the artisans came from major urban areas, with the remainder coming from smaller towns in rural areas. It was these groups of rural and urban artisans, historians agree, that formed the vanguard of protest throughout most of the country in the summer and fall of 1789.

There is evidence that both officers and men with experience in the Americas did not act to protect the monarchy in the spring and summer of 1789, and then did take decisive action to protect the revolution in the year following the Revolution, at a time when many serving and former soldiers were openly opposed to its gains.

In the noble assemblies to write the cahiers, for instance, 499/561 noble deputies and suppliants in 1789 (89%) had served in the military, and in some cases military networks allowed officer nobles to mobilize against senior courtiers who tried to rein them in. “In the noble assembly at Melun, noted its secretary, the comte de Vaublan, the officers of the regular army formed a ‘coalition’ and successfully defeated the electoral bid of the due du Châtelet, commander of the Gardes du Corps (Blaufard, 2002: 51).” Not all of these officers were American veterans, but American veterans were over-represented by 3-4 times their representation in the officer corps in general.

American-returned soldiers were not just sympathetic to the Revolution, but also that they were more likely to remain cohesive and effective in supporting the revolution compared to other groups in the military. Scott reports that:

Unlike most of the forces, however, the “American” units maintained perfect order not only during the immediate crisis but also in the following weeks and months. The key to explaining this unusual conduct seems to have been the ties developed between officers and men during their participation in the American war. Although this cohesion eroded more quickly in the Deux Ponts Infantry, Rochambeau’s old regiments generally remained among the best disciplined in the French Army until 1792.” (Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy, 1998)

The Bourbonnais Regiment, another Americas-returned unit, was the only one of the eight garrisoned at Metz in the early months of 1790 which supported the Revolution and the National Guards and “has worn to live and die with it.”17 Lauzun’s Hussars, another American-returned regiment, played a key role in preventing the French King from successfully fleeing the country in mid-1791, a key event in the revolution. The Hussars had been ordered to assist the King’s escape, but the regiment refused and instead supported the National Guards to stop the King at Varennes.18

Throughout the early years of the revolution both officers and men who had served in the Americas, though only 3-4% of the French Army at the time of their service, played a disproportionate role in defending the revolution. Scott, who has studied their role extensively acknowledges that “In the Estates General and the National Assembly that succeeded it, a number of aristocrats who had

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17 Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette, May 7, 1790 [citing report from Paris, April 1]
18 Diary or Woodfall’s Register, Friday July 8, 1791.
served under Rochambeau became leaders of the liberal cause; they endorsed a reform program that ranged from the Declaration of the Rights and Man and Citizen to the creation of a National Guard.” (Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy*, 1998)

### Possible Robustness Concerns

**Selection Effects**

One obvious concern about the data and analysis here is whether the troops that were sent to the Americas were representative of the French army at the time, or instead were selected (or self-selected) for Rochambeau’s force on the basis of some attribute or combination of attributes that might also be related to our dependent variable of interest? Fortunately, there is good evidence to show that this was not the case, and that the units and soldiers sent to America were typical of the army at the time and not specially chosen.\(^{19}\)

First, we have good qualitative evidence to show that soldiers did not select themselves for service in the war. The force refused volunteers as it was being assembled, and the soldiers did not even know their destination until they had been seven weeks at sea after leaving France (Merlant, 1920: 114-16). Scott tells us that, when the soldiers in the fleet were eventually told they were going to the 13 colonies, they cheered loudly because they had feared they were being sent to the West Indies, notorious for its high mortality rates for soldiers.\(^{20}\)

Second, a comparison by Samuel Scott of the 6,500 soldiers in Rochambeau’s force with a systematic sample of general army lists from the 1780s shows that the French expeditionary force was “a fairly typical cross-section of the French regular army towards the end of the Old Regime” and broadly representative of the French army as a whole in terms of such important variables as region, urban vs. rural, literacy, noble vs. non-noble officers, etc. (Scott, 1998: 6-8).\(^{21}\)

Third, the regiments themselves seem not to have been selected for their specific characteristics. Our own analysis suggests that the particular regiments sent to fight with Rochambeau’s force were not unusual in terms of their prestige or status with the French army, which we would have expected—given the status imbalances within the army—that the units were not especially chosen for their prestige or status. The French army at this time had a well-established order of precedence (laid out in 1758 and again in 1780) in terms of prestige. As the Table below shows, when we compare the units that were sent to the Americas with the prestige of units in the army as a whole, we find that they are statistically indistinguishable in terms of their prestige from units in the rest of the army. They are also

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\(^{19}\) There is one minor exception. When news of US revolutionary victories reached France in 1782, and became “the rage at Versailles,” a handful of French officers, enthused by the revolution, sailed to the colonies to try to join Rochambeau’s forces. Scott says that “It is highly questionable whether these enthusiastic but largely inexperienced officers added much of military value to Rochambeau’s little army.” Scott (1998) p.97.


\(^{21}\) Scott (1998), pp.6-8.
indistinguishable in terms of their heights (when cross-checked against the Buffon height data) and ages.

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<th>American Revolutionary War Regiments</th>
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**Future Directions**

*Additional measures of Ideology*

One of the most important arguments to be tested is about the ideological motivations for the revolution. We are currently collecting data that will allow us to carry out some tests of this thesis. First, there is a huge database of pre-revolutionary wholesale book orders to different parts of France that has survived from one of the most important wholesalers of the time, the Sociétés Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN) in Neuchâtel. This STN dataset has been extensively mined by historians, and scholars at Leeds University and the University of Western Australia have recently created the STN Online Database Archive v1.1 to allow scholars to search the archive.22

The STN records may not be an ideal source for differences in the overall regional or local demand for books, because it was just one of the major wholesalers of the time, and different wholesalers dominated the trade in different regions of country, even though STN had at least some presence throughout almost all of France. But the STN records are likely to be much more reliable when we

look at the mix of books in the orders. Robert Darnton points out that the prohibitively high transportation costs of the time meant that booksellers ordered a variety of books from one wholesaler to save on transportation costs rather than a small number of books from many retailers. And STN had such an extensive list that it could fulfill almost all the orders it received, so its records are a good guide to the demand mix from different areas (Darnton, 1995: 5).

Darnton also shows that the STN archives are a particularly reliable source for demand for the top selling illegal books, those confiscated most often by the French authorities before the revolution. The illegal book trade was not a marginal enterprise but was a vast industry accounting for perhaps half of all book sales, with dozens of important book wholesalers and tens of thousands of customers. The books contained, as Darnton points out “almost everything that Mornet was later to identify with the intellectual origins of the French Revolution.”

With the STN data, which we are currently entering, it should be possible to compare the wholesale lists of books ordered from different regions with Darnton’s lists of subversive or banned books of the time, to get some idea of the demand for subversive texts in different areas, which we can use as a proxy for regional levels of ideological opposition to the established old order in France.

**Conclusion**

This paper has taken advantage of an as random process—the deployment of less than 5% of the French army for service in the Americas from 1779-83—in order to find out whether this combat experience in a revolutionary environment seems to have affected subsequent political behavior and mobilization back in France. Others have argued that there was an effect (Stephens 1886; McDonald 1951) but these hypotheses have never been given any sort of systematic test, as we have attempted to do here.

We conclude that veterans with combat experience in the Americas do seem to have been more politically mobilized and engaged in support of the Revolution than those who did not serve overseas: whose presence according to our statistical data made them actually less likely to protest in 1789. More generally we hope that this case, like the India case we have explored in Jha and Wilkinson (2012) helps to increase our understanding of the potential of war to lead to enormous changes in the capacity of disenfranchised political groups to press for change. Motivations matter, but so do the skills and capacities of these groups, and wars are a major way in which these skills and capacities can change.

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**Bibliography**


Herbert, Sydney (1921). *The Fall of Feudalism in France* (London: Methuen)


25


