# Religious Orders in the State-Making Process*

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**Abstract**

Confiscating religious orders (networks of monasteries) was a hallmark of historical state-making, yet its peculiar dynamics have not yet been analyzed. We argue that because monasteries were geographically dispersed and maintained translocal ties, their suppression provoked resistance where other monasteries continued to exist, not where suppression occurred. Since suppression could trigger system-wide backlash, rulers faced incentives to move swiftly and comprehensively rather than gradually, and this produced patterns of punctuated suppression. We study England's 1536 Dissolution of the Monasteries and show that rebellion was more likely near monasteries spared from initial suppression—a pattern confirmed using a regression discontinuity design. Analyzing monastery closures across 18 European regions from 1000 to 1850, we demonstrate that religious suppression usually unfolded as rapid, wholesale episodes rather than incremental processes.

Keywords: religious orders; state-making; Protestant Reformation
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# 1 Introduction

In medieval and early modern Europe, the Catholic Church played important roles in the operation of state institutions, legitimizing rule, staffing state administrations, and pioneering legal innovations (Grzymala-Busse, 2020, 2023; Møller and Doucette, 2022; Rubin, 2017). Its religious orders formed networks of geographically dispersed and interconnected monasteries that, at their medieval peak, ranked among the continent's largest landowners and exercised local lord-like authority, employing tenants, collecting taxes, and providing charity (Heale, 2009). Monks owed obedience to their abbots and the papacy rather than to secular rulers. The suppression of religious orders was a recurring feature of state-making—the process through which states neutralized or eliminated internal rivals (Tilly, 1985). Across Europe, rulers targeted religious orders through large-scale confiscations and dissolutions, often eliminating entire orders within a single decade (Landi, 2022).

Monastic confiscations brought large windfalls that rulers could distribute to their allies while neutralizing an organization with an independent source of legitimacy (Grzymala-Busse, 2024*a*). For all their importance, the dissolution of religious orders has not been studied in political science. Recent works on the Catholic Church have focused on the medieval period (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Bueno de Mesquita, 2023; Grzymala-Busse, 2023; Møller and Doucette, 2022), when confiscations were rare. Others have studied monasteries' role in European political development (e.g., Doucette, 2021, 2025; Doucette and Møller, 2021; Møller, 2024), and the effects of suppressing them (Cantoni, Dittmar and Yuchtman, 2018; Figueroa, 2023; Heldring, Robinson and Vollmer, 2021) but the dynamics of state encroachment on religious orders have not been explored.

We argue that the interaction between state-making rulers and religious orders followed a distinctive pattern that was a consequence of the orders' organizational struc-

ture. Because religious orders were geographically dispersed and linked by translocal connections, resistance to encroachment emerged not in targeted monasteries but in those spared from confiscation—what we term *displaced resistance*. Since partial confiscation elicited resistance in spared monasteries, such episodes either did not happen or were short-lived, and state encroachment typically proceeded through extended periods of stasis interrupted by concentrated bursts of large-scale confiscation—what we term *punctuated suppression*.

We document these patterns with original historical data. To test for displaced resistance, we study England's sixteenth-century dissolution of the monasteries. This event occurred as Henry VIII asserted royal supremacy over ecclesiastical matters, appropriating powers previously held by the pope in the beginning of the English Reformation. The dissolution was a rare early case of monastic suppression that initially targeted the "smaller" monasteries in 1536, only to quickly escalate to full suppression after a rebellion mobilized 30,000 participants in the northern counties (MacCulloch and Fletcher, 1997). This short-lived partial suppression allows us to study its effect on an intense type of resistance: armed rebellion. We document a positive association between monastery presence and local rebellion likelihood, which is driven almost entirely by monasteries *spared* by the dissolution policy. We also show that spared monasteries were more likely to participate directly in the rebellion. To probe causality, we conduct a regression discontinuity design exploiting the £200 threshold that determined eligibility for suppression.

Beyond England, we analyze systematic data on monastery closures in 18 European regions between 1000 and 1850. The descriptive temporal patterns we document are consistent with our argument. We show that for 17 out of 18 regions, a model of punctuated change with an abrupt fall fits the data better than a model of linear decline. This confirms that rulers typically pursued monastic confiscations in concentrated bursts, consistent with anticipating, or reacting to, the displaced resistance that partial suppressions can

incite across the monastic network. The cases of punctuated change we detect correspond to state-led episodes such as the Protestant confiscations in the sixteenth century (Cantoni, Dittmar and Yuchtman, 2018), the eighteenth-century dissolution of the Jesuits (Garfias and Sellars, 2025), and post-revolutionary expropriations in France (Finley, Franck and Johnson, 2021) and the territories it occupied across Europe. Historical analyses of some of these episodes reveal that rulers engaging in confiscations considered speed to be essential.

Our main contribution is to theorize how the organizational characteristics of religious orders shaped the dynamics of state-making, extending a literature that often treats non-state actors as a homogeneous category. Existing research has shown that state encroachment on local powerholders leads to localized rebellion —when powerholders are not compensated (Chen, Wang and Zhang, 2025)— either because new state infrastructure disrupts local customary arrangements (Gay and Albertus, 2026), or because it eliminates powerholders who served as intermediaries managing popular dissent (Garfias and Sellars, 2022, 2025). We add that state encroachment on religious orders, which were territorially dispersed and translocally connected, could produce resistance in regions untouched by state intervention.

This difference matters because rulers responded to it and adjusted the timing and scope of confiscations accordingly, opting for wholesale suppression. Qualitative research has debated whether state-building is inherently gradual and which mechanisms account for variation in its pace (Becker and Goldstone, 2005; Ertman, 2005; Rueschemeyer, 2005). Rueschemeyer (2005, p. 156), for example, asks "what are the conditions of slow incremental change and of accelerated, if partial, breakthroughs in state formation?" We contribute by showing that, in the context of suppressing internal rivals, the organizational characteristics of targeted actors—and the resulting geography of resistance—help explain both extended periods of stasis and episodes of sharp, sudden change.

# 2 Religious Orders in the State-Making Process

State-making was the process through which rulers eliminated or co-opted internal rivals and organizations with autonomous sources of legitimacy (Tilly, 1985). Religious orders were one such adversary, even if their relationship with secular rulers was often one of cooperation. Monasteries were more than places for religious worship. They were among Europe's major landowners, enriched by the gradual accumulation of donations and testamentary bequests. Monasteries employed tenants, collected taxes, and supplied education, charity, medical care, and intercessory prayers for their communities (Heale, 2009). But what made them a disruptive actor for rulers was their relative autonomy. While parish priests were subordinated to bishops, themselves increasingly appointed by monarchs and under state control, monks owed obedience only to their abbots and to the pope—especially in orders such as the Cistercian and the Knights Templar (Bueno de Mesquita and Bueno de Mesquita, 2023).

The monasteries' wealth, autonomy, and influence on their communities made them a threat to rulers who sought to consolidate authority. As states became stronger, monasteries increasingly became targets of state encroachment, ranging from demands of oaths of loyalty to harassment, confiscation, and outright dissolution. Landi (2022) lists 56 episodes of large-scale state confiscation of religious orders. In 1305-12, Philip IV of France confiscated the Knights Templar, his bankers (Benzecry and Shera, 2023). In the sixteenth century, Protestant rulers suppressed religious orders and confiscated their lands (Cantoni, Dittmar and Yuchtman, 2018). In the eighteenth century, Catholic rulers suppressed the Jesuit order and seized their assets (Guasti, 2019). All French religious orders were dissolved after the Revolution in 1789, and their land was seized and redistributed (Finley, Franck and Johnson, 2021). Napoleonic victories expanded this policy to large areas of Europe. Even in Catholic states like Spain and Italy, religious orders were suppressed

in the nineteenth century (Landi, 2022).

## 2.1 Religious Orders as Dispersed and Interconnected Organizations

Religious orders were geographically dispersed and translocally connected organizations. In essence, they functioned as confederations of monasteries, and thousands of such monasteries dotted the medieval European landscape (Grzymala-Busse, 2023, p. 35). Some orders, like the Cluniac, expanded from an original mother-abbey, flexibly filling voids in the feudal landscape (Doucette and Møller, 2021). Religious orders were thus territorially scattered and projected influence over the environs of each particular monastery.

The monastic networks were dense, with personal links between monks within particular monasteries, organizational and spiritual links across monasteries of the same religious order, and identity links across monasteries of different orders. At the most immediate level, monks were members of face-to-face religious communities, bound by shared daily rituals and traditions. Beyond their local communities, monks belonged to broader religious orders such as the Augustinian or Benedictine. Each order emphasized particular Biblical principles and followed a distinct rule of life, such as the Rule of St. Benedict. Orders functioned as collectivities unified by shared spiritual values, liturgical practices, and disciplinary norms. Some, like the Benedictine, were relatively decentralized, granting considerable autonomy to individual abbeys. Others, such as the Cistercian, were more centralized (Francis, 1950). At the broadest level, all monks were part of a transregional religious community defined by strict adherence to Catholic doctrine and common vows.

## 2.2 The Interaction between Religious Orders and the State

We argue that the organizational characteristics of religious orders shape the dynamics of the state-making process, beginning with the geography of resistance to state encroachment. Given that religious orders are both geographically dispersed and linked by strong organizational ties, state encroachment over specific monasteries is likely to produce resistance in spared monasteries in the network. It does so through several mechanisms. First, members of the religious order in targeted monasteries have incentives to relocate to unaffected monasteries within their network, either momentarily or permanently, rather than resist locally where repressive forces are present. These transfers serve as direct channels for transmitting grievances and firsthand accounts of grievances from targeted to spared locations. Second, as translocal ties include emotional links, such as a shared identity, unaffected monasteries experience moral outrage and act out of reciprocal obligation to their counterparts in targeted monasteries. Finally, resistance is more effective in monasteries spared from confiscation because there they retain the material resources, personnel, and institutional capacity necessary to mobilize opposition, while targeted monasteries may be stripped of such capacity by confiscation itself. While the spared monasteries are not directly aggrieved, their links to targeted monasteries give them a motive to mobilize. We therefore state our main hypothesis as follows:

$H_1$ (Displaced Resistance Hypothesis): the confiscation of monasteries generates resistance in spared monasteries.

A secondary hypothesis follows as a corollary. A ruler weighing how many monasteries to confiscate faces an unusual calculus. Both the assets a ruler captures and the costs of doing so increase in the share of monasteries taken. But confiscations also generate grievances, and displaced resistance ($H_1$) implies that the monasteries that act on those grievances are those that are spared. Partial confiscation can therefore be a dominated

strategy: rulers capture only part of the assets, while facing the resistance of the spared houses. The choice becomes leaving the network intact or confiscating it entirely.

Since only comprehensive confiscation is worth undertaking, and since comprehensive confiscation demands permissive conditions that might not be met, a ruler who anticipates displaced resistance refrains until he can move against the whole religious order. He waits not because he lacks the motive but because the opportunity has not yet arrived, and he acts when some shock or development—for example, a religious rupture or a foreign conquest—makes wholesale suppression feasible.[1] In practice, rulers might underestimate the strength of translocal ties, fail to anticipate displaced resistance, and initially confiscate partially. In such cases, the backlash either halts the campaign or forces escalation into full suppression.[2] Either way, the aggregate result is that episodes of monastic confiscation are comprehensive and rapid when they happen.

$H_2$ (Punctuated Suppression Hypothesis): when a ruler moves against a religious order, confiscations are comprehensive and rapid rather than incremental, producing long periods of stability interrupted by discrete episodes of large-scale suppression.

The contrast with other targets of state encroachment follows. A ruler confronting powerholders who are locally rooted but not translocally tied faces no displaced resistance, so taking some of them does not leave the rest aggrieved and armed. Partial encroachment is not dominated, and the ruler takes what his capacity allows, gradually taking more and more as that capacity grows.

Focusing on the related phenomenon of building state capacity, Rueschemeyer (2005) argues that state-building is slow and incremental because it meets opposition that pro-

[1] Our argument takes the arrival of opportunities for comprehensive confiscation as exogenous —the circumstances that open them lie outside our theory— and speaks instead to how the process unfolds when confiscations occur.

[2] Partial suppressions are therefore rare and short-lived (and it is within one such window that we test $H_1$ below).

duces periods of stagnation and reversal. We argue that, beyond their strength, the organizational characteristics of the actors who oppose state-making shape the tempo of the process. Moreover, slowness and incrementalism need not go together. State encroachment on religious orders took centuries to complete, but it did not advance in small steps, unfolding instead through long stretches of stasis followed by rapid and comprehensive change once rulers moved.

To provide evidence for our argument, we proceed in two steps. We first document displaced resistance to monastic confiscation using data on the English Reformation. We then use aggregate data on the number of monasteries over time to show that monastic closures happened in concentrated bursts across regions—much more than the closure of castles—and use qualitative data to link the largest waves of monastery closure to episodes of state confiscation.

# 3 Displaced Resistance

England under Henry VIII provides analytical leverage to test whether monastic resistance to confiscation or suppression was geographically displaced to spared locations because a first wave of confiscations in 1536 targeted about half of all the monasteries. Reflecting in part the haphazard nature of the English Reformation (Haigh, 2012), this initial partial suppression was followed, a year later and after the outbreak of a large-scale rebellion against royal policy, by the crown's escalation to suppress monasticism entirely. In this section, we examine data on a large rebellion that took place between the first (1536-7, partial) and second (1538-40, comprehensive) waves of monastic suppression, allowing us to test for displaced resistance to confiscations.

## 3.1 Historical Context: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries

### 3.1.1 Religion in Pre-Reformation England

The Catholic Church in early modern England was powerful and deeply embedded in society. Its basic unit of organization was the parish. By 1535, the Church's administrative system comprised approximately 8,800 parishes and was staffed by 38,000 individuals (Lepine, 2003). This infrastructure gave the Church an extraordinary degree of reach and proximity—most communities were within a mile or so of a church (Haigh, 2012). The clergy held significant moral authority and pre-Reformation religion was vibrant (Duffy, 1992). The Catholic Church was also extremely wealthy. It collected tithes and voluntary donations. Individually, monasteries were major landowners, each holding property in its own right rather than as part of a collective order (e.g., Mingay, 1990). The net annual income of monasteries was higher than the total royal income (Grummitt and Lassalmonie, 2015).

### 3.1.2 The English Reformation

The English Reformation marked a decisive break from papal authority and the assertion of secular control over the Church (see, e.g., Haigh, 1987). Elton (1977) characterizes it as a rapid transformation initiated from above by chief minister Thomas Cromwell, with the support of parliament, during the 1530s. Historians generally emphasize that the Reformation was driven less by theology than by political considerations (Haigh, 2012), its immediate spark being Henry VIII's request for a marriage annulment that the pope refused.

The first stages of the English Reformation featured a package of reforms enacted through Parliament (see, e.g., Greif and Rubin, 2024). These reforms redirected taxes from the pope to the crown, ended financial payments to Rome, and established the king as the

head of the Church of England. Together, these laws empowered the English crown to tax, adjudicate, and administer ecclesiastical affairs.

### 3.1.3 Royal Visitations and the Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries

To assert royal authority and determine monasteries' tax liability, Henry VIII first ordered a kingdom-wide survey of ecclesiastical property and income, known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, which was completed in 1535 (see, e.g., Savine, 1974). Royal inquisitors were dispatched with instructions to catalog every income-generating asset held by religious houses. They were then to calculate the net annual income by deducting from gross revenues all pensions, rents, and other legal obligations (Knowles, 1979, p. 242). The result was the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*—a comprehensive survey of monastic wealth. A second round of visitations, which took place between July 1535 and February 1536, assessed moral rather than financial standing. The result of these visitations was the *Compendium Compertorum* —a survey cataloging alleged misconduct in monasteries. It reported sexual activity, masturbation, and desire for release from monastic vows (Shaw, 2003).

Once these financial and moral surveys were finished, in 1536 Parliament authorized the suppression (and transfer to the Crown) of all the smaller religious houses in the realm. The "enacting clause adopted as a yardstick for good and evil the sum of £200 net income" (Knowles, 1979, p. 304). It said:

> "his majesty shall have and enjoy to him and to his heirs for ever, all and singular such monasteries, priories, and other religious houses of monks, canons, and nuns, of what kinds or diversities of habits, rules, or orders soever they be called or named, which have not in lands, tenements, rents, tithes, portions, and other hereditaments, above the clear yearly value of two hundred pounds" (Gee and Hardy 1910, p. 259).

The dissolution policy quickly became known, although there was no formal public announcement (Stober, 2007, p. 198). In March 1536, the patron of two religious houses in Devonshire, wrote in a letter to Thomas Cromwell that "there is much communication and bruit that all abbeys, priories, and nunneries under the clear yearly value of £200 shall be suppressed" (cited in Stober, 2007, p. 198). In Lincolnshire, commissioners were "provided, at the outset, with a list of all the religious houses in their district which had been assessed at less than £200 a year" (Woodward, 1966, p. 80).

While awaiting formal closure, commissioners from the Court of Augmentations, a new administrative department especially created to administer confiscated monastic property, conducted official visitations and required monks to surrender the house's common seal, effectively stripping them of the capacity to authenticate documents and manage their property (Woodward, 1966, p. 81). At least in Yorkshire, commissioners also took eligible houses into custody until formal suppression could be carried out (Clark, 2021, p. 329).

Monks of targeted houses were given the option to transfer to another monastery or be released from their vows (Bernard, 2011). A surviving Elizabethan-era copy of a 1536 ledger lists the houses slated for dissolution, the number of monks who wished to continue in monastic life, and the larger houses to which they might be reassigned (Clark, 2021, p. 338-339). Some monasteries secured dispensations from dissolution at considerable financial cost—the sums required "were very high relative to the reported value of the house" (Clark, 2021, p. 334). In other cases, the patrons and benefactors of specific monasteries lobbied royal authorities on their behalf, most often unsuccessfully, noting the presence of tombs of their ancestors in monastic estates (Stober, 2007, p. 196-197).

### 3.1.4 The Pilgrimage of Grace

Less than six months after the first suppressions, the north of England rose in open rebellion. While there is historical debate about the *main* cause of the rebellion, there is broader agreement that the dissolution of the smaller monasteries ignited the uprising (Bush, 2005), and some historians argue it was its principal cause (e.g., Haigh, 1969; Knowles, 1979; Scarisbrick, 1968). The rebels called themselves "pilgrims," mobilized under a banner of the Five Wounds of Christ, and when their leader Robert Aske produced a petition to the king, the first eight items addressed religious concerns—including the restoration of the suppressed monasteries.

The Lincolnshire Rising began on 2 October 1536 in Louth, where townspeople arrested the official who was carrying out the visitation of the clergy. The rebels quickly gained strength, with support from local clergy and eventually the gentry. By 4 October, the movement had spread across Lincolnshire, with at least 10,000 rebels reaching Lincoln by 7 October. The king's rejection of their petition and the threat of royal force led to the movement's dispersion on 11 October (MacCulloch and Fletcher, 1997, p. 28-29).

The Pilgrimage of Grace began almost simultaneously, on 8 October 1536, in Yorkshire, and was far more extensive and organized. It was led by Robert Aske, a lawyer who envisioned the movement as a defense of traditional religion, the commonwealth, and the authority of the king—but not of his policies. The movement spread across the north, restoring many dissolved monasteries and attracting gentry and clerical support. The rebels, numbering perhaps 30,000, negotiated with royal forces under the Duke of Norfolk, reaching a truce on 27 October at Doncaster. Aske met with Henry VIII in London and returned optimistic about reforms and pardons. But the king stalled, and a second uprising in early 1537 gave him a pretext to crack down. Aske and other leaders were arrested and executed in mid-1537 (MacCulloch and Fletcher, 1997, p. 31-38).

The crown's approach towards the monasteries changed after neutralizing the rebel-

lion, escalating the confiscations to all the religious houses. Monasticism was eliminated by 1540.

## 3.2 Data

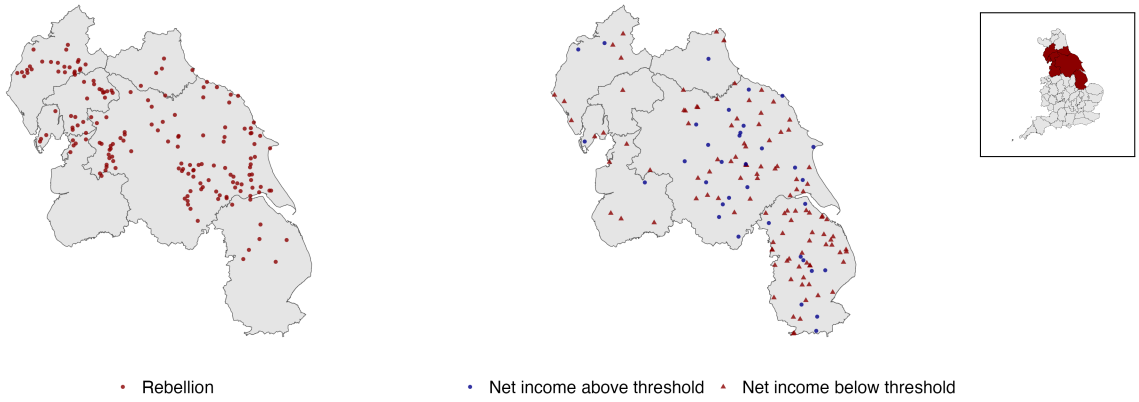
To test the displaced resistance hypothesis, our research design draws on data on monasteries and rebellion in England shortly after the initial round of monastic suppressions in 1536, which targeted monasteries with incomes below £200. We conduct two analyses: one at the parish level and another at the monastery level. In both analyses, our baseline results focus on the six northern historic counties that experienced rebel activity—Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Westmorland, and Yorkshire—yielding a final sample of 1,674 parishes and 144 monasteries, 35 of them large (spared) and 109 small (targeted).

Open disaffection and rebel plots were reported across England (Dodds and Dodds, 1915, p. I), but available evidence allows us to measure rebellion, which took place in the north. Our baseline analysis, therefore, focuses on parishes in the northern counties, where actors more clearly faced a choice between joining a rebellion and abstaining. Including counties without rebellion could conflate non-participation with lack of opportunity. As a robustness check, we also estimate the models on the full sample of English parishes (Table A.2). This expanded sample includes 11,376 parishes (6.8 times the size of our baseline sample) and 635 monasteries (4.4 times the size). This large expansion adds only observations with no variation in the dependent variable—none experienced rebellion. The estimated effects are accordingly attenuated, but remain significant at the 10-percent level.

**Parish-level variables.** To measure rebellion at the parish level, we georeference data from Bush (1996), which maps locations associated with contentious activity during the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536-7. Reading the book, we classify the

type of activity in each location, and keep only those associated with rebel —not royalist— activity (i.e., rebel origin, route, assembly point, muster point, or stronghold). We code an indicator of rebellion in each parish. Figure 1 (left panel) plots its distribution across the northern counties.

Figure 1: Distribution of rebellion and monasteries




The maps display the location of rebellion (left) and monasteries (right) in the northern counties that participated in the rebellion.

We take information on religious houses from the "Discover the Dissolution" project (DtD), managed by The National Archives. Whenever possible, we use data on monastic income from Savine (1974), collected from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. We classify monasteries as large (with a net income over £200) or small (with a net income under £200). Figure 1 (right panel) plots the distribution of monasteries. Using these data, we code indicators of the presence in each parish of at least one monastery, as well as separate indicators for large (spared) and small (targeted) monasteries.

We also code a set of parish-level covariates. To proxy for historical contentious activity in each parish, we digitize information on the number of protests in English towns between 1196 and 1450 from Cohn (2013), and code a variable that equals one if there were any protests registered in each parish during that period. In addition, to account for the presence of elite infrastructure, we measure the number of castles in each parish, us-

ing data from *Gatehouse*, a gazetteer of English castles. We also include the log distance to Louth Park Abbey, the starting point of the Lincolnshire Rising. Finally, as larger monasteries might have been located near cities or wealthier areas, we control for the log distance to the nearest city in 1500, as well as geographic characteristics like latitude, longitude, soil suitability for wheat cultivation, elevation, terrain ruggedness, flow accumulation, and log distance to the nearest coastline and river. See Appendix A.1 for a description of the data and sources.

**Monastery-level variables.** Our second analysis is at the level of the individual monastery. To measure direct monastic participation in the rebellion, we review various secondary sources. We find concrete examples of active participation in the uprising for 30 monasteries (21% of our sample). The religious houses that participated are listed in Table A.1, along with the source and a short description of the type of participation.

We use DtD to code each house's religious order (Benedictine, Augustinian, Cistercian, or other) and whether the house was a monastery, friary, or nunnery. Using Stober (2007, Appendix), we code the patron of each monastery in the late 1530s, which we classify as either royal, ecclesiastical, or other. To assess internal conditions of the monasteries, we use data from the 1535–36 royal visitations compiled by Shaw (2003, pp. 448–451), which report the number of residents and the proportion of monks accused of breaking their vows in 66 houses in our sample. For each monastery, we also measure its latitude, longitude, and log distance to Louth Park Abbey and the nearest city.

## 3.3 Testing for Displaced Resistance

The displaced resistance hypothesis predicts a link between monasteries and rebellion, driven by the larger religious houses that were spared from the dissolution policy. To test this hypothesis, we estimate linear regressions at the parish- and monastery-level.

Table 1 displays the results. We first report the overall association at the parish-level between the presence of a monastery and rebellion, regardless of whether the monastery was targeted for dissolution. Column 1 shows that a parish with a monastery experienced 11.2 percentage points more rebellion than a parish without one. Column 2 shows that the association is robust to the inclusion of the full set of controls and county fixed effects. While our controls do not exhaust all possible confounding factors, they capture key characteristics like previous protest activity, the number of castles, and geographic attributes that may influence both the distribution of monasteries and the likelihood of rebellion.

The models in columns 3 and 4, both at the parish-level, distinguish between spared (large) houses and targeted (small) ones.[3] Column 3 reports a simple linear regression of rebellion incidence on the presence of large and small religious houses, defined using the £200 income threshold. The presence of a large monastery was associated with a 27-percentage-point increase in the probability of rebellion, whereas the presence of a small monastery was associated with only a negligible 2-percentage-point increase. The 25-point difference between these coefficients is statistically significant. Column 4 shows robustness to the inclusion of control variables and county fixed effects.[4]

The parish-level analyses hinge on the assumption that monasteries could somehow affect popular rebellion—e.g., by mobilizing their tenants or spreading incendiary rumors. Our second analysis is at the level of the individual monastery and does not require such an assumption. In columns 5 to 7, the outcome variable is an indicator of direct monastic participation in the Pilgrimage of Grace. Because smaller houses are the reference category in these regressions, we only report the coefficient for large monasteries. In column 5, we only control for the net income of each house. The results show that large monasteries were 48.2 percentage points more likely to directly participate in the rebellion than small

[3]Because eligibility for suppression was based on income, and most mendicant orders were not surveyed in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, most friaries are excluded due to missing income data.

[4]In Table A.4, we incorporate additional control variables from Heldring, Robinson and Vollmer (2021).

Table 1: Monasteries and rebellion

| *Dependent variable:* | Any monastery (backlash) | | Large vs small (displaced resistance) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | | | Direct participation (monastery-level dataset) | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
| Monastery | 0.112*** | 0.072** | | | | | |
| | (0.035) | (0.030) | | | | | |
| Monastery above 200 | | | 0.270*** | 0.224*** | 0.482*** | 0.369** | 0.299** |
| | | | (0.090) | (0.079) | (0.133) | (0.149) | (0.132) |
| Monastery below 200 | | | 0.021 | 0.002 | | | |
| | | | (0.029) | (0.029) | | | |
| Net Income | | | | | 0.000086 | 0.0002 | -0.0010* |
| | | | | | (0.0002) | (0.0002) | (0.0005) |
| Difference (large - small) | | | 0.249*** | 0.221*** | | | |
| | | | (0.081) | (0.075) | | | |
| | | | [0.002] | [0.003] | | | |
| Mean DV | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.208 | 0.210 | 0.322 |
| SD DV | 0.271 | 0.271 | 0.271 | 0.271 | 0.408 | 0.409 | 0.471 |
| Mean monastery | 0.103 | 0.103 | | | | | |
| Mean large monastery | | | 0.021 | 0.021 | 0.243 | 0.245 | 0.373 |
| Mean small monastery | | | 0.064 | 0.064 | 0.757 | 0.755 | 0.627 |
| Controls | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| County F.E. | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 144 | 143 | 59 |
| $R^2$ | 0.016 | 0.121 | 0.021 | 0.128 | 0.300 | 0.498 | 0.765 |

In models 1-4, the unit of observation is the parish, and in models 5-7, the monastery. Models 2, 4, and 6 include the full set of controls and county fixed effects. Model 7 includes additional controls only available for a subsample of the monasteries. Conley standard errors reported in parentheses. Models 1 to 4 use a 20km cutoff, while models 5 to 7 use a 30km cutoff. Our findings are robust to doubling the cutoff and to clustering at the hundred level (Table A.3). The last row in columns 3 and 4 reports Wald tests of coefficient equality between the two estimates of each model (SE in parentheses and p-values in brackets).*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

monasteries.[5]

Table A.5 reports how targeted and spared houses differ beyond income. Of the fifteen characteristics we can measure, eleven show no significant difference across the £200 line. Spared houses had more people, were founded earlier, and were more often under royal

[5]We report standard errors robust to spatial correlation Conley (1999), using the cutoff that the fixest package selects by default Bergé, Butts and McDermott (2026). The default sets the cutoff to the sum of the two median distances. This produces a window in which about half the observations have at least eight neighbors. Table A.3 shows that the results hold when both cutoffs are doubled and when we cluster at the hundred level (an intermediate geographic unit between the county and the parish) instead.

patronage. Some variables are only recorded for part of our sample, which is why we introduce the monastery-level controls in two steps. Column 6 uses the variables observed for every house, together with county fixed effects (see the previous section for the full list of controls).[6] Larger houses continue to display higher rates of direct participation than smaller houses. Column 7 further adds the characteristics available only for a subset of houses: the type of patron, the number of monks, the year of foundation, and the percentage of monks accused of breaking their vows during the visitations of 1535. Every dimension on which the two groups are unbalanced is controlled for in column 7. This reduces our sample to 59, but our estimates remain positive and significant.

**Sensitivity analysis.** We assess how sensitive these estimates are to omitted variable bias following Oster (2019). Comparing columns 3 and 4 of Table 1, the inclusion of controls and county fixed effects increases the $R^2$ sixfold, while the coefficient on large monasteries falls by only 17%. We calculate the degree of selection on unobservables—relative to selection on observables—that would be required to estimate the observed $\hat{\beta}$ if the true $\beta$ is zero, setting the maximum attainable $R^2_{\text{max}}$ to 1.3 times the $R^2$ of the controlled model, as Oster recommends. At the parish level, selection on unobservables would need to be 8.99 times stronger than selection on observables to explain away the estimate; equivalently, if unobservables mattered exactly as much as observables, the coefficient on large monasteries would fall only from 0.224 to 0.207. Figure A.1 in the Appendix shows how this ratio varies with $R^2_{\text{max}}$. Repeating the exercise at the monastery level, comparing columns 5 and 6, the $R^2$ rises by a factor of 1.7 while the coefficient falls by 23%, and selection on unobservables would need to be 2.86 times stronger than selection on observables to drive the estimate to zero; under equal selection the coefficient would fall from 0.369 to 0.299.[7]

[6] One county has only one monastery, so that observation is dropped after including county fixed effects.

[7] In both exercises we focus on the coefficient on large monasteries, since the comparison between large and small monasteries constitutes our main result on displaced resistance. Comparing the coefficients on any monastery (that is, comparing model 1 to model 2 of Table 1), we obtain an Oster's $\delta$ equal to 4.01.

Both ratios are well above one, a level of selection that is implausible given that our covariates include previous protest activity, the number of castles, and a comprehensive set of geographic controls.

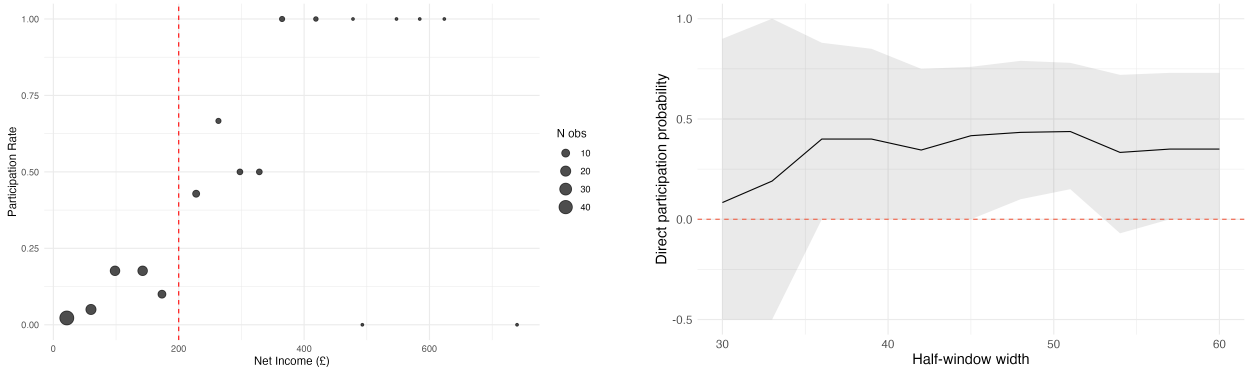
## 3.4 Regression Discontinuity Design

One could argue that the Crown may have spared the larger monasteries precisely because they were more prone to rebellion —flipping the direction of causality— or that large and small monasteries differed in other characteristics beyond the ones we control for. To rule out these possibilities, we implement a regression discontinuity design that exploits the £200 income threshold that determined eligibility for dissolution in 1536. Because our sample is small, with 144 northern religious houses with income data and only a few near the £200 cutoff, we use a local randomization approach (see, e.g., Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2024). In this exercise, we restrict the sample to windows around the cutoff and compare the share of rebellious monasteries above with the share below. The identifying assumption is that within the selected window, placement above or below the cutoff is effectively random. This approach minimizes extrapolation, avoids smoothing methods, and relies on exact inference.

Figure 2 (left panel) shows the proportion of houses directly participating in the rebellion grouped in bins £40 wide, with the vertical line indicating the £200 cutoff.[8] A discontinuity in the probability of monastic rebellion after the £200 cutoff is visible in the plot. The right panel compares the probability of participation in the rebellion between monasteries above and below the eligibility cutoff, for various symmetrical windows around the cutoff, ranging from £30 to £60. We also report 95% confidence intervals constructed using randomization inference. Across windows, we detect a positive effect of being spared from the dissolution policy on direct rebellion—with statistically significant estimates for

[8] We implement this using the `rdlocrand` package (Cattaneo, Frandsen and Titiunik, 2015).

Figure 2: Randomization inference RDDs




The dependent variable is monastic participation in the rebellion. The left panel shows participation rates by income, grouped in £40 bins. The right panel displays the estimated difference between monasteries above and below the £200 cutoff, with 95% CIs, for different windows. The estimates and CI were estimated by randomization inference.

some window widths.

Table A.8 in the Appendix reports the estimate for every window, indexed by the minimum number of houses the window contains and reporting how many of them fall on each side of the threshold. Across all windows containing at least twelve religious houses, the estimated effect lies between 0.29 and 0.44, and the associated p-values range from 0.01 to 0.23. The magnitude of the effect is therefore in line with the estimates of Table 1, columns 6 and 7. Even though the estimates are imprecise, owing to the small sample size, we interpret the results from this RDD analysis as confirming the observational patterns detected earlier—and as one component of a broader triangulated empirical strategy.

## 3.5 The Role of Organizational Ties with Suppressed Monasteries

Can we attribute the rebellion of the larger houses to their translocal ties with the targeted houses? We present evidence consistent with this interpretation by examining heterogeneity across large monasteries.

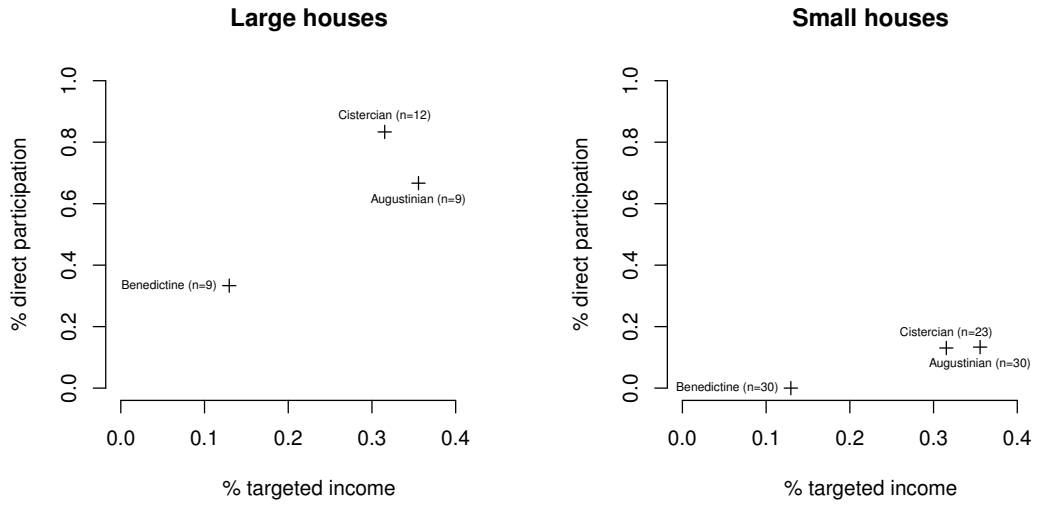
**Heterogeneity across orders.** As a first approximation, we explore variation in rebellion

across religious orders that differed in their degree of organizational interconnection and in their exposure to the confiscation of smaller monasteries. We limit the comparison to the orders with at least five large houses in the northern counties: the Cistercian, Augustinian, and Benedictine. The Benedictines were composed of largely autonomous abbeys, with no machinery above the abbey and with monks making a vow of stability that bound them to a single house for life. The Cistercians were hierarchically organized, with centralized governance and regular visitations across houses, and the Augustinian canons occupied an intermediate position (Francis, 1950). To measure how far the suppression of smaller monasteries affected each order, we compute the percentage of its total annual income across England that was targeted for confiscation. Only 13 percent of Benedictine income fell below the threshold, against 32 and 36 percent for the Cistercians and Augustinians.

The left panel of Figure 3 shows that large Cistercian and Augustinian houses—those of the more centralized orders, and the orders more exposed to the confiscation of *other* monasteries—participated directly at higher rates than large Benedictine houses. Among the spared houses of these three orders, 3 of 9 Benedictine houses took part directly (33 percent), against 16 of 21 Cistercian and Augustinian houses (76 percent; $p = 0.04$ for the difference). The right panel shows that in all three orders the smaller houses rebelled far less often, consistent with our core finding that spared monasteries drove resistance.

**Links to suppressed houses.** To assess the role of links to suppressed houses more directly, we turn to variation across the 35 spared monasteries. The 1536 dissolution policy allowed monks of suppressed monasteries who wished to continue in religious life to transfer to a larger house (Bernard, 2011). We approximate exposure to these migrants with three measures. The first is an indicator that large house $i$ is the nearest large house to a dissolved monastery of its own order in its own county. The second is the number of such dissolved monasteries to which house $i$ is the nearest large house. The third weights

Figure 3: House size, exposure to confiscations, and direct participation




The figures show the percentage of targeted income (x-axis) and the proportion of houses participating directly in the Pilgrimage of Grace (y-axis) for the three largest religious orders in the northern counties. The left panel depicts large religious houses; the right panel depicts small religious houses.

that count by the number of monks in those dissolved houses who wished to be transferred. To measure the latter, we digitized a surviving Elizabethan-era manuscript copy of a 1536 ledger listing the houses eligible for dissolution and the number of monks in each who wished to continue in monastic life.[9]

Table 2 shows that, among the spared northern houses, all three measures of exposure to dissolved monasteries positively predict direct participation in the rebellion. Column 1 shows that a large house that was the nearest large house to at least one dissolved monastery of its own order in its county was 32 percentage points more likely to participate than a large house that was nearest to none. Column 2 shows that the probability of participation rose with the number of such dissolved houses. Column 3 reports the analogous result weighting that count by the number of monks who wished to transfer.

[9]The manuscript is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 111, *The Bath Cartulary and Related Items: Antiquarian Transcripts of Charters*, available at `https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/bj009wm8755`. The list of small houses appears on pp. 319–333. We manually linked the 390 small houses listed there to our master list of monasteries using each house's name, religious order, county, and reported income. We learned about this manuscript from (Clark, 2021, pp. 338–339).

Table 2: Exposure to suppressed houses of the same order in the same county

| | Neighbor of the same order | | | Neighbor of a different order | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Nearest large house to a suppressed neighbor (0/1) | 0.318* | | | 0.246 | | |
| | (0.179) | | | (0.159) | | |
| Number of those suppressed neighbors | | 0.072** | | | 0.029 | |
| | | (0.030) | | | (0.084) | |
| Religious wishing to transfer in those neighbors | | | 0.017*** | | | −0.007 |
| | | | (0.005) | | | (0.011) |
| Net income (£100s) | 0.001 | −0.002 | 0.003 | 0.008 | 0.002 | −0.003 |
| | (0.032) | (0.029) | (0.028) | (0.029) | (0.029) | (0.029) |
| Constant | 0.494** | 0.557*** | 0.528*** | 0.455** | 0.569*** | 0.636*** |
| | (0.197) | (0.175) | (0.172) | (0.207) | (0.202) | (0.185) |
| Observations | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| $R^2$ | 0.091 | 0.060 | 0.091 | 0.058 | 0.004 | 0.009 |
| Mean of dep. var. | 0.600 | 0.600 | 0.600 | 0.600 | 0.600 | 0.600 |
| $p$ (Conley, 30 km) | 0.076 | 0.017 | 0.000 | 0.122 | 0.734 | 0.568 |
| $p$ (randomization) | 0.110 | 0.153 | 0.076 | 0.161 | 0.723 | 0.612 |

*Notes.* Sample: all 35 spared houses in the six northern counties. The dependent variable is direct participation; OLS models. Exposure is coded on proximity to a male house of under £200 in the same county formally dissolved in 1536, of the house's own order (1–3) or of any other order (4–6). Standard errors in parentheses are Conley (1999) with 30 km cutoff; randomization-inference p-values use 20,000 permutations. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Exposure to dissolved houses could proxy for nothing more than the geographic centrality of a large house, and the third measure, which counts monks wishing to remain in religious life, could additionally proxy for the religiosity of the surrounding area. Both concerns imply that exposure to dissolved houses of *any* order should predict participation. Columns 4–6 therefore repeat the exercise using each large house's exposure to dissolved houses of *other* religious orders in its county. Across these three placebo specifications, the coefficients are smaller than their counterparts in columns 1–3 and never statistically significant.

## 3.6 Alternative Explanations

**Larger houses were directly threatened.** One might argue that spared monasteries rebelled because they perceived an immediate threat of suppression, as they were indeed

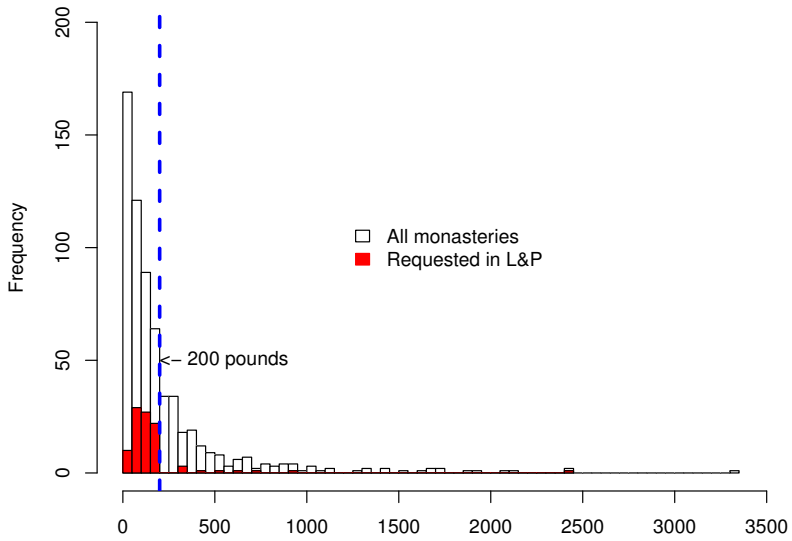
targeted in 1538-40. We conduct a systematic analysis of documents from Henry VIII's reign that suggests that the large houses were not immediately threatened. We also support this claim with qualitative historical evidence in Appendix A.3.

We identify all requests concerning monastic lands recorded in the 1536 volumes of the *Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII* (Brewer, Brodie and Gairdner, 1867), a comprehensive collection of documents from Henry VIII's reign. We focus on two types of requests: (i) petitions seeking possession of monasteries or their assets expected to be seized, and (ii) petitions pleading that monasteries or their assets be spared or protected. If the larger monasteries were perceived as available for redistribution in 1536, local gentry and aspiring landowners would have seized the chance to petition for them, while abbots would have tried to defend them. We identify 104 requests in total, of which 97 can be linked to monasteries in our sample. Figure 4 compares the distribution of net income across all English monasteries (white) with that of the monasteries that were requested or protected (red). The figure shows that requests overwhelmingly targeted smaller houses: while small monasteries made up 70 percent of all monasteries, they accounted for over 90 percent of the requests. Notably, requests declined sharply above the £200 threshold.

**Reaction to eliminated public goods.** Another alternative explanation for our findings is that rebellion was motivated by the withdrawal of public goods provided by monasteries to their local communities, such as education, charity, or hospitals. To address this possibility, we digitize and geocode data on monastic hospitals in the pre-Reformation period from Cobbett (1829). In Table A.6, we show that having a hospital, or being close to one, significantly predicts more rebellion at the parish level, but our displaced resistance results remain unchanged when we include either of these variables as controls.

**Smaller houses were corrupt and locally unpopular.** Another possible alternative explanation for our findings is that the suppression policy deliberately targeted smaller monas-

Figure 4: Monasteries requested or protected in the Letters & Papers




This plot shows the distribution of the income of all the religious houses in England (white) and the distribution of the net income of the religious houses that either (i) had their land requested by local gentry, court favorites, or other aspiring landowners, or (ii) were attempted to be protected from confiscation or suppression by abbots, priors, or others.

teries because they were less popular locally. Unfortunately, we lack historical data to measure monasteries' popularity directly. We do, however, have data that approximates the degree of "corruption" of a subset of religious houses in the northern counties. Shaw (2003, p. 448-451) computes the percentage of monks, friars, or nuns accused of various types of sexual behavior or desiring release from their vows in 66 religious houses in our sample using royal commissioners' reports. We find no significant relationship between a monastery's net income and the share of its members accused of corruption: a one-pound increase in income was associated with a 0.006 percentage point *increase* in the corruption rate ($p = 0.49$).

**Smaller houses were already dissolved by the time of the uprising.** One mechanical account of our results is that suppression itself produced the pattern: a house dissolved before the rising had no community left to join it. Table A.7 allows the coefficient of a targeted (below £200) house to differ according to whether its formal dissolution had in

fact been carried out in 1536, taking houses already dissolved as the omitted category. Every house above the threshold survived that year, so the comparison is identified among targeted houses. Of the 109 targeted houses with recorded income, 44 had been dissolved during 1536 and 65 had not. Houses still standing were no more likely to participate than houses already suppressed. At both the parish and the monastery level the differential ranges from $-0.05$ to $0.10$ and is statistically insignificant in every column, so the mechanical channel finds no support in the data. The gap between larger and smaller houses, by contrast, is large within both groups—between 0.22 and 0.50—and significant in every specification.

# 4 Punctuated Suppression

Having shown evidence of displaced resistance in the English case, we now turn to analyzing aggregate temporal dynamics. We have argued that when rulers confront religious orders, suppression will frequently follow a punctuated pattern: long periods of stability interrupted by concentrated bursts targeting the entire network. In this section, we test this prediction using systematic data on the closure of religious orders across 18 European regions between 1000 and 1850, which we compare with the closure of castles.

Defining a precise cutoff for what constitutes fast suppression is not straightforward. Events that unfold within the timespan of a particular ruler, roughly 25 years, are considered "short-term" in state-making (Rueschemeyer, 2005); and in the literature on persistence, the arbitrary cutoff is 10 years (Cirone and Pepinsky, 2022). As shown below and in Appendix A.4.2, most monasteries disappeared in large-scale confiscation episodes that unfolded within less than a decade—just as in the case of the English dissolution of the monasteries, where all the monasteries were dissolved in the span of four years.

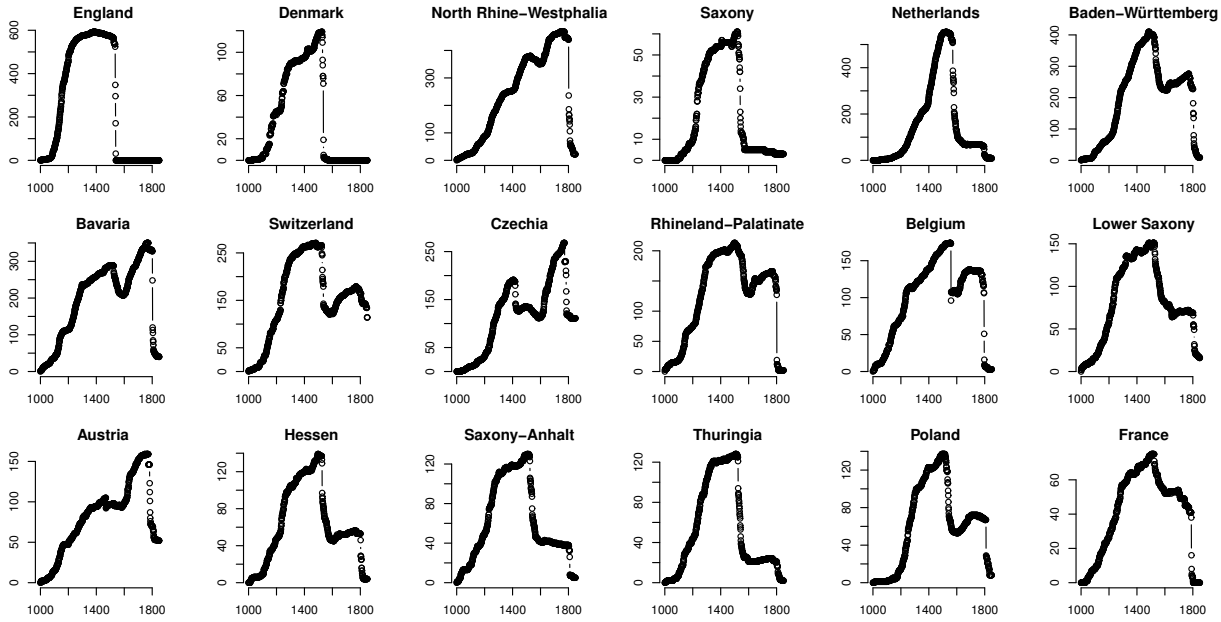
## 4.1 Data

The availability of large georeferenced datasets of religious houses in Europe allows us to describe their dissolution systematically across regions and over time. Our main data on English monasteries comes from the *Discover the Dissolution* project. We complement these data using Stober (2007) to add monasteries dissolved before the English Reformation, and to measure monastery founding dates. For Denmark, we use data from the *Katalog over klostre i middelalderens Danmark*. For regions within the Holy Roman Empire (HRE), we draw on the *Klosterdatenbank*, which documents over 6,300 monasteries, collegiate churches, and convents. We disaggregate the HRE data into 16 regions with at least 75 monasteries, yielding 18 total regions when combined with England and Denmark.[10]

Figure 5 shows the number of active monasteries in England, Denmark, and regions in the HRE from 1000 to 1850. Across cases, we consistently observe concentrated drops rather than gradual erosion. In England, monasticism was fully suppressed in the reign of Henry VIII, with almost all the dissolutions taking place between 1536 and 1540. Denmark shows a similar pattern of sharp change following its Reformation. The regions in the Holy Roman Empire, which encompassed multiple political units—only some of which adopted Protestantism—exhibit mixed patterns: some regions experience sharp drops in the sixteenth century with the Protestant Reformation, in the seventeenth century there is gradual *growth* in some regions with the rise of the Jesuit and Franciscan orders, and then rapid drops across regions with the expulsions of the Jesuits (c. 1759-1782) and confiscations after the Napoleonic Wars.

[10]Regional definitions within the HRE follow the *Klosterdatenbank*, which include German federal states and areas of contemporary countries that belonged to the HRE; thus "France" refers to areas of modern France that were once part of the HRE. We adopt this anachronistic definition intentionally. Defining fixed regions is challenging because borders in this period were often porous, overlapping, or fluid, with polities appearing and disappearing. Since contemporary regions encompassed multiple historical polities at different times, swift dissolutions by historical rulers appear as gradual changes in our time series. Therefore, this approach tilts toward finding gradual rather than punctuated patterns. Figure A.2 displays time series using 1500 polity boundaries from Nussli's *Euratlas*, yielding the same sharp drops as contemporary regions.

Figure 5: Evolution of the number of religious houses in selected cases




This figure shows the number of active religious houses (monasteries, friaries, nunneries, cells, etc) in England, Denmark, and regions in the Holy Roman Empire from 1000 to 1850.

## 4.2 Statistical Test: Punctuated or Gradual Change?

Does a model of punctuated change fit the data better than a model of gradual decline? In each region, we focus on periods following the peak number of monasteries —isolating the phase of decline— and compare two models. The *gradual change* model allows for an initial plateau followed by a linear decrease after a breakpoint. The *punctuated change* model imposes a discontinuous shift: a plateau followed by a sudden, stepwise drop at a breakpoint. For each model, we identify the optimal breakpoint by evaluating all admissible candidate positions along the post-peak portion of the time series. We then compare model fit using the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC).[11]

Table 3 presents the results. In 17 of 18 regions, the punctuated change model provides a better fit than gradual decline (indicated by lower BIC); Lower Saxony is the sole exception. The final two columns report a placebo test examining castle abandonment and

[11]Figure A.3 illustrates how the two models fit observed time series in three representative cases.

destruction, which we use as a non-networked benchmark.[12] The gradual model fits better than the punctuated model in all ten regions with sufficient castle data. This contrast suggests that punctuated patterns of decline are not a general feature of local powerholding infrastructure but are specifically associated with monasteries.

Table 3: Comparing the goodness-of-fit of models of gradual vs steep decline

| | Monasteries | | Castles | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region | Gradual change | Steep drop | Gradual change | Steep drop |
| Austria | 928.81 | 801.00⋆ | 141.63⋆ | 211.59 |
| Baden-Wurttemberg | 4013.60 | 4002.13⋆ | 258.79⋆ | 304.21 |
| Bavaria | 995.25 | 775.02⋆ | 160.41⋆ | 221.66 |
| Belgium | 2718.95 | 2494.22⋆ | — | — |
| Czechia | 844.41 | 673.29⋆ | 111.14⋆ | 152.90 |
| Denmark | 2865.53 | 1842.09⋆ | — | — |
| England | 6111.30 | 4190.26⋆ | — | — |
| France | 2458.11 | 2415.49⋆ | — | — |
| Hessen | 3196.81 | 3071.51⋆ | 162.25⋆ | 190.48 |
| Lower Saxony | 3108.38⋆ | 3242.88 | 150.81⋆ | 201.43 |
| Netherlands | 4017.81 | 3440.17⋆ | 120.18⋆ | 139.10 |
| North Rhine-Westphalia | 1262.98 | 1117.57⋆ | 180.70⋆ | 221.74 |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 3372.53 | 3214.87⋆ | 160.92⋆ | 199.06 |
| Poland | 3278.04 | 3080.14⋆ | — | — |
| Saxony | 2550.30 | 1763.61⋆ | — | — |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 2991.40 | 2823.73⋆ | — | — |
| Switzerland | 3806.23 | 3232.87⋆ | — | — |
| Thuringia | 3145.91 | 2682.76⋆ | — | — |
| Mecklenburg | — | — | 164.94⋆ | 172.89 |

The table shows, for each region, the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) of a model of gradual decline after the peak and a model of steep decline after the peak. A lower BIC indicates a better fit with the data. The symbol ⋆ flags the model with the lower BIC.

[12]Castles provide a useful benchmark because, like monasteries, they were infrastructure associated with local powerholding and subject to both deliberate suppression and natural decay—e.g., adverse climate, plagues, and war. Yet castles lacked the translocal organizational networks characteristic of religious orders. This makes them an appropriate, if imperfect, comparison case: infrastructure associated with autonomous local power, subject to similar sources of natural decay, but without the organizational features our theory identifies as producing punctuated suppression. We scrape data on thousands of castles from *Die Burgendatenbank* (`www.ebidat.de`), which covers castles in Germany and neighboring regions of the former Holy Roman Empire. Using information provided in the database, we identify the periods during which each castle was active or standing and construct regional time-series of the number of active castles.

## 4.3 Temporal Concentration: Gini Index

In our second analysis, we abstract from chronological ordering and examine how episodes of monastery closure are distributed across time. Figure A.4 shows period-to-period changes in the number of monasteries across European regions from 1000–1850; Figure A.5 presents the analogous distribution for castles.[13] Monastery changes display pronounced left tails, reflecting large-scale dissolutions concentrated in brief periods, whereas castle changes are more symmetrically distributed around zero. We quantify these patterns using Gini coefficients that measure the concentration of dissolution events across time. A coefficient of one indicates that all dissolutions occur in a single period, while zero implies uniform distribution across periods. Table A.9 reports Gini coefficients for monastery dissolutions at 1-, 10-, and 25-year resolutions and for castle abandonments at the 25-year resolution. Across all regions and temporal aggregations, monastery Gini coefficients range from 0.87 to 0.99, indicating extreme temporal concentration. Castle coefficients range from 0.63 to 0.88 and are lower than the monastery coefficient in every region where both are observed.

## 4.4 Complementary Qualitative Evidence

The statistical patterns align with our theoretical predictions. A key limitation of our database is the absence of information on reasons for closure, which may lead to misclassification. To assess this concern, we manually examine the ten decades with the largest drops in monasteries, which account for 92% of the total decline from 1517 to 1850 (Table A.10). Based on timing and geography, each decade maps onto a major state-led confiscation episode. As discussed in section A.4, secondary sources further confirm that political circumstances fit our argument: rulers sought swift and comprehensive dissolution, understood it as a way to neutralize a rival and assert authority, and in some cases explicitly

[13] Castle data record construction and abandonment/destruction at 25-year intervals; we aggregate monastery data to the same temporal resolution for comparability.

anticipated or reacted to the risk of resistance. The patterns of England, Denmark, the Habsburg Monarchy, Revolutionary France and the territories it occupied, and the Jesuit expulsions across Europe fit our argument closely. Cases that conform least well are those where political fragmentation meant neither centralized suppression nor a clear target for displaced resistance—the Netherlands during the Dutch Revolt and small states within the HRE.

The Jesuit Expulsions illustrate the pattern well. From 1759 to 1773, Catholic rulers across Europe suppressed the Society of Jesus with extraordinary speed, providing perhaps the clearest illustration of our argument (see Appendix A.4.1 for a detailed account). The rulers of Portugal (1759), France (1764), the Spanish Empire (1767), and the Papal States (1773) issued decrees abolishing the order with immediate effect. The starkest example is the Spanish expulsion: the royal decree arrived in a sealed envelope, instructing officials not to open it until April 2nd at sunrise, whereupon they were to muster troops, proceed to each Jesuit college, and transport every member to designated ports *within 24 hours*. The episode corroborates our theory on three counts. The suppressions were extraordinarily fast. The Jesuits were uniquely isolated from the broader monastic network—their long-standing rivalries with older orders meant that when rulers moved against them, no connected organizations mobilized in their defense (Beales, 2003, p. 167). And the expulsions were acts of state-making against an organization perceived as incompatible with centralized authority.

## 4.5 Encroachment on Non-Networked Actors

Does the state suppression of non-networked actors follow the same punctuated pattern? The literature typically describes state encroachment on territorial actors as gradual. Ertman (1997, p. 57) argues that the French Capetians "slowly extended their power in roughly concentric circles over a wider and wider area," and in Iberia and southern Italy,

"rulers operating from geographically compact bases slowly expanded their realms outward." Cappelen and Hariri (2022) show that the castles owned by the crown increased gradually over time. Similarly, Stasavage (2014, p. 343) points out that cities lost their autonomy to territorial states "... over a course of numerous centuries." Lastly, in their study of political centralization in colonial Mexico, Garfias and Sellars (2021) shows that the replacement of indirect rule (the *encomienda* system) for directly appointed officials unfolded gradually over their study period, from 1550 to 1645, and did not affect all of Mexico's regions.

# 5 Conclusion

While political science has recently experienced a resurgence of studies on the historical interaction between the Catholic Church and the state (Grzymala-Busse, 2020, 2023, 2024*a*,*b*; Møller and Doucette, 2022), this literature has focused on the medieval period, and therefore not examined monastic confiscations. Instead, research on religious orders has focused on their contributions to institutional and technological innovations, often framed as revivals of early Christian ideals (Møller, 2024). This line of research has shown that Dominican houses facilitated the early spread of the printing press (Doucette, 2025); Cistercian monasteries contributed to agricultural productivity growth (Andersen et al., 2017); and Cluniac (Doucette and Møller, 2021) and Dominican (Doucette, 2021) networks advanced practices that helped institutionalize urban self-government. The implications of religious orders' distinctive spatial and organizational structure for processes of state-making have remained underexplored. Our analysis addressed this gap by showing how their translocal organization and shared identity shaped both the form of their resistance and patterns of state encroachment.

We have emphasized the challenges that the organizational structure of religious or-

ders posed for centralizing rulers, yet these same transregional networks also created opportunities for co-optation. In particular, rulers may co-opt religious institutions to project influence and authority in regions where they lack military presence. Existing research has argued that rulers combined their territories through marriage and inheritance (Sharma, 2015), that geographically dispersed kinship networks could facilitate state-making (Wang, 2022), and that rulers relied on family members to cement their rule (Kokkonen et al., 2021; Müller-Crepon et al., 2025). Exploring the opportunities that the organizational characteristics of religious orders afforded to centralizing monarchs is an interesting area for further research.

Competing interests: The authors declare none

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# A Supplementary Appendix

- Table of contents:
  - A.1. Geographic controls
  - A.2. Additional tables and graphs
  - A.3. Qualitative evidence that large houses were not directly threatened in 1536
  - A.4. Qualitative evidence on the punctuated suppression of religious orders

## A.1 Geographic Controls

We measure the number of castles in each parish, using data from *Gatehouse*, a gazetteer of English castles, available at: https://www.gatehouse-gazetteer.info/home.html. We calculate the average elevation, slope, terrain ruggedness, and flow accumulation of each parish using data from the U.S. Geological Survey's GTOPO30 dataset (EROS, US Geological Survey, 1996), which offers global coverage at a resolution of 30-arc seconds. Suitability for wheat production is assessed using data of the same resolution from the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Global Agro-Ecological Zones (GAEZ) portal. Measures of cities in 1500 and their coordinates are from Bosker et al. (2013). Distance to the nearest navigable river is computed using data from Satchell et al. (2017).

## A.2 Additional Tables and Graphs

Table A.1: Documented cases of monastic involvement in the rebellion

| Religious House | Participation | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Barlings Abbey | Abbot and six canons joined the rebellion in arms, some were executed | Altazin 2011 p 130-131, James 1970 p 19 |
| Bardney Abbey | Monks reported among the rebels, some were executed | Altazin p130, James, p19 |
| Kirkstead Abbey | Seventeen monks joined the rebellion in arms, some were executed | Altazin p130, 152, 276, James p19 |
| Revesby Abbey | Monks reported among the rebels | Altazin p 130 |
| Sawley Abbey | Abbey restored by monks, who armed themselves to hold it. | Woodward 1966 p94, Altazin 2011 p132 |
| Jervaulx Abbey | Abbot aided the rebels and monks incited rebellion. The abbot was executed. | Altazin p132, Woodward p98–99 |
| Fountains Abbey | Former abbot offered money and supported rebels | Altazin p257 |
| Guisborough Priory | Prior was a notable leader of the rebels, and was executed | Altazin p276 |
| Bridlington Priory | Prior gave horses and money to rebels and monks joined the rebellion. The prior was executed | Altazin p132, Woodward p100 |
| Whalley Abbey | Gave safe harbor to the chaplain of Sawley Abbey's abbot. Whalley's abbot was executed. | Altazin p299, Woodward 1966 p100 |
| Furness Abbey | Abbot and monks offered material and moral support to the rebels | Altazin p131 |
| Louth Park Abbey | Monk instigated rebellion | Altazin p324 |
| Carlisle Priory | Canons among the rebels and involved in negotiating the town's surrender | Shaw 2003 p102, Woodward p96 |
| Vaudey Abbey | Three monks helped the rebels and were executed | Shaw p 94 |
| Conishead Abbey | The canons reoccupied the priory | Shaw p 95 |
| Thornton Abbey | Abbot gave money to the rebels | Heale 2016 p315 |
| St Mary's Abbey, York | Abbot gave money to the rebels | Heale p315 |
| Watton Priory | Canons gave 40 sheep to rebels | Heale p315 |
| Holme Cultram Abbey | Monks assembled tenants and commanded them to join the rebels | Heale p315 |
| Byland Abbey | Sent a small sum of money | Heale p317, Woodward p98 |
| Newburgh Priory | Sent a small sum of money | Heale p317 |
| Whitby Abbey | Sent a small sum of money | Heale p317, Woodward p98 |
| Bolton Priory | Gave money and provisions to the rebels | Haigh 2012 p149 |
| Rievaulx Abbey | Gave money and provisions to the rebels | Haigh p149 |
| Knaresborough Priory | Canons spread rumors of new taxes | Haigh p149 |
| Lanercost Priory | Monks reoccupied and kept their house with force | Woodward p96 |
| Easby Abbey | Monks reoccupied and kept their house with force | Woodward p96 |
| Kirkstall Abbey | The abbot was an enthusiastic pilgrim, attended a convocation | Woodward p98 |
| Malton Priory | Abbot accused of joining the rebellion | VCH, Yorkshire, vol 3, 253-54 |
| Cartmel Priory | Several canons were executed for participation in the rebellion | VCH, Lancashire, vol 2, 142-48 Woodward p 100. |

The table displays concrete examples of monastic participation in the rebellion, according to various secondary sources listed in the third column. VCH stands for Victoria County History, available online at `https://www.british-history.ac.uk/`

## Table A.2: Monasteries and rebellion across England (all counties)

| | Any monastery (backlash) | | Large vs small (displaced resistance) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DV: Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | | | Direct participation (monastery-level dataset) | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
| Monastery | 0.032** | 0.018** | | | | | |
| | (0.015) | (0.009) | | | | | |
| Monastery above 200 | | | 0.053* | 0.042* | 0.097* | 0.103* | 0.300** |
| | | | (0.028) | (0.022) | (0.058) | (0.054) | (0.134) |
| Monastery below 200 | | | 0.013 | 0.0004 | | | |
| | | | (0.011) | (0.009) | | | |
| Net Income | | | | | -0.00003 | 0.000005 | -0.0008 |
| | | | | | (0.000025) | (0.000031) | (0.0007) |
| Difference (large - small) | | | 0.040* | 0.041* | | | |
| | | | (0.023) | (0.023) | | | |
| | | | [0.090] | [0.078] | | | |
| Mean DV | 0.012 | 0.012 | 0.012 | 0.012 | 0.052 | 0.053 | 0.317 |
| SD DV | 0.107 | 0.107 | 0.107 | 0.107 | 0.222 | 0.223 | 0.469 |
| Mean monastery | 0.065 | 0.065 | | | | | |
| Mean large monastery | | | 0.017 | 0.017 | 0.302 | 0.306 | 0.349 |
| Mean small monastery | | | 0.037 | 0.037 | 0.698 | 0.694 | 0.651 |
| Controls | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| County F.E. | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 11,376 | 11,376 | 11,376 | 11,376 | 635 | 628 | 63 |
| $R^2$ | 0.005 | 0.148 | 0.004 | 0.148 | 0.030 | 0.295 | 0.708 |

In models 1-4, the unit of observation is the parish, and in models 5-7, the monastery. Conley standard errors reported in parentheses. Models 1 to 6 use a 60km cutoff, while model 7 uses a 30km cutoff. The last row in columns 3 and 4 reports Wald tests of coefficient equality between the two estimates of each model (SE in parentheses and p-values in brackets). *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Table A.3: Monasteries and rebellion (Robustness: alternative standard errors)

| | Any monastery (backlash) | | Large vs small (displaced resistance) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DV: Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | | | Direct participation (monastery-level dataset) | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
| Monastery | 0.112 | 0.072 | | | | | |
| | (0.029) | (0.028) | | | | | |
| | [0.030] | [0.029] | | | | | |
| Monastery above 200 | | | 0.270 | 0.224 | 0.482 | 0.369 | 0.299 |
| | | | (0.079) | (0.073) | (0.123) | (0.127) | (0.165) |
| | | | [0.067] | [0.062] | [0.162] | [0.120] | [0.096] |
| Monastery below 200 | | | 0.021 | 0.002 | | | |
| | | | (0.030) | (0.029) | | | |
| | | | [0.025] | [0.030] | | | |
| Net Income | | | | | 0.000086 | 0.0002 | -0.0010 |
| | | | | | (0.0002) | (0.0002) | (0.0004) |
| | | | | | [0.0003] | [0.0002] | [0.0007] |
| Difference (large − small) | | | 0.249 | 0.221 | | | |
| | | | (0.082) | (0.076) | | | |
| | | | [0.076] | [0.078] | | | |
| Mean DV | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.079 | 0.208 | 0.210 | 0.322 |
| Mean monastery | 0.103 | 0.103 | | | | | |
| Mean large monastery | | | 0.021 | 0.021 | 0.243 | 0.245 | 0.373 |
| Mean small monastery | | | 0.064 | 0.064 | 0.757 | 0.755 | 0.627 |
| Controls | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| County F.E. | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 144 | 143 | 59 |
| $R^2$ | 0.016 | 0.121 | 0.021 | 0.128 | 0.300 | 0.498 | 0.765 |

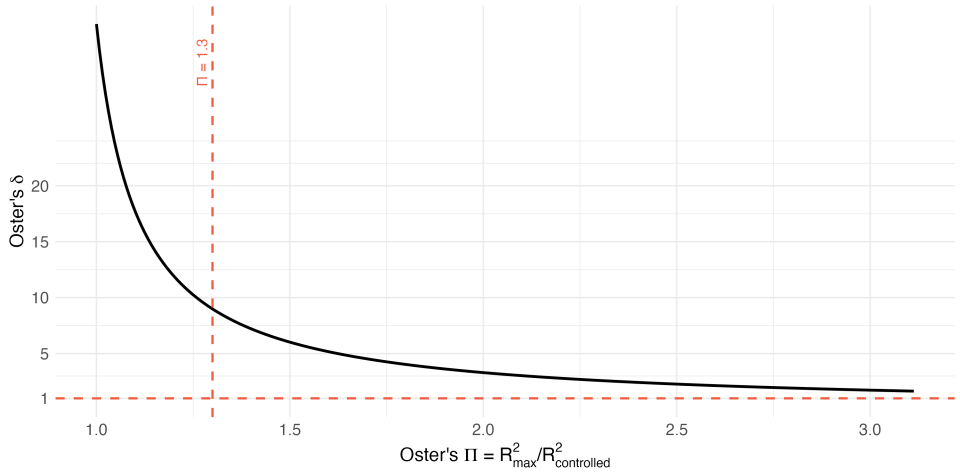
In models 1–4, the unit of observation is the parish, and in models 5–7, the monastery. Standard errors clustered at the Hundred level are reported in parentheses. Conley standard errors with doubled cutoffs relative to the baseline (40km in models 1–4 and 60km in models 5–7) are reported in brackets. The last row in columns 3 and 4 reports Wald tests of coefficient equality between the large and small monastery estimates.

# Table A.4: Monasteries and rebel activity with additional covariates from Heldring et al. (2021)

| | DV: Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Monastery | 0.072** | 0.075** | | |
| | (0.030) | (0.030) | | |
| Monastery above 200 | | | 0.224*** | 0.209*** |
| | | | (0.079) | (0.077) |
| Monastery below 200 | | | 0.002 | 0.005 |
| | | | (0.029) | (0.028) |
| *Additional covariates* | | | | |
| Monastic land | | 0.018 | | 0.020 |
| | | (0.012) | | (0.013) |
| N gentry | | 0.037*** | | 0.035*** |
| | | (0.010) | | (0.010) |
| Copyhold count | | 0.454*** | | 0.452*** |
| | | (0.021) | | (0.021) |
| N mills | | -0.009 | | -0.007 |
| | | (0.026) | | (0.025) |
| Lay subsidy tax pc | | 0.002 | | 0.002 |
| | | (0.003) | | (0.003) |
| Difference (large - small) | | | 0.221*** | 0.204*** |
| | | | (0.075) | (0.071) |
| | | | [0.003] | [0.004] |
| Controls | Baseline | + HVR | Baseline | + HVR |
| Observations | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 |
| $R^2$ | 0.121 | 0.152 | 0.128 | 0.158 |

Models 1 and 3 include the baseline set of controls. Models 2 and 4 additionally include controls from Heldring et al. (2021): presence of monastic land in the parish, number of gentry families, copyhold count, number of mills, and lay subsidy tax records. All models include county fixed effects. Conley standard errors in parentheses, using a 20km cutoff. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

## Figure A.1: Sensitivity analysis




In this figure, we show how Oster's (2019) $\delta$ (the ratio of selection on unobservables relative to selection on observables that would be required for the coefficient on large monasteries in model 4, Table 1, to be zero) varies for different values of $\Pi = R_{\text{max}}/R^2_{\text{controlled}}$ (the ratio of the R-squared from a hypothetical regression on treatment and both observed and unobserved controls to $R^2_{\text{controlled}}$ from model 4, Table 1).

## Table A.5: Balance table

| Covariate | Above £200 | Below £200 | Difference | SE of Diff | Obs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Spatial* | | | | | |
| Latitude | 53.855 | 53.762 | 0.093 | 0.108 | 144 |
| Longitude | -1.146 | -1.011 | -0.135 | 0.168 | 144 |
| Dist. to Louth Park | 109.861 | 95.862 | 13.999 | 12.149 | 144 |
| Dist. to York | 70.174 | 77.616 | -7.442 | 8.658 | 144 |
| Dist. to nearest city | 59.718 | 67.780 | -8.062 | 6.421 | 144 |
| *Institutional* | | | | | |
| Augustinian | 0.257 | 0.275 | -0.018 | 0.086 | 144 |
| Benedictine | 0.257 | 0.275 | -0.018 | 0.086 | 144 |
| Cistercian | 0.343 | 0.211 | 0.132 | 0.090 | 144 |
| Other order | 0.143 | 0.239 | -0.096 | 0.073 | 144 |
| House population | 25.500 | 10.400 | 15.100*** | 2.051 | 67 |
| Foundation year | 1136.294 | 1174.220 | -37.926* | 19.706 | 125 |
| *Patron* | | | | | |
| Royal patron | 0.562 | 0.231 | 0.332*** | 0.101 | 110 |
| Episcopal patron | 0.062 | 0.090 | -0.027 | 0.054 | 110 |
| Other patron | 0.375 | 0.679 | -0.304*** | 0.102 | 110 |
| *Corruption* | | | | | |
| Crime rate in Visitation | 22.455 | 20.500 | 1.955 | 6.033 | 66 |

This table reports means for monasteries above and below the £200 threshold. Differences (above – below) and SE reported. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

## Table A.6: Public goods and resistance

| | DV: Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Monastery above 200 | 0.270*** | 0.224*** | 0.221*** | 0.215*** |
| | (0.090) | (0.079) | (0.076) | (0.076) |
| Monastery below 200 | 0.021 | 0.002 | 0.005 | 0.004 |
| | (0.029) | (0.029) | (0.029) | (0.029) |
| Has hospital | | | 0.179** | |
| | | | (0.083) | |
| Log distance to hospital | | | | -0.023** |
| | | | | (0.010) |
| Difference (large - small) | 0.249*** | 0.221*** | 0.216*** | 0.211*** |
| | (0.081) | (0.075) | (0.072) | (0.073) |
| | [0.002] | [0.003] | [0.003] | [0.004] |
| Controls | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| County F.E. | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 | 1,674 |
| $R^2$ | 0.021 | 0.128 | 0.135 | 0.133 |

Column 1 includes only monastery controls. Columns 2–4 add baseline controls and county fixed effects. Column 3 controls for hospital presence; column 4 for log distance to nearest hospital. Conley (20km), SE in parentheses and p-values in brackets. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Table A.7: Monasteries and rebellion, by dissolution status in 1536

| | Large vs small (displaced resistance) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DV: Rebellion in the parish (parish-level dataset) | | Direct participation (monastery-level dataset) | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Monastery above 200 | 0.270*** | 0.224*** | 0.451*** | 0.361** | 0.333** |
| | (0.090) | (0.079) | (0.137) | (0.155) | (0.130) |
| Monastery below 200 | 0.006 | -0.0001 | | | |
| | (0.040) | (0.040) | | | |
| × Not yet dissolved | 0.025 | 0.004 | -0.052 | -0.013 | 0.096 |
| | (0.051) | (0.048) | (0.064) | (0.056) | (0.085) |
| Net Income | | | 0.000086 | 0.0002 | -0.0009* |
| | | | (0.0002) | (0.0002) | (0.0005) |
| Difference (large - small), not yet dissolved | 0.239*** | 0.220*** | 0.504*** | 0.375** | 0.237* |
| | (0.087) | (0.079) | (0.135) | (0.150) | (0.132) |
| | [0.006] | [0.005] | [0.0002] | [0.012] | [0.073] |
| Difference (large - small), already dissolved | 0.264*** | 0.224*** | 0.451*** | 0.361** | 0.333** |
| | (0.082) | (0.078) | (0.137) | (0.155) | (0.130) |
| | [0.001] | [0.004] | [0.001] | [0.019] | [0.011] |
| Controls | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| County F.E. | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1,674 | 1,674 | 144 | 143 | 59 |
| $R^2$ | 0.021 | 0.128 | 0.303 | 0.499 | 0.769 |

In models 1–2, the unit of observation is the parish, and in models 3–5, the monastery. Houses below the £200 threshold were either dissolved or not dissolved in 1536. The "× Not yet dissolved" row reports the probability of rebellion of small non-dissolved houses, compared to dissolved houses. Note that small, dissolved houses are the omitted category in models 3 to 5. Model 5 includes additional controls only available for a subsample of the monasteries. Conley standard errors reported in parentheses. Models 1 to 2 use a 20km cutoff, while models 3 to 5 use a 30km cutoff. The last two rows report Wald tests of coefficient equality between houses above the threshold and each group below it (SE in parentheses and p-values in brackets). *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Table A.8: Local randomization RD estimates by minimum window size

| | | Houses | | Participation rate | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Min. $N$ | Window (£) | Below | Above | Below | Above | Difference | $p$ | 95% CI |
| 10 | [167, 233] | 7 | 3 | 0.143 | 0.333 | 0.190 | 1.000 | [-0.50, 0.81] |
| 12 | [165, 235] | 9 | 4 | 0.111 | 0.500 | 0.389 | 0.217 | [0.00, 0.89] |
| 14 | [164, 236] | 10 | 4 | 0.100 | 0.500 | 0.400 | 0.168 | [0.00, 0.88] |
| 16 | [161, 239] | 10 | 6 | 0.100 | 0.500 | 0.400 | 0.233 | [0.00, 0.85] |
| 18 | [158, 242] | 12 | 7 | 0.083 | 0.429 | 0.345 | 0.132 | [0.00, 0.75] |
| 20 | [157, 243] | 12 | 8 | 0.083 | 0.500 | 0.417 | 0.101 | [0.00, 0.79] |
| 22 | [153, 247] | 14 | 8 | 0.071 | 0.500 | 0.429** | 0.030 | [0.09, 0.79] |
| 24 | [151, 249] | 16 | 8 | 0.062 | 0.500 | 0.438** | 0.028 | [0.12, 0.75] |
| 26 | [147, 253] | 18 | 8 | 0.167 | 0.500 | 0.333 | 0.147 | [-0.06, 0.72] |
| 28 | [143, 257] | 20 | 8 | 0.150 | 0.500 | 0.350 | 0.160 | [0.00, 0.73] |
| 30 | [134, 266] | 22 | 8 | 0.136 | 0.500 | 0.364* | 0.058 | [0.00, 0.69] |
| 32 | [130, 270] | 23 | 9 | 0.130 | 0.444 | 0.314* | 0.087 | [0.00, 0.66] |
| 34 | [128, 272] | 26 | 9 | 0.154 | 0.444 | 0.291 | 0.167 | [-0.01, 0.59] |
| 36 | [124, 276] | 27 | 9 | 0.148 | 0.444 | 0.296 | 0.161 | [0.00, 0.61] |
| 38 | [117, 283] | 28 | 10 | 0.143 | 0.500 | 0.357** | 0.040 | [0.04, 0.63] |
| 40 | [113, 287] | 29 | 11 | 0.138 | 0.545 | 0.408** | 0.012 | [0.13, 0.69] |

Each row is the smallest symmetric window around the £200 eligibility threshold containing at least the stated number of religious houses. The outcome is direct participation in the rebellion. Differences, $p$-values and confidence intervals come from randomization inference (1,000 replications). Three windows hold one house more than the stated minimum ($N = 13$, 19 and 35), because pairs of houses are equidistant from the threshold and enter together. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure A.2: Evolution of religious houses in the Holy Roman Empire, by historical polity in 1500

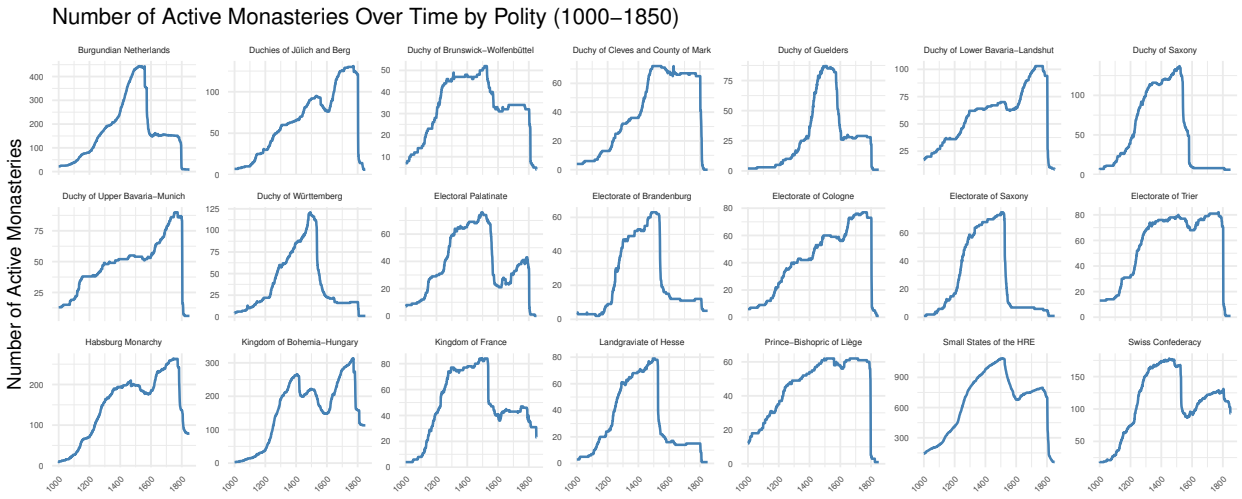
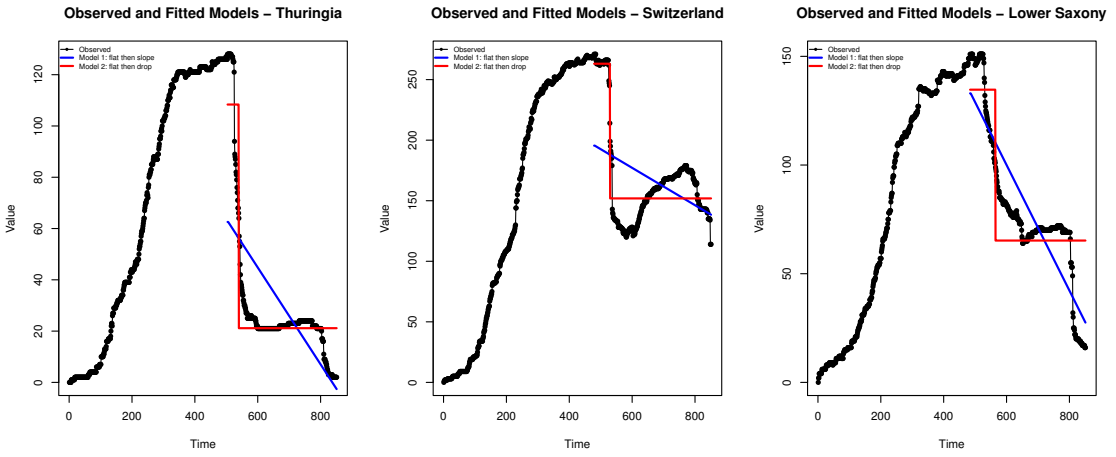
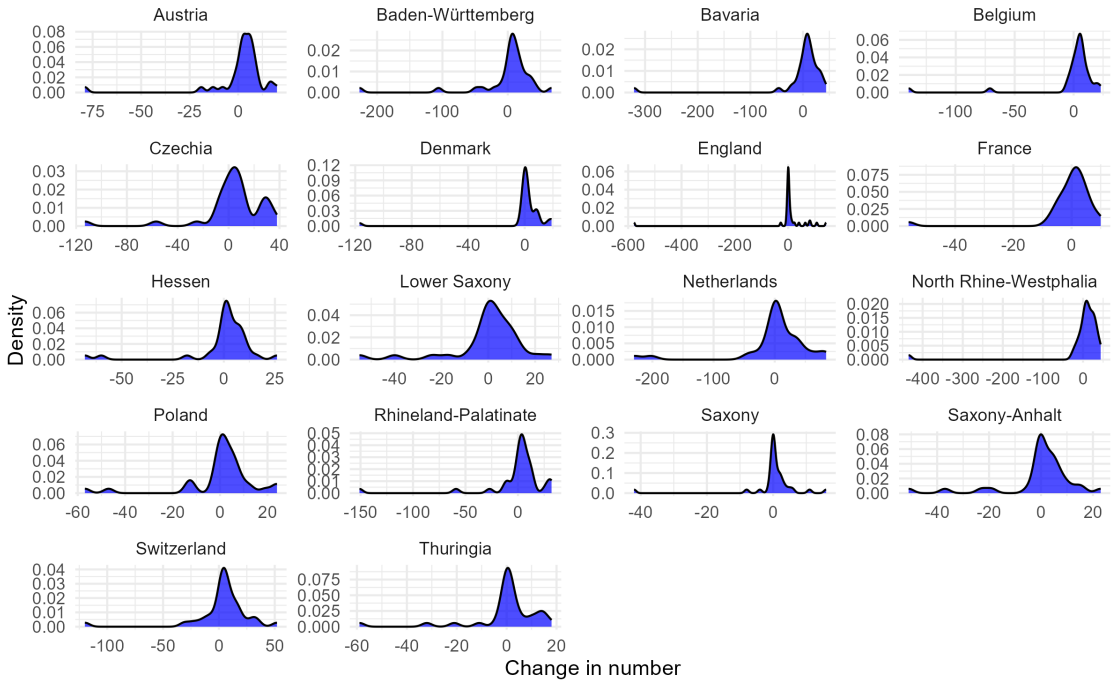



Figure A.3: Examples of comparison between gradual vs steep decline



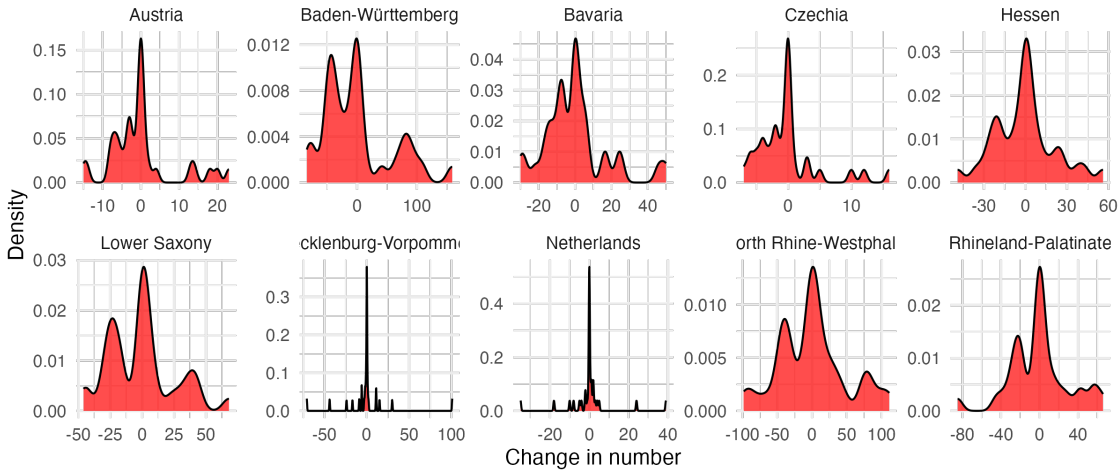

The figures show the time series of the number of active monasteries in Thuringia, Switzerland, and Lower Saxony. After the maximum point of the time series, we overlay the predicted number of monasteries according to a model of gradual decline (blue line) and a model of steep fall (red line).

Figure A.4: Distribution of changes in the number of monasteries




Distribution of period-to-period changes in the number of monasteries (driven by construction and dissolution). Each period is 25 years (for better comparison with Figure A.5). Positive values indicate net growth, negative values indicate net decline, and zero indicates no change. The period is 1000-1850. The long left tails indicate major dissolution events.

Figure A.5: Distribution of changes in the number of castles




Distribution of period-to-period changes in the number of castles (driven by construction and abandonment or destruction). Each period is 25 years (resolution available in our data). Positive values indicate net growth and negative values indicate net decline. The period is 1000-1850.

Table A.9: Concentration of monastery and castle dissolutions over time

| Region | Gini coefficient | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Monasteries (1-year) | Monasteries (10-years) | Monasteries (25-years) | Castles (25-years) |
| Austria | 0.978 | 0.954 | 0.927 | 0.691 |
| | (0.967, 0.984) | (0.894, 0.973) | (0.824, 0.960) | (0.561, 0.791) |
| Baden-Württemberg | 0.922 | 0.920 | 0.906 | 0.629 |
| | (0.897, 0.939) | (0.845, 0.953) | (0.807, 0.953) | (0.490, 0.752) |
| Bavaria | 0.970 | 0.958 | 0.934 | 0.691 |
| | (0.937, 0.981) | (0.872, 0.973) | (0.790, 0.957) | (0.566, 0.802) |
| Belgium | 0.988 | 0.964 | 0.941 | |
| | (0.969, 0.991) | (0.880, 0.976) | (0.848, 0.969) | |
| Czechia | 0.969 | 0.946 | 0.898 | 0.664 |
| | (0.953, 0.976) | (0.892, 0.967) | (0.786, 0.941) | (0.530, 0.776) |
| Denmark | 0.991 | 0.982 | 0.968 | |
| | (0.982, 0.994) | (0.941, 0.988) | (0.854, 0.971) | |
| England | 0.992 | 0.982 | 0.962 | |
| | (0.984, 0.994) | (0.869, 0.986) | (0.829, 0.969) | |
| France | 0.971 | 0.909 | 0.868 | |
| | (0.948, 0.982) | (0.815, 0.942) | (0.686, 0.923) | |
| Hessen | 0.956 | 0.932 | 0.917 | 0.730 |
| | (0.933, 0.970) | (0.885, 0.959) | (0.824, 0.965) | (0.595, 0.835) |
| Lower Saxony | 0.929 | 0.866 | 0.869 | 0.686 |
| | (0.909, 0.945) | (0.794, 0.910) | (0.776, 0.927) | (0.540, 0.811) |
| Mecklenburg-Vorpommern | | | | 0.866 |
| | | | | (0.763, 0.913) |
| Netherlands | 0.949 | 0.932 | 0.903 | 0.876 |
| | (0.923, 0.963) | (0.860, 0.958) | (0.810, 0.944) | (0.767, 0.933) |
| North Rhine-Westphalia | 0.976 | 0.967 | 0.945 | 0.723 |
| | (0.950, 0.985) | (0.892, 0.979) | (0.787, 0.963) | (0.587, 0.835) |
| Poland | 0.958 | 0.919 | 0.892 | |
| | (0.937, 0.973) | (0.868, 0.952) | (0.791, 0.946) | |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 0.951 | 0.935 | 0.913 | 0.748 |
| | (0.910, 0.972) | (0.861, 0.962) | (0.813, 0.953) | (0.607, 0.850) |
| Saxony | 0.978 | 0.957 | 0.946 | |
| | (0.967, 0.985) | (0.912, 0.978) | (0.853, 0.969) | |
| Saxony-Anhalt | 0.954 | 0.917 | 0.884 | |
| | (0.933, 0.966) | (0.869, 0.945) | (0.778, 0.935) | |
| Switzerland | 0.941 | 0.925 | 0.905 | |
| | (0.921, 0.956) | (0.859, 0.949) | (0.788, 0.951) | |
| Thuringia | 0.950 | 0.924 | 0.898 | |
| | (0.929, 0.965) | (0.870, 0.951) | (0.811, 0.941) | |

Gini coefficients measure the degree of inequality in dissolution and abandonment events across time periods within each region. Values range from 0 (perfectly equal distribution of dissolutions over time) to 1 (all dissolutions concentrated in a single time period). We study year-to-year change, focusing on years with a decrease. Bootstrap confidence intervals (95%) are shown in parentheses. The consistently higher Gini coefficients for monasteries compared to castles across all time resolutions support the hypothesis that monastic dissolutions occurred in more concentrated, coordinated waves than castle abandonments.

## A.3 Qualitative Evidence that Large Houses Were Not Directly Threatened in 1536

In the text of the paper, we have presented statistical evidence from petitions in the *Letters & Papers* that the large houses were not immediately threatened by dissolution in 1536. Here, we review complementary qualitative evidence. To begin with, the 1536 parliamentary act authorizing the dissolution of smaller monasteries was framed as a solution to the depravity of the smaller houses, not as a general attack on monasticism. Hoyle (1995, p. 297) argues that the statute, by highlighting the satisfactory moral standards of the richer monasteries, made it "hard to argue in the future that the remainder of the monasteries

should be dissolved because of their spiritual and moral inadequacy." Moreover, the act also explicitly included a provision allowing monks and nuns to transfer to larger houses. As Bernard (2011, p. 399) notes, "it is difficult to see why such a provision would have been included if the ultimate aim of the government had been to dissolve them all"—a claim echoed in Woodward (1966, p. 71). There are also records of large houses making large investments in renovating infrastructure and admitting new novices during 1536 (Clark 2021, p. 350), behavior that would have been imprudent had abbots and priors anticipated imminent suppression.

## A.4 Qualitative Evidence on the Punctuated Suppression of Religious Orders

In this appendix, we first provide an overview of the suppression of the Jesuits, and then examine the ten decades with the largest drops in the number of monasteries in our data, drawing on secondary sources to document the political circumstances surrounding each episode.[14]

### A.4.1 The Jesuit Expulsions

From 1759 to 1773, Catholic rulers across Europe suppressed the Society of Jesus with extraordinary speed and coordination. The Catholic rulers of Portugal (in 1759), France (1764), the Spanish Empire (1767), and the Papal States (1773) issued decrees that abolished the order and exiled their members with immediate effect. Each of these suppressions was executed as rapidly as the administrative capacity of the state allowed—in the Spanish case, the decree mandated that every Jesuit house be emptied within twenty-four

[14]Our data record the year in which each house's record ends. Counts of the stock of active houses treat a house as standing through that year, so a closure dated $t$ appears as a fall in the stock at $t + 1$. Where the narratives below attribute closures to particular years, the attribution is accurate to within one year for this reason.

hours.

A notable feature of the Jesuits is that the order was uniquely isolated from the rest. Since its inception in 1540, the Jesuits had accumulated long-standing rivalries with the older orders over doctrinal and organizational differences, and these relationships further deteriorated over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Guasti, 2019; Pavone, 2019). Indeed, this was a case in which other orders "applauded the suppression" (Beales 2003, p. 167). Because the Jesuits had severed their ties with other orders, rulers who moved against them faced no other religious orders that might mobilize in their defense. The combination of swift action against a target and the absence of a broader resistance network is what our model predicts should characterize efficient dissolution.

The Portuguese Empire's movement against the Jesuits was led by the chief minister, the Marquis de Pombal. The initial policy was not outright dissolution but a set of reforms aimed at dismantling the autonomy of the Jesuit missions on the Brazilian frontier. Pombal sought to remove indigenous communities from Jesuit protection and encourage their integration with the Portuguese settler population to assert metropolitan authority over the empire (Beales 2003, p. 150). The policy provoked armed resistance, and a joint Spanish-Portuguese force was required to defeat the Guaraní missions in the war of 1754–1756. Whether or not the Jesuits instigated the resistance, the Portuguese and Spanish courts took it as a fact. Pombal then ensured that this interpretation became the dominant one across Europe, commissioning and widely circulating a polemical account that cast the Jesuit missions as a state within a state; a republic built on the exploitation of indigenous labor (Beales 2003, p. 151).

The Portuguese response escalated from reform to elimination. Jesuits were removed from court in 1757, and in 1759 "their lands and property were seized by the state;" their members "either imprisoned or exiled, with no compensation of any kind" (Beales 2003, pp. 151–152). The text of the 1759 decree illustrates the understanding of the Jesuits as

political rivals within the state, as well as the punctuated nature of their suppression:

> "I declare the Jesuits, in their present corruption, alienated from their holy institute and incapable of returning to it, to be notorious rebels, traitors, adversaries, and aggressors against my royal person, my states, the public peace of my kingdoms, and the common good of my faithful subjects. From this moment onward, I hold them denaturalized, proscribed, and banished. I order that they be expelled from all my kingdoms and dominions, never again to set foot in them."

Beales (2003, p. 152) characterizes the episode as fundamentally about state power: "The destruction of the Society in Portugal was an act of state, facing down rebellion and ruthlessly asserting the absolute power of the Crown" (p. 152). The speed of the transition, from targeted reform to comprehensive suppression within three years, is consistent with what our model predicts when rulers learn that partial measures provoke resistance rather than compliance.

The Spanish case provides an even starker illustration of the logic of swift dissolution. The following quote from Jerónimo Grimaldi, a Spanish secretary of state in 1764, illustrates the animosity of state authorities toward the Jesuits in the late eighteenth century and their characterization as a political threat for their foreign allegiances to the papacy:

> "The friars have no homeland. From the moment they take their vows they should be regarded not merely as foreigners, but as enemies of the state where they were born. It is a militia in which the popes have found the secret of maintaining themselves at the expense of the very peoples against whom they wage war. They are neither Spanish, Neapolitan nor French—they are Romans wherever they may be found. Catholic Europe has been blind for many centuries, allowing this woodworm that gnaws at it from within to spread without limit,

and perhaps when it wishes to restrain or exterminate it, it will no longer be able to do so" (quoted in Barrio Gozalo 2000 [our translation]).

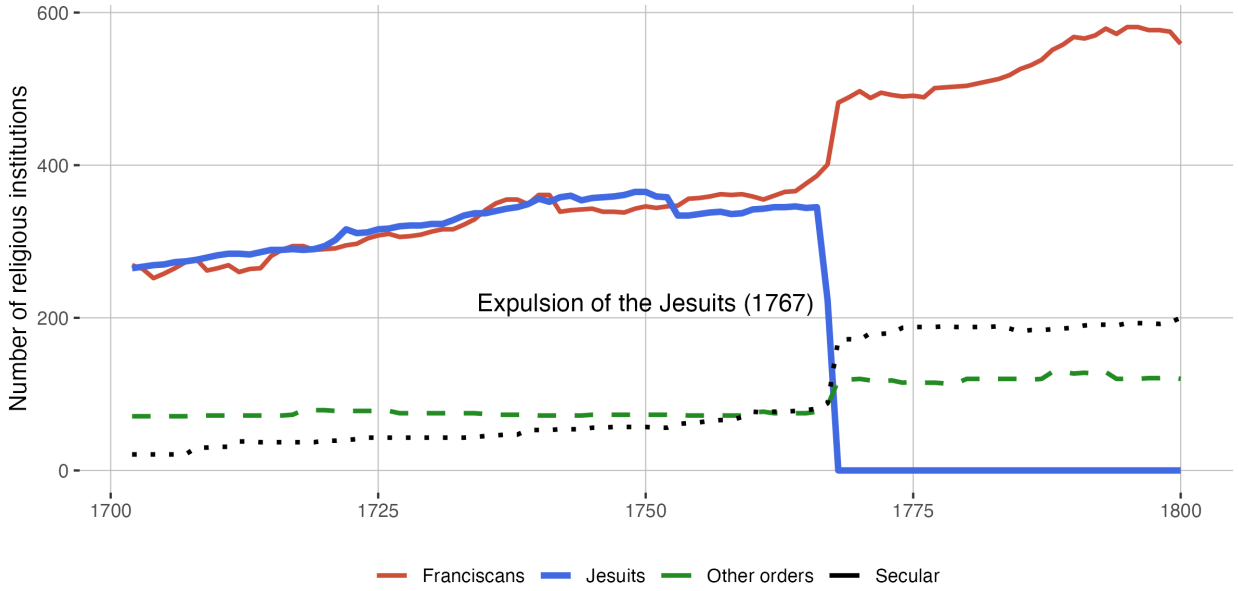
Charles III initially made no move against the Jesuits upon assuming the throne. But after a wave of urban disturbances, he convened a secret extraordinary council under minister Campomanes to investigate. The council concluded that wherever disturbances had occurred, Jesuits had planned or fomented them (Beales 2003, p. 159). Campomanes's memorandum to the king laid out a diagnosis that reads like a description of the organizational threat our theory highlights. It said that the order was "united under a foreign government," it had taken "up arms against the government in South America," it peddled doctrines that could encourage rebellion, and it possessed "external allies" (Beales 2003, pp. 159–160). The recommended response followed directly from this assessment of the Jesuits as a cohesive threat. The king was advised to act "secretly, suddenly and with overwhelming force" (Beales 2003, p. 160). The royal decree implementing the expulsion was delivered in sealed envelopes with instructions not to open them until April 2nd at sunrise, at which point officials were to muster troops, proceed to each Jesuit college, and arrange for the transport of every member to designated ports within twenty-four hours.[15]

Implementation in the colonies followed a similar pattern of speed and military precision (Lynch, 2012, p. 73). Figure A.6 shows that the data on the number of religious institutions per order confirms the speed of the dissolution (data from the HGIS de las Indias; Stangl 2019). There was no preceding decline, and none of the 223 Jesuit institutions recorded in 1767 remained in 1768. The religious institutions seized from the Jesuits were absorbed by the secular clergy, more tightly linked to the monarchy, and other religious orders—mainly the mendicant Franciscans.

Under pressure from the Spanish and French courts, Pope Clement XIV issued a brief suppressing the Society in 1773, extending the dissolution to Catholic states that had not

[15]The decree is available at: `https://www.loc.gov/resource/llhsp.llhsp_laws_03-00110-00124/`

Figure A.6: Expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish Empire




This figure depicts the number of religious institutions administered by religious orders and the secular (non-monastic) Church. Source: HGIS de las Indias (Stangl 2019).

yet acted on their own— most importantly, the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy. Maria Theresa made no effort to save the order, and insisted that Jesuit property pass to the state (Beales 2003, p. 166). In our data, the result is clear: nearly all of the 140 monastery closures recorded in the 1770s are Jesuit houses, concentrated in 1773.

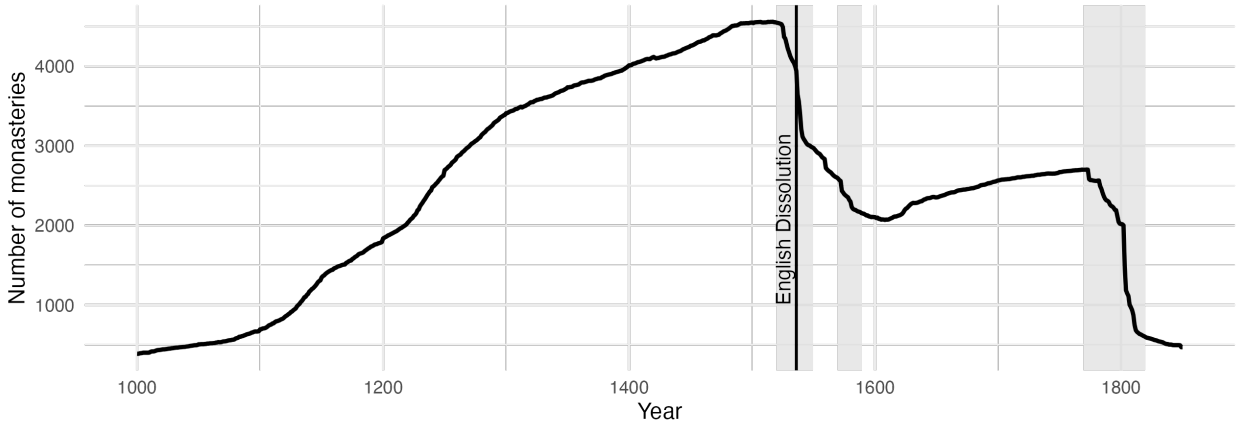
All told, the dissolution of the Society of Jesus exemplifies several features of our argument. First, Jesuit expulsions were, above all, acts of state-making by monarchs against an organization they perceived as incompatible with centralized authority. As Beales (2003, p. 166) concludes, the principal motive of rulers who expelled the Jesuits "was to enhance their absolute authority as against what they saw as an arrogant and overmighty body that owed allegiance to a foreign ruler and apparently did not scruple to foster rebellion when its interests were threatened." Second, the historical record confirms that these expulsions were comprehensive and executed with remarkable speed and coordination. Third, the episode illustrates the importance of translocal ties within the broader monastic network.

Because the Jesuits' relationships with older orders and the secular Church had deteriorated so severely by the eighteenth century, their suppression triggered no wider religious mobilization.

### A.4.2 Decades with the Largest Number of Dissolutions

In section 4, we introduce a sample of monasteries across European regions from 1000 to 1850. In 1517, when the number of monasteries reached its peak, we observe 4559 monasteries; in 1850, only 469 remain. The fall is temporally concentrated: in the 85 decades in our time-series, the number of monasteries only falls in 17.

Figure A.7: Number of monasteries in our sample over time




In Table A.10, we show the ten decades with the largest drops in the number of monasteries and their main associated political event. These decades account for 92% of the total decline in monasteries between 1517 and 1850 (the ten decades are shaded in grey in Figure A.7). We present a short narrative for each decade below. In all decades, we find evidence for a major role of political authorities —most often a central state— in initiating and carrying out dissolutions. We show that dissolutions took place in short time spans, typically following a political or religious rupture that made comprehensive action feasible. Historical evidence suggests that those who commanded the dissolutions

believed that they should be carried out quickly, and understood dissolutions as an action that would empower secular authorities and weaken an organization with an autonomous source of legitimacy and foreign allegiances. In some cases, historians mention that rulers were concerned about resistance from religious orders and communities backing them up, and that confiscations were accelerated after rebellions—as it happened in England.

Table A.10: Decades with the largest net declines in the number of monasteries

| First Year | Last Year | Number at start | Number at end | Net change | Associated historical episode |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1800 | 1809 | 2016 | 936 | -1080 | French Occupation of West Germany and German Mediatisation |
| 1530 | 1539 | 4179 | 3407 | -772 | The Dissolution of the Monasteries in England and Denmark |
| 1520 | 1529 | 4548 | 4223 | -325 | The Protestant Reformation |
| 1790 | 1799 | 2296 | 2022 | -274 | The French Revolution |
| 1810 | 1819 | 875 | 605 | -270 | French Occupation of Germany and German Mediatisation, continued |
| 1570 | 1579 | 2588 | 2320 | -268 | The Dutch Revolt |
| 1780 | 1789 | 2559 | 2309 | -250 | Joseph II's suppressions in the Habsburg Empire |
| 1540 | 1549 | 3210 | 2980 | -230 | The Protestant Reformation, continued |
| 1580 | 1589 | 2300 | 2153 | -147 | The Dutch Revolt, continued |
| 1770 | 1779 | 2700 | 2560 | -140 | The Last Jesuit Expulsion |

#### A.4.2.1 1800-1809: French Occupation of West Germany and German Mediatisation

The 1800-1809 decade saw the largest drop in the number of monasteries in our data: 1,080 monasteries (from 2,016 in 1800 to 936 in 1809). Most of these dissolutions (92 percent) come from the south and west German states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Hessen. In these five states, 75% of the monasteries disappeared. Moreover, 72% of the dissolutions in this decade happened in just two years—1802 and 1803.

The first dissolutions in the decade happened in German territories occupied by French revolutionary armies (Beales 2003). At the same time, the HRE engaged in a process of ter-

ritorial redistribution and consolidation referred to as the German "mediatisation." This process included the secularization of most ecclesiastical polities. The Imperial Recess of 1803 formalized these changes and explicitly allowed for the dissolution of monasteries, which were, as the clause read, "left at the free and full disposition of the respective sovereigns." Beales (2003, p. 287-289) insists that "the theoretical inspiration came not from Voltaire or even Muratori but from the advocates of state sovereignty."

**A.4.2.2 1530-1539: The Dissolution of the Monasteries in England and Denmark** We have discussed the Dissolution of the Monasteries in England in the main text. The second region with the most closures in 1530-39 was Denmark, where almost every monastery disappeared during this decade. Christian III, a Protestant, was elected king in 1533 and emerged victorious in a civil war by 1536. He immediately introduced reforms that some historians describe as a revolution (Lockhart 2007, p. 49). Consistent with our prediction of punctuated change, almost half of the decade's closures happened in 1537 alone. The changes included a complete prohibition of the mendicant orders. The larger rural monasteries were technically allowed to survive, but in Evangelical form and under royal administration, which Jakobsen (2021, p. 12) argues "...only meant that the financial draining of their manorial wealth continued at increased speed."

These religious reforms contributed greatly to the centralization of royal authority. According to Lockhart (2007, p. 32-33) "royal landholdings more than tripled, and in Norway they increased sevenfold, and the king owned close to half of all the land in his realm. Because of the Reformation, the royal house had made the transition from minor landowner to the greatest of all landowners in the realm, and the king now enjoyed economic parity with the entire noble estate."

**A.4.2.3 1520-1529: The Protestant Reformation** The Protestant Reformation is sometimes dated to the publication of the Ninety-Five Theses by Martin Luther in 1517. In this decade, we observe an important drop in the number of monasteries (325 dissolutions). The 1520-1529 decade saw a rapid diffusion of Protestant ideas, which included a denunciation of monasticism. Since this early diffusion was especially successful in small polities of the Holy Roman Empire (such as the free imperial cities), no particular territory in our sample stands out over the rest. However, these smaller dissolution events share relevant characteristics with the larger, royal-led reforms like the English Dissolution. In particular, they were fast, and they resulted in an increase in the power of the secular authorities. Cantoni et al. (2018, Table 2) document significant transfers of church property to territorial lords. With a different dataset, they also document monastery closings, with rates ranging from 32% to 96%.

The largest decrease we observe is in the territory of modern Switzerland, with 53 closures. The years 1526 and 1529 stand out with 13 and 31 closings, respectively. In this decade, cities such as Bern, Basel, and Zurich officially converted to Protestantism, and their municipal governments expropriated monastic property. For example, "Geneva's Reformation was therefore born of an attempt to assert the autonomy of a new city-state. The extent of Reformed Geneva's territory was augmented by secularized monastic lands and lands of the deposed bishop" (Murdock 2017). In Zurich, "The reform measures carried out in close collaboration between the city council and the leading evangelical clergy... established an evangelical, municipal church: ... monasteries and canonic chapters were successively dissolved and their assets placed at the disposition of the council" (Kaufmann and Crawford 2023, p. 94). The second largest decrease we observe is in Hesse, with 46 closures (33 in 1528). Cohn (1987, p. 81) calls its ruler, Philip "...the vanguard of aggressive confiscators." From this confiscation, Philip received 40% of the monastic wealth. Gorski (2003, p. 128) notes that Philip paired the seizures with a network of

"common chests" that placed poor relief under magistrate control, so the dissolution of the mendicant houses went together with the secularization of the functions they had performed. The annual revenues from these properties accounted for a seventh of the total state revenues (Cantoni et al. 2018, p. 2057).

Other monastery closures in this decade, however, do not squarely conform to our theoretical argument. For example, some of the drop may be attributed to the Peasants' War (1524-26), when monasteries were destroyed (Roper 2021, p. 2). As we note in the main text, not all monastic closures were state-led or centralized. However, episodes of monastery destruction by townsfolk during religious upheaval should, to the extent that such contentious action is decentralized, produce less comprehensive, or at least more localized, dissolution patterns in our quantitative data.

**A.4.2.4 1790-1799: The French Revolution** Immediately after the French Revolution, in the 1790s, we observe a drop of 274 monasteries. The territories of Belgium, France, and the Netherlands encompass 79% of these dissolutions. The first two saw their numbers fall to almost zero. Beales (2003, p. 231) calls the actions taken by the French revolutionaries "far more drastic than any country had ever taken against monasteries, except in the name of Reformation." In November 1789, all the property of the French Church was put at the disposal of the nation; in February 1790, all religious orders that required lifelong vows were dissolved; the remaining orders had been dissolved by the end of 1792. Following revolutionary victories, Belgium was incorporated into France in 1795. Just as in France years earlier, the administrator sent by the French Directory, after initial hesitation about potential popular sympathy towards monasteries, inventoried their assets in 1796 and suppressed them and seized their property in 1797 (Beales 2003, p. 272-273).

Consistent with this timeline, in our data, the bulk of dissolutions in French lands happened between 1791 and 1792, while most of the dissolutions in Belgium happened

in 1797 and 1798. Both episodes display the pattern of punctuated suppression central to our theory. The Belgian case is particularly illustrative: the French administrator's initial hesitation, which Beales explicitly links to his awareness that monasteries "enjoyed the sympathy of the population," reflects a rational calculation about resistance potential. Once he received orders from Paris, he moved comprehensively. The sequence is what our theory predicts: a ruler who perceives organized popular support for monasteries responds not with gradual attrition but with rapid, total dissolution.

**A.4.2.5 1810-1819: French Occupation of Germany and German Mediatisation, continued** In the early 1810s, the French expanded eastward. In this decade, we observe a drop of 270 monasteries, with 79% of this drop concentrated in 1810-1813. The top four regions by number of dissolutions are North Rhine-Westphalia, Poland, Lower Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt. These four regions account for two-thirds of the drop. For historical analysis, see the account of the 1800-1809 decade.

**A.4.2.6 1570-1579: The Dutch Revolt** This decade saw a drop of 268 monasteries, with 207 concentrated in the Netherlands. More than half of this drop was in 1573. The relevant conflict is the Eighty Years' War, or the Dutch Revolt, a conflict between Spain, which ruled over the Low Countries, and Dutch rebels. Protestant (especially Calvinist) teachings had spread widely in the Low Countries, and iconoclastic outbreaks in 1566-67 prefigured later violence. Philip II's harsh repression (1566-71) had further radicalized the population, and by 1572, the Low Countries were in open revolt. With the Beggar takeover of the towns of Holland and Zeeland, monasteries and convents were invaded and ransacked and their communities forced to flee to Catholic territory (Kooi 2022, p. 124).

Protestant authorities immediately seized ecclesiastical institutions and secularized church property. According to Parker (2008, p. 191): "In 1572 the States of Holland and

the States of Zeeland became the first provincial bodies to begin appropriating the assets of the Catholic Church; other provinces followed suit soon thereafter." Tracy (2007, p. 109-113) underscores the importance of the sale of monastic property for financing the rebel cause, first by the States General and afterwards by municipal governments.

Our theory has more explanatory power for large territorial states than confederations of autonomous provinces, like the Netherlands. The Eighty Years' War pitted the Spanish government against a diverse group of Dutch rebels. Still, the broad strokes of the episode show some similarities with our main case. Monasteries' riches helped to strengthen a rebel government. While some monastery closures may be explained by iconoclast frenzies, it is notable that the peak (in 1573) did not occur during any of these outbreaks (dated by Israel 1995, p. 415 in 1566, 1576-8, and 1580-1). Rather, they occurred at the earliest point of institutionalization of the rebel movement (Israel 1995, p. 179).

**A.4.2.7 1780-1789: Joseph II's Suppressions in the Habsburg Empire** This decade saw a drop of 250 monasteries. The bulk of these dissolutions in our sample happened in the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy: the current regions of Czechia and Austria alone encompass 75% of the drop. They mostly happened in the five years between 1783 and 1787. The reform incited a rebellion in Belgium, revealing the ability of monasteries to foster resistance.

Joseph II (r. 1780-1789) initiated the reform. He was committed to the primacy of the state and to the principles of the Enlightenment. According to Beales (2003, p. 179), the suppression of monasteries in the Austrian Monarchy "formed part of a much broader programme of church reform which included the limitation of papal authority over the Church, the curbing of its wealth..." The dissolution was therefore intended to reduce the influence of a foreign power, the papacy, in Austrian lands.

While the reform was broad and relatively punctuated, it targeted monasteries selec-

tively. Joseph dissolved the contemplative orders —those with no educational or charitable function — swiftly and completely, while the remaining two-thirds were intervened rather than dissolved outright: their translocal ties were severed, their funds tapped for a pension fund, and their internal organization reformed by royal decree. Most of the appropriated funds went to parochial work and pensions for monks and nuns, giving the reform a welfare rationale that distinguished it from the more nakedly fiscal episodes in England or Denmark. Interestingly, the first step of the reform involved abolishing organizational ties between the monasteries. Joseph II made sure monasteries were "stripped of their extra-territorial character" by abolishing "all the connexions that existed between houses in his lands and superiors or monasteries in other states" (Beales 2003, p. 192). This supports our claim that the *networked* structure of religious orders was considered by rulers.

While the reforms were implemented without inconveniences in the Central Lands, Belgium resisted them. By 1789, the monastic suppressions hardly started. As a response to the delays and opposition from the monasteries and from the Council of Brabant, Joseph annulled ancient liberties and rights and attempted rapid enforcement. The reaction was the Brabant Revolution, which led to the expulsion of Austrian troops from Belgium. The role of the monasteries in this rebellion is clear. According to Beales (2003, p. 223), the abbots and their monasteries "had lands and resources outside the Austrian Netherlands, wealth sufficient to fund an army, an assured political position as leaders of the First Estates of the provinces and a fund of goodwill among the population." While the government defeated the rebellion in the next year, the monastic reforms were largely backtracked: "the abbeys of Belgium had the major role in raising and funding an army and a rebellion that drove out the armies of the emperor and smashed his reforming programme" (Beales 2003, p. 223-224).

The Belgian case thus illustrates what our theory predicts when suppression is not

swift and comprehensive enough: monasteries that retained their organizational resources (in this case, land, wealth, and political position in the provincial Estates) had the capacity to fund an army and reverse the reforms entirely.

**A.4.2.8 1540-1549: The Protestant Reformation, continued** In this decade, we see a drop of 230 monasteries. The top region is England, where the last 35 monasteries were dissolved in 1540. The regions of Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Poland, Saxony, and Baden-Württemberg follow with between 30 and 20 closings. The Catholic regions of France, Austria, and Belgium register no net losses in this decade. These numbers reflect the continuing expansion of the Reformation, albeit without the fury of the 1520s or the massive dissolutions carried out by large states in the 1530s.

If the 1520s established the theological-legal machinery for expropriation, the 1540s saw the progressive removal of legal obstacles. The Catholic Church had resisted early confiscations by filing restitution claims at the *Reichskammergericht*, the highest court of the HRE. As Ocker (2006, p. 120) documents, these suits rarely restored properties, but they kept confiscations formally illegal and hindered legitimation by default. In 1542, the Schmalkaldic League won a temporary suspension of the court, then declared it incompetent in all matters. The Diets of Nürnberg (1543) and Speyer (1544) confirmed the suspension and recognized the League's reformation of church property until a final settlement — amounting to de facto recognition of Protestantism within the Empire. Only then did some rulers, such as the Elector of Saxony, place confiscated properties under their own chancellery (Cantoni et al. 2018, p. 2053). The process culminated after the Schmalkaldic War (1546–47) and the Peace of Augsburg (1555), which sanctioned the secularization of clerical institutions and legalized prior property transfers.

The German experience in this decade provides useful counterpoints to the patterns observed in England and Denmark. On the one hand, it illustrates forms of peaceful re-

sistance to dissolutions, based on legal process and not on rebellion. On the other hand, it shows how confiscations unfolded in more fragmented contexts. Ocker (2006, p. 9-11) emphasizes that confiscations in the Empire varied so much from city to city and territory to territory that they cannot be called a dissolution of the monasteries in the English sense. The progression from inventory to confiscation was often slow, sometimes never completed, and sometimes reversed; many monasteries were not dissolved but simply faded away by attrition. Hesse and Württemberg, where confiscations happened decisively like in Denmark and England, were exceptions (Ocker 2006).

**A.4.2.9 1580-1589: The Dutch Revolt, continued** This decade saw 147 monastery closures, 123 of which happened in the Netherlands. Of these 123, 85 happened in 1580-1582. This period is also part of the early stages of the Eighty Years' War, already described in our account of the 1570s. The early 1580s saw both a new outbreak of iconoclasm (Israel 1995, p. 145) and government efforts to suppress Catholicism. The dissolutions from this decade may also reflect the policies of some municipal governments that took more gradual approaches. For example: "Unlike the case in Haarlem, the Utrecht city government, appropriating church property in the early 1580s, took a much more gradual approach to secularizing prebends, because local noble families held them as benefices for their sons..." (Parker 2008, p. 195).

**A.4.2.10 1770-1779: The Last Jesuit Expulsion** In this decade, we see a drop of 140 monasteries, of which 129 are Jesuit. Almost all of them are concentrated in the year 1773, the year the papacy suppressed the order. See the section on the expulsion of the Jesuits above.

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