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Introduction: petitions and petitioning in historical perspective

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Citation

Huzzey, R., Janse, M. J., Miller, H., Oddens, J., & Waddell, B. (2024). Introduction: petitions and petitioning in historical perspective. In *Petitions and petitioning in Europe and North America* (pp. 1-30). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

doi:10.5871/bacad/9780197267721.003.0001

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4212662>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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Petitions and Petitioning in Europe and North America: From the Late Medieval Period to the Present

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<https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267721.001.0001>

Published online: 19 October 2024 Published in print: 20 June 2024

Online ISBN: 9780198930976

Print ISBN: 9780197267721

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CHAPTER

Introduction: Petitions and Petitioning in Historical Perspective

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<https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267721.003.0001> Pages 1–30

Published: June 2024

Abstract

This introduction charts the growth of a vibrant but fragmented field of research on petitions and petitioning across a wide range of different chronological and geographical contexts. The development of this literature has various causes, including dissatisfaction with established narratives regarding the 'rise' of democracy prompting an examination of non-electoral political practices; the emergence of e-petitions in the 21st century; and petitions' utility for recovering the voices of groups – such as women, colonised or indigenous peoples, or refugees – marginalised within the official historical record. Mirroring the book's structure, the introduction considers definition, chronology, and impact in turn. In defining petitions as a genre, it outlines various typologies before analysing the key elements that have historically characterised petitions. Petitioning's history over the *longue durée*, it suggests, includes moments of transformation and rapid change mapping onto a broader story of social and political modernisation, but these exist alongside deep continuities that remain remarkably stable across long periods and regime changes. Finally, petitions have mattered, regardless of specific successes or failures, because of their many uses for both petitioners and authority. In particular contexts, petitioning has had the potential, sometimes realised, to catalyse sudden, unpredictable upheavals in politics, society, and the state.

Keywords: petitions, petitioning, political culture, representation, authority, power, collective action, protest, democracy, state formation

Subject: European History, History of the Americas, Social and Cultural History, Political Methodology

IN 1852, FOLLOWING a public meeting, the women of Sheffield petitioned the UK House of Commons against a proposed plan to form militias. The petition bluntly informed MPs that 'we have for too long seen the demoralising effects of taking our children and husbands from their peaceful homes' before declaiming that 'war is detestable in any shape'. If Parliament assented to the government's scheme, it was tantamount to mounting 'an aggressive war on the people of this country', particularly their 'hearths and liberties'.¹ The

petition, one of a million or so sent to the Commons from 1780 to 1918, was a powerful example of the ways in which petitioning enabled unenfranchised women to mobilise a potent gendered rhetoric that combined an emphasis on their role as custodians of the family, with an increasing appeal to rights and liberties.² Removed from its specific geographical and historical context, the petition stands as but one example of an important and ubiquitous practice with a long lineage, which is the subject of this volume.

From classical antiquity to the emergence of e-petitions in the early 21st century, petitions and petitioning have been ubiquitous practices in myriad societies and polities. Across many centuries and many territories, these practices have constituted a persistent channel of communication between rulers and ruled, monarchs and their subjects, representatives and the represented, and states and citizens. Petitions have proved to be a malleable tool for those subject to different forms of power, both formal and informal. The specific characteristics of petitions, as well as their ubiquity and longevity, mean that a broader study of this phenomenon is not just important in terms of particular periods, places, or polities. It is also crucial for scholars seeking to understand power and authority, representation and representative claims, collective action and repertoires of popular contention, popular politics, political culture, state formation, institutions, citizenship and participation, and democracy and democratisation. To explain the scope and objective of this volume, we will begin by outlining the body of research to which it contributes.

Research on petitioning published before the 1990s typically used petitions as source material or a theme to address particular questions within an existing field of study. Not surprisingly, given that these works addressed distinct regions and literatures, scholars isolated the specific, rather than the broader phenomenon of petitioning, and rarely drew comparisons to form a coherent body of scholarship on petitions.³ Since then petitions and related genres have more often been studied as practices in their own right. The project led by Cecilia Nubola and Andreas Würzler on petitions in late medieval and early modern Europe produced a series of edited collections published in both German and Italian in the 2000s.⁴ This project fed directly into a much-cited special issue of the *International Review of Social History* (2001), edited by Lex Heerma van Voss, on *Petitions in Social History*.⁵ In the British context, in the same decade, the York Medieval Petitions project traced petitioning in the remaking of England's monarchy and Parliament, while Mark Knights and David Zaret examined the role of petitioning in forging a public sphere in the 17th century.⁶ Meanwhile, Charles Tilly's historical sociology of popular contention in Europe highlighted petitions as part of a broader repertoire of tactics that forged the modern social movement.⁷ Since the 1980s, scholars of constitutional law in the United States have become increasingly interested in the historical development of the Anglo-American right to petition, as they have sought to rehabilitate petitioning as 'a robust, essential, and institutionalized democratic practice'.⁸

Building on this earlier work, a burgeoning scholarly interest in petitions and petitioning has expanded in the last decade, in part thanks to major national research projects. Historical studies on petitions, or in which they have been central to the analysis, include important monographs on early modern England, Ireland, and Scotland;⁹ early modern Dutch Brazil;¹⁰ the early modern Mediterranean region centred on Venice and Istanbul;¹¹ 19th-century USA, UK, Mexico, Netherlands, and France;¹² early colonial India;¹³ late Ottoman Palestine;¹⁴ and East Germany;¹⁵ as well as studies of contemporary China and earlier dynasties back to the Han.¹⁶ Leading journals in history, law, and the political and social sciences have published articles on petitions and petitioning.¹⁷ A spate of edited volumes and special issues have examined petitions within specific historical contexts, such as South Asia and colonial India, early modern Britain and Scandinavia, the Atlantic world, 19th-century western Europe and America, 19th-century Mexico, late medieval England, and the Holocaust.¹⁸

The dramatic growth of this field of research is only partly explained by the increasing accessibility of digitised historic petitions and related material. In many cases, the transcription or digitisation of these sources have been outputs that have followed, rather than preceded, major research projects.¹⁹ Broader intellectual reasons for the proliferation of work on petitions and petitioning include their utility, as social

historians have long known, as a vital resource for recovering the voices of groups often marginalised within the historical record, such as women, refugees, indigenous or first peoples, and colonised peoples.²⁰ Examinations of petitions and petitioning have also been an attractive means to question established narratives and paradigms. For instance, dissatisfied with traditional narratives of the 'rise' of mass democracy centred on the ballot box, historians and social scientists have increasingly turned to examining the contested history of democracy, and of a much broader range of practices than voting, in challenging older accounts of political 'modernisation'.²¹ A cultural turn in the humanities has encouraged scholars to broaden the concept of 'the political' by attending to languages, cultures, and rituals, bringing different forms of identity, including gender, to bear on their study of the past.²²

p. 6 Hence, rather than adopting a top-down or bottom-up approach, many recent studies have focused on the interactive, dynamic relationship between petitioners and authority. Petitions, French scholars have suggested, were a way of citizens 'facing' the state.²³ Medievalists as well as contemporary scholars of e-petitions have identified 'processes' as crucial for understanding the relationship between petitioners, authority, and political culture.²⁴ Writing of the 19th-century United States, Daniel Carpenter has suggested that petitions allow us to rethink institutions as 'encounters' between citizens and government.²⁵ The interactions between petitioners and authority might also be conceptualised as a form of ongoing negotiation. In his study of early modern Scandinavia, Thomas Munck has observed that petitions reveal the 'complicated negotiation of power within an absolute monarchy'.²⁶ Scholars studying e-petitions have noted that they provide a form of 'linkage' between citizens and representative institutions.²⁷ However conceptualised, the point is that studying petitionary interactions allows us to cut across different categories (such as elite politics and histories of protest), fields (such as political history and social history), and topics (such as institutions and social movements) in ways that provide fruitful new perspectives on the past and present.

p. 7 In shaping the workshops that forged this volume, we sought to consolidate and develop comparison over the *longue durée* by confining the contributions to roughly 700 years and to a certain portion of the world, namely Europe and North America. These chronological and geographical limits mean that the following chapters share antecedents in petitions of the Graeco-Roman-Mediterranean world, imparting derivative traditions and etymologies, as well as later cross-fertilisation, between European states.²⁸ However, as this introductory chapter and its footnotes make clear, we have sought to learn from research into forms of petitioning outside the scope of the volume. Our geographical focus provides coherent and related case studies to trace comparative developments across time, in fields with a concentration of researchers studying petitions. At the same time, this risks isolating them from a broader family of petitioning traditions and innovations. Incorporating work on Jamaica, Canada, and the United States of America allows some of the following chapters to trace the descent of petitioning in societies formed from the European ↵ colonisation of North America. However, we hope that this volume will stimulate further comparisons, incorporating systems of petitioning developed in other regions, such as East Asia, West Africa, and South Asia, as much as their influence on subsequent colonial regimes. The chronological and geographical scope of this volume may then provide a foundation, not the definition, of further comparison of petitions and delineation of influences between societies, including the exchange within continental and intercontinental empires.²⁹

p. 8 Beyond opening up new approaches to the historical exercise and contest of power in European and North American polities, the further significance of this volume lies in addressing important topics within social and political science, as two specific examples demonstrate. First, given the focus on the impact of technology on politics, and the trend towards declining turnouts and party memberships in many mature democracies, scholars of contemporary politics have increasingly focused on e-petitions as a form of public engagement and participation.³⁰ ↵ Consolidating and distilling a broad literature, this volume provides a necessary historical context to recent accounts of e-petitions, in particular, by drawing attention to the

wider uses of petitioning beyond the formal, institutional settings that have been the typical unit of analysis in such studies. Second, social scientists studying collective action have tended to categorise petitioning as merely one activity within a wider repertoire of contention,³¹ or presented it as a rather conventional and low-risk one.³² A historical perspective suggests that these assumptions need revising because petitions and petitioning have often underpinned and facilitated many other forms of collective action, including more direct forms of protest. For these reasons, this volume will have important implications for social and political scientists, as well as historians.

The significance of this collection lies in developing a new definitional clarity, longer chronological frameworks, and detailed studies with the ambition of consolidating and advancing this vibrant field. Making the topic accessible to scholars across the humanities and social sciences may support further research on these polities and also offer a platform for comparison with other portions of the globe with distinct practices analogous to petitioning. Largely adopting a historical perspective, this book is divided into three sections that probe why, when, and in what circumstances petitions and petitioning mattered, in chapters offering conceptual, chronological, and contextual studies. Mirroring this structure, the rest of our introduction seeks first to define petitions, then to outline key trends over the *longue durée*, and finally to examine the effects of petitions and petitioning.

Definitions

One of the challenges of conceptualising petitions is crafting a definition that is both inclusive and distinctive enough. As Miguel da Cruz has put it, it is important to acknowledge the ‘variations by which people have petitioned through time, from secretive court appeals and poor relief requests to modern, public, political mass petitions’, while also identifying ‘common features and historical continuities’.³³ If we imagine possible definitions to be on a spectrum, the most inclusive definition would be simply that (1) petitions are appeals to power-holders. At the other extreme of the spectrum, a much more distinctive definition would be that (2) petitions are written, signed, addressed and submitted, deferential, standardised requests, to established authorities. Other scholars have provided a host of different definitions (Table 0.1) that highlight particular elements of a petition. Most present-day petitions and many historical petitions do not meet all the criteria dictated by the second definition above, but this definition is valuable in clarifying the broader phenomenon with which this volume is concerned. Accordingly, we will separately discuss the different elements of the second definition with reference to historical and contemporary petitioning practices.

Table 0.1 Five definitions of petitions

Lex Heerma van Voss (2001)	Demands for a favour, or for the redressing of an injustice, directed to some established authority.
Cecilia Nubola (2001)	Letters (or documentation) that single citizens, or organised and recognised groups, sent to the state authorities requesting grace, favours, or privileges, or calling attention to injustices and abuses.
Gwilym Dodd (2007)	Written entreaties presented in a formal manner to a higher authority.
Griet Vermeesch (2012)	A wide variety of letters, written by (groups of) subjects to rulers or administrative bodies, describing certain needs and soliciting certain actions.
Jean Gabriel Contamin (2013)	Protest texts that are intended to be signed by a number of persons, at least one of whom has not the opportunity to amend it.

Sources: L. Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction', in L. Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, Supplement 9 of *IRSH*, 46 (2001), 1–10 (p. 1); C. Nubola, 'Supplications between Politics and Justice: The Northern and Southern Italian States in the Early Modern Age', in Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, pp. 35–56, (p. 35); G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1; G. Vermeesch, 'Professional Lobbying in Eighteenth-Century Brussels: The Role of Agents in Petitioning the Central Government Institutions in the Habsburg Netherlands', *Journal of Early Modern History* 16 (2012), 95–119 (p. 99); J.-G. Contamin, 'Petitions', in D. A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, published online, 14 January 2013, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm151> (accessed 17 January 2024).

Written

p. 10 Most contemporary scholars understand petitions as written texts. Yet many examples from medieval and early modern contexts emphasise that petitioning (or supplicating) could be understood as appearing before an authority and performing a sequence of ritual (speech) acts.³⁴ One such act may have been to present a written request in order for the authority to have documentary evidence of this encounter with the petitioner, but this was not a compulsory element, and many requests were made only in verbal form. In later periods, orally transmitted requests to authorities continued, but in many cases we seem to have stopped thinking of these requests as petitions.

Signed

A quintessential feature of contemporary petitions is that they bear the names or signatures of the petitioners. Petitions are collective, and the very point is to collect as many names as possible. In many languages other than English, versions of the word 'petition' are reserved for such collective petitions.³⁵ However, a multiplicity of subscribers is certainly no requirement for a document to be a petition. On the contrary, in the historical record, petitions with only one or a few signatures probably make up the majority. They may only bear the names of the persons making a request, or of an intermediary writing the petition on their behalf, with no canvassing for additional signatures having taken place.

While the submission of written petitions seems to be almost as old as writing itself, signatures have only become a standard feature in the early modern period. Before the 17th century, when literacy levels were

much lower, petitions were not as a rule undersigned by the petitioner. Instead, the identity of the petitioner appeared from the text of the petition – which was often written by a scribe³⁶ – or from the fact that they presented it in person. Without the names of the petitioners written onto the petition or appended to it, authorities did not always know who had petitioned them. This could be to the advantage of petitioners, who thus could claim to be a larger group than they actually were, or make bold demands for which they could not be held personally accountable. It was for this reason, and for reasons of bureaucratic efficiency, that authorities might choose to make signatures mandatory, requiring those unable to write their name to place a mark and have it countersigned by someone else. Although the sign manual (or a substitute mark) gradually displaced the aristocratic seal as the legal personification of an individual, some forms of petitioning still permitted names to be printed or added on the remote authority of another person.³⁷

p. 11 **Deferential**

Petitions typically reflect a vertical relationship between the petitioner and the addressee. When a petition contains a request – as most petitions do – this implies a hierarchical, unequal relationship: the addressee is in a position to grant something to the petitioner.³⁸ Moreover, historically, petitions have emphasised the difference in power between petitioner and addressee: the petitioner appeals to the authority – or, as has been argued, to the jurisdiction³⁹ – of the addressee, and in exchange hopes for their request to be favourably considered.⁴⁰

The vertical relationship between an authority and petitioners has often been expressed through deferential forms, such as the submissiveness of those physically presenting their petitions to its recipient or, more often, expressed in the formulaic language of the petition, such as ‘your humble petitioners’. Formulaic expressions of deference have often become standard elements: in many historic collections of petitions, every one contains the same, or similar phrases. When this happens, the original meaning of such phrases is diluted through repetition and they are more of a formality. Paradoxically, the formulaic phrases that imply a minimum degree of deference can thus lower the threshold for transgressive or even subversive content.⁴¹

Because formulaic expressions of deference are often clichés of the genre, it becomes all the more significant when they are omitted, such as during moments of revolution.⁴² At such junctures, new formulaic phrases, in which the petitioner(s) addressed authority on more egalitarian terms, were coined. Even so, the underlying unequal power relations between petitioner(s) and authority did not change, and nor usually did the bureaucratic procedure by which the petition was handled. When revolutionary regimes were short-lived, traditional expressions of deference usually returned. Contemporary petitions typically lack expressions of deference, and tend to be commanding rather than submissive.

p. 12 **Addressed and Submitted**

A universal characteristic of a petition may be that it has, like other epistolary forms, an addressee. Petitions in standardised formats typically mention the addressee at the top of the text. Informal petitions sometimes lack a formal statement of the addressee, but instead the addressee may be directly addressed, in the second person, in the body of the text. Historically, most petitions were submitted to their addressee: by handing the document to the addressee in person; through an official; by sending by post; or, latterly, through e-petition websites. Petitions can also be submitted making use of the services of an intermediary; in some times and places this was even made obligatory by the authorities.⁴³

Over time, it is possible to detect the growth of the expressive and representative function of petition-signing, as some petitions circulated primarily to reach a wider audience, or increasingly expressed the signatories’ beliefs, with the addressee’s response itself of secondary importance.⁴⁴ In such cases, these petitions can appear as standalone publications, such as pamphlets, or appear in newspapers, in which case

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they have much in common with open letters.⁴⁵ At the same time, individual and collective appeals on questions of policy have often taken the form of letters addressed and submitted to politicians. Appeals with private requests for redress, as well as public concerns on law-making, are sometimes termed ‘citizen letters’ when directed to individual legislators rather than formally to a legislature as an institution.⁴⁶ In fact, the boundaries between petitioning and the letters addressed or forms submitted to authorities may be the hardest to identify. Amongst social historians of England, paupers’ petitions are sometimes distinguished from the familiar salutation and genre of personal letters that contained substantively identical requests for relief.⁴⁷ It is very difficult to draw a sharp border between petitioning and other forms of ‘writing upwards’, as the wider genre of the weak writing to the powerful has been termed, and they often adopted the purposes, and sometimes acquired the designation, of petitions.⁴⁸

Standardised

Petitions have often been characterised as formal texts with a standardised format, following the structure of ancient oratory and containing formulaic expressions and other conventions, such as the use of the third person.⁴⁹ Besides their content, the material form of petitions can also be standardised: in certain times, places, or archival collections, for instance, all petitions have been written onto stamped paper or have a uniform layout. Whereas stamped paper for taxation purposes has sometimes been a requirement for petitions,⁵⁰ official rules for how petitions should be drawn up have historically been rarer. However, even where authorities did not officially impose a standard format for petitions, conventional formats emerged nonetheless for reasons of scribal and bureaucratic efficiency. In many countries, writing manuals were available that provided model petitions.⁵¹

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The extent to which a document needs to meet certain formal characteristics before we can consider it a petition is more a matter of historiographical convention than of legal requirements. Many written requests from the poor blurred different forms and genres.⁵² In archival collections we may find formal petitions alongside informal requests written in the first person or using idiosyncratic language. In many cases, authorities considered all legible requests, including informal petitions that lacked formulaic phrases but remained standardised in other respects.⁵³ Archival series of informal petitions often have many features in common, which implies that even if such documents were not drawn up by experienced scribes, petitioners still had access to networks in which new informal conventions developed, were transmitted, and crystallised.⁵⁴

Over the course of the modern era, petitions have gradually lost their formulaic features and adopted freer forms of expression, especially in publicly representing opinions. The e-petition of the 21st century is standardised less by political custom than by the requirements of the websites on which it is published, whether hosted by a state or private providers.⁵⁵ By contrast, states and bureaucracies have channelled many instrumental requests, such as for welfare, into application forms that were historically articulated in petitions.⁵⁶

Request

To petition implies making a request. The very word ‘petition’, which is derived from the Latin verb *petere* (‘seek’, ‘beg’), seems to suggest as much.⁵⁷ While many historic petitions contain recognisable requests, there are also less clear-cut cases. As mentioned above, a petition may have all the formulaic conventions of a deferential request, but its illocutionary meaning may be that of a demand or a command. Indeed, on occasion petitioners may only thinly mask the fact that their petition is meant to be imperative rather than supplicatory.

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A request and a demand at least have in common that the goal is for their addressee to take action, but what if this is not the main aim of petitioners? Petitions can serve many purposes other than triggering policy decisions, such as setting the political agenda, informing or mobilising the public, recruiting supporters, or obtaining the personal details of the subscribers.⁵⁸ Often petitioners did not expect their requests to be granted, but most of these petitions were still formulated as requests. There are, however, forms of subscriptional (or name-signing) culture, such as 'loyal' addresses, that express support for an authority rather than make formal requests, and in some cases were actively solicited by governments seeking popular endorsement (or the appearance of it).⁵⁹ Historians have usually considered ↳ addresses as petitions, or at least a closely related genre, because in practice it is difficult to distinguish between both types of texts: addresses have often followed the petitionary format and in such cases were considered and archived by authorities as such. In the present, e-petitions are sometimes used to convey gratitude or political support. In this sense, addresses or expressions of support can be regarded as requests for action in terms of maintaining the status quo or continuing with current policies. Historically, there were also related forms of subscriptional culture such as covenants, bonds, or declarations, in which signatories were bound together in common cause, but which were unattached to a request to authority.⁶⁰

Established Authority

Today, some non-governmental websites allow individuals and groups to publish petitions online without (directly) submitting them to the recipients they address. This is the digital equivalent of an open public letter or a declaration containing a signatory list but not directed to a particular authority. Individuals starting e-petitions on third-party web platforms such as change.org or 38degrees.org.uk can address them to corporations and non-governmental organisations, as well as to formal political institutions, or may not specify the immediate target of the demand.

While petitions without a specific addressee seem to be mostly a recent phenomenon, there are many historical examples of petitions addressed to bodies other than formal political institutions. In early modern times, the boards of many semi-public corporations such as churches and guilds, as well as trading companies, received petitions.⁶¹ Moreover, large numbers of petitions have been addressed to individual power-holders, ranging from great kings to small lords. While individual office-holders can of course be established authorities, many people supplicated these power-holders as potential patrons or leaders of political factions, rather than in their official capacity.⁶² A key difference between the petition and other forms of interaction or communication between people and power-holders is perhaps the expectation of a response, or what has been called the 'norm of receptivity' shared by petitioners and petitioned alike.⁶³

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Ultimately, what makes petitions challenging to define is that they have changed over time, but so gradually that they can still be regarded as one phenomenon, even if following distinct heritages within particular European societies or their North American offshoots. Yet petitions have also changed so profoundly that a highly deferential, ritualised appeal that was orally transmitted to a medieval ruler, and a bold one-sentence statement with a list of signatures published on an e-petitions website and addressed to 'all of us', would seem to have little in common. Finally, petitions are both formal and fixed, regulated by the official or institutional petition systems that receive them, but they also exist as social and political practices outside these contexts. This explains why petitions have been an ambiguous, mutable, and unstable form of interaction between authority and those who address it.

Continuities and Transitions

The changing nature of how ‘petitions’ have been defined was merely part of a series of shifts in their role in society since the late medieval period. Petitioning practices and the genre itself were shaped by well-known social and political developments across this period.⁶⁴ Moreover, petitions also contributed to many of these broader changes as people used them in a vast range of ways to attempt to gain redress, shape policy, or change opinion. As this volume demonstrates, looking across different periods that are usually studied in isolation allows us to chart these transformations more clearly, while acknowledging the deep continuities in petitioning that are often missed when we privilege disruption and change.

Traditional narratives of ‘the rise of democracy’ paid little attention to petitioning apart from studies of campaigns that could be linked directly to debates about suffrage and constitutional matters, such as those, in the British context, of the 17th-century Levellers and the 19th-century Chartists. However, more recently historians have shown that petitioning was a vital part of broader changes in the nature of ‘representation’ and ‘public opinion’ over the last 700 years. In England, for example, it contributed to new conceptions of ‘the commons’ in 14th-century parliaments and helped to broaden public debates about political issues in the 17th century.⁶⁵ Likewise, in his study of 19th-century North America, Daniel Carpenter has shown how the process of democratisation was closely associated with, and driven by, an explosion of petitioning.⁶⁶ Historians have also begun to integrate petitioning into histories of ‘state formation’, demonstrating that it could be crucial to the evolution and expansion of institutions of governance from antiquity ↵ onwards.⁶⁷ It was, for instance, a valuable tool for strengthening the authority of the state in both early modern Italy and revolutionary Russia.⁶⁸ A recent survey of early modern Scandinavia has commented that petitioning contributed to a process of ‘state building from below’.⁶⁹ Our grand narratives of social and political change may gain, therefore, from considering petitions as drivers of large-scale transformations rather than as merely indicators of that change.

While this intervention within broader national and international historiographies is important, it also poses a risk for scholars of petitioning. The danger of simply adding petitioning to broader histories of change is that its distinctive features are elided and its particular chronologies are obscured. Given its importance to these sweeping histories, it is vital to understand better the specific chronologies of petitioning itself. Few previous studies have attempted to examine such developments over long periods, but the suggestive existing work, when combined with the new research in this volume, makes it possible to begin to trace these threads. David Zaret has offered a valuable starting point by suggesting that ‘the premodern petition was primarily an instrument of state’ that subsequently developed into a ‘liminal’ mode of political action in the early modern period before becoming an accepted tool of protest in contemporary society.⁷⁰

Zaret’s model, which echoes Tilly’s notion of a shift in repertoires of contention, offers a convenient way to conceptualise how the character of petitioning changed across time rather than assuming a static, all-encompassing definition by suggesting that there was a shift from one petition archetype to another, bridged by an era of overlap and transition. Specifically, for Zaret, each archetype has features that fit with the underlying norms of its associated period. The ‘premodern’ petition, which was ubiquitous across Europe until at least the 17th century, came from an individual or corporate body; was submitted privately and directly; and was expressed in humble, deferential language. By contrast, the ‘modern’ petition, which was common in England at least by the early 19th century, came from masses of individual subscribers, was created and presented publicly, and adopted an assertive or even ‘insurgent’ tone.⁷¹ According to Zaret, the ↵ shift from one to the other included a ‘liminal’ stage that emerged in England in the mid-17th century and elsewhere in western Europe in the 18th century, when the legitimacy of different types of petitioning was constantly debated and many individual examples exhibited a ‘paradoxical combination of deference and defiance’. The transition was, he notes, ‘an extended, uneven process’ that happened at different times

in different places, yet this overall narrative of modernisation is still useful as an attempt to provide a coherent chronology of petitioning that accounts for change across many centuries rather than confining analysis to a single period.⁷²

Although the phases of petitioning described by Zaret are much better than the static portrait found in some earlier scholarship, we can go further still by examining how these practices often changed in ways that do not fit into a model of linear development and by foregrounding the importance of long-term continuities. Moreover, we need to attend to the way that some changes in petitioning were sudden, dramatic shifts that contemporaries noticed and commented upon, whereas others were gradual long-term transitions that were barely perceived by the people involved in the process and which are only visible in hindsight. Looking at even just a few of the key features of petitions discussed in this volume from a chronological perspective reveals some of the commonalities, and complexities, of how this worked in practice across time and geography.

One apparent continuity in the history of petitioning is the fact that almost anyone could – in theory – submit a formal petition. From the medieval period, if not before, it seems to have been widely accepted that there were virtually no categories of people who were officially excluded from this process, and we have many examples of individuals who would normally have no lawful ‘voice’ in the polity using petitions to attempt to secure redress or advancement. Immigrant craftsmen in medieval Genoa, convicted murderers in 16th-century France, impoverished war widows in 17th-century England, enslaved people in 18th-century Jamaica and New Orleans, indigenous groups in the early United States, serfs in pre-emancipation Bohemia and Russia – all were able to petition even if they had no other legal route for addressing state authorities.⁷³ Here, then, is an obvious example of a long-term continuity despite major changes in political and social structures.

Yet, the widespread lack of formal exclusions from petitioning masks the many ways that the profile of petitioners changed in practice. Unfortunately, until the late 20th century we lack the sorts of social surveys that can show us, for example, that three in five Canadians reported signing petitions in the early 1980s.⁷⁴

p. 19 But in many places the proportion of the population involved in petitioning appears to have been increasing over time, meaning that more people of low social status were able and willing to use this tool in later than in earlier periods. Sometimes this happened very quickly, as in the oft-cited example of England in the 1640s, when political turmoil and civil war spurred tens of thousands of individuals to subscribe to mass petitions about religious policy and ‘affairs of state’.⁷⁵ In other cases, the change was more gradual, as in Scotland, where we find petitioning initially dominated by groups of nobles in the late 16th century but widening to include more and more ordinary people over the course of subsequent centuries.⁷⁶ Still, we should not assume that the number of people involved in petitioning simply grew ever larger. More than one regime attempted to reverse such trends by imposing restrictions on collective subscriptions and discouraging direct appeals about certain issues or from certain groups. While they rarely succeeded in fully suppressing these practices, governments could narrow the range of people comfortable adding their name to a list of signatures.⁷⁷

The main recipients of petitions also changed, though this has received rather less attention from historians, despite the fact that identifying who received petitions can be a very effective way of tracking shifts in political and administrative power over time. For instance, medievalists have long studied the central role of the papacy as the target of petitioners from across western Christendom and, while this continued to be important in Catholic countries into the early modern period, there was a sharp shift towards petitioning royal or more local ecclesiastical authorities in northern Europe during the Reformation.⁷⁸ This necessitated severing many centuries-old long-distance supplicatory practices that had previously connected churchmen and laypeople to Rome.⁷⁹ In a much more gradual way, the slow decline in the volume of petitions addressed to landlords speaks to a substantial reconfiguration of social and economic power as customary forms of tenancy gave way to more commercialised arrangements.⁸⁰

p. 20 Meanwhile, the appearance of novel institutions – whether Republican Clubs in late-18th-century France, legislatures in the 19th century, or international bodies in the 20th century – provided new targets ↵ for those seeking relief, redress, or policy change.⁸¹ We need, therefore, to be very attentive to changes in the flow of petitions. As Huzzey and Miller argue later in this volume, if we only focus on national political institutions then our sense of the chronology of petitioning will be fundamentally skewed. Moreover, acknowledging continuities is equally important. Royal – or presidential – individuals remained popular targets for petitions even when their formal political power was limited or diminished, partly owing to the symbolic importance of their roles. Even without much influence on national policy, modern monarchs and their republican equivalents still retained a reputation as potential sources of gracious intervention in the lives of individual subjects.⁸²

The form and rhetoric found in petitions could remain similar over extremely long periods of time, but sometimes changed very quickly to adapt to new political contexts. For many centuries petitions tended to follow a fairly simple structure – a humble address, an explanatory narrative, an actionable request, a prayerful conclusion – and, as noted already, in some spheres scribal practice gradually standardised this into something approaching a formula. Indeed, some types of petitions became so formulaic that enterprising printers had them typeset with blank spaces for the names of the petitioner and other key information. On the other hand, we can also trace a countervailing trend towards vernacularisation and personalisation, as less literate individuals became involved in writing them. In 18th-century England, both trajectories are visible, as imprisoned debtors turned to printed petitions to submit their fully standardised requests while at the same time growing numbers of paupers wrote highly individualised letters to parish overseers seeking relief on their own behalf.⁸³

p. 21 The specific rhetoric used in petitions was even more changeable. Over the long term, it would be difficult to deny that there was a shift from meek supplications asking for mercy or patronage to assertive demands claiming legal or civic rights. In moments of revolution, this gradual trend could accelerate, leading to sudden, jarring changes in how petitioners justified themselves, whether in England in the 1640s or in the short-lived Helvetic Republic in the 1790s.⁸⁴ Yet a sudden change of regime did not always lead to novelty in petitioning.⁸⁵ Moreover, even when it did, ↵ this should not be seen as a simple shift from ‘premodern’ to ‘modern’ petitionary forms, because so many exceptions undermine any attempt to impose such categories. In 14th-century England, for instance, the ‘commons’ petitions presented to the king could contain aggressive complaints rather than humble pleas.⁸⁶

The aims of petitioners – much like their form and rhetoric – were often remarkably stable across vast periods of time, though this continuity ran alongside a long-term rise in appeals for substantive policy changes. In the late medieval period, most supplicants sought judicial mercy, material relief, or career advancement. Even collective petitions often focused on exceptions from taxation or other special consideration. These issues remained popular throughout the early modern and well into the modern period, as seen in the thousands of appeals about pensions submitted to the United States Congress in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, or the individual requests for aid sent by Polish refugees in postwar Germany.⁸⁷

However, in most jurisdictions, there was a decline in the number of people using petitions for such purposes in the modern era, as both state institutions and administrative agencies tried to impose a depersonalised system of restrictive printed forms to handle such claims.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, more and more activists and lobbyists used petitions to push for broader changes in government policy or general (rather than specific) legislation on matters ranging from religion to slavery to suffrage. Sometimes this happened only gradually, but often newly organised campaigns or political instability provoked an upsurge in large-scale petitioning on these issues. While the Chartist mass petition drives of the 1830s and 1840s were perhaps the most well-known British example, the same aim of policy change can also be seen in the 4.5 million subscribers to a petition defending ambulance drivers in 1989, or 6.1 million for the anti-Brexit e-

petition of 2019.⁸⁹ Yet we cannot ignore the many ways that this apparent trajectory away from specific exemptions or exceptions to more ‘political’ goals aimed at changing general policy misses important alternative developments. For instance, the flurry of petitions and counterpetitions about the rights of mestizos in late-16th-century Spanish America were undoubtedly focused on ‘policy’ but far too ‘early’ to fit easily into this narrative.⁹⁰ Likewise, according to Joanna Innes, petitioning about ‘contentious matters’ relating to church and state became less common in early 18th-century Britain despite its importance in the preceding and subsequent periods.⁹¹

p. 22 We are left, then, with a chronology of petitioning that aligns relatively well with a story of broader political and social modernisation, in some polities, but which constituted more than merely a symptom of these long-term trends. Petitioners adapted quickly and vigorously in moments of sudden political change, sometimes anticipating or accelerating them rather than simply reacting to institutional shifts. Moreover, the typically ‘vertical’ nature of the practice meant that it is easy to find continuities in form and function across many centuries, wherever inequalities in power made such appeals attractive to both authorities and petitioners alike. While these are sometimes obscured by shifts in jurisdictional remits or official ideologies, by broadening our lens to encompass many different types and targets of petitioning, the resilient and adaptable nature of this practice over the *longue durée* is revealed.

Petitions and Petitioning in Context

Scholars of contemporary politics have all too frequently evaluated the effectiveness of petitions and e-petitions in terms of whether they achieve policy change or their impact on officials and politicians.⁹² The problem with such a narrow, instrumental view is that it fails to explain adequately why people petition,⁹³ and have petitioned throughout history, when, typically, their demands have rarely been granted. While there are plenty of historic examples of petitions that have led to important changes, such as the abolition of feudal tenure in 19th-century North America, the outcomes for specific requests usually disappointed petitioners.⁹⁴ To put it another way, why then do petitions and petitioning matter, and why have they mattered for centuries? Part III focuses on specific studies of petitions and petitioning in context, but here we reflect upon the broader reasons why these practices have mattered to petitioners and authorities, as well as their wider consequences. Rather than judging petitions and petitioning on the success or failure rate of particular requests, we should consider them in the round.

p. 23 Historically, petitions have always been vehicles for making individual as well as collective claims. Petitioners have addressed authority to negotiate their status, and claim rights, privileges, and exemptions as citizens or subjects.⁹⁵ In the English context, through the genre of pauper petitions or letters, supplicants sought to access welfare.⁹⁶ At other times and in other places too, petitions have been a mechanism to claim entitlements, such as military pensions.⁹⁷ Petitions from widows, and war widows specifically, have allowed scholars to recover women’s experiences of legal processes generally, and war in particular.⁹⁸ Petitions have always been an important way for individuals to seek dispute resolution or arbitration, make patronage requests, and advance other personal interests through appeals to power.⁹⁹

p. 24 Petitions have been an important ‘weapon of the weak’ for individuals or groups lacking legal or political rights and material resources, or who were otherwise marginalised.¹⁰⁰ As a diverse number of studies have found, at times petitions have been a useful, if limited, tool for indigenous and colonised peoples,¹⁰¹ peasants,¹⁰² and women, to give just three examples.¹⁰³ Writing of the last group, one scholar has commented: ‘Petitions provide historians with one of the few opportunities to “hear” non-elite women voice their concerns’, although as in other cases the voices of petitioners were usually mediated.¹⁰⁴

Collective petitioning, too, had many uses for historical actors, regardless of the response of authorities, as a hefty body of recent scholarship has made clear. Petitions were and are a way to promote legislation,

influence policy, and push specific issues up the political agenda.¹⁰⁵ While this volume focuses on petitionary practices, we should not isolate petitioning from a wider repertoire of collective action, with which it was closely, and in some cases inseparably, associated, including strikes, associations, meetings, assemblies, riots, and demonstrations.¹⁰⁶ The mutability and flexibility of petitioning as a tool that was connected and, to an extent, underpinned other forms of activity, was part of its appeal. Through petitions, signatories forged political communities, made representative claims on behalf of wider groups, and catalysed collective identities.¹⁰⁷

p. 25 In the modern era, petitioning has been an essential tool for political recruitment and organisation, building social movements, mobilising popular support, ↵ raising public awareness, and creating networks.¹⁰⁸ Petitioners have often used the petitioning process to promote their cause to a wide range of audiences, including the public, the media, and potential signatories, as much as the authority to which the petition is nominally addressed – hence the emphasis placed by 20th-century campaigners on turning the public presentation of petitions at sites of authority, such as 10 Downing Street in the United Kingdom, into photo opportunities intended to be communicated to wider audiences through the modern mass media.¹⁰⁹ By such means petitions could also reach international as well as domestic audiences. Commenting on the (typically unsuccessful) petitions sent to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, Susan Pedersen has perceptively observed that the petitioners ‘persisted, rather, because of what petitioning offered: exposure, contacts, credibility, publicity, voice’.¹¹⁰ Even if their requests had no impact in the corridors of power, petitioners’ dogged commitment to petitioning is much more understandable when we consider the range of uses to which these practices could be put.

For states, institutions, or rulers, petitions have always been an instrument of rule because the very act of petitioning requires petitioners to submit to and recognise their authority and jurisdiction within a given territory. For this reason, the petition ‘played a critical role in facilitating royal authority in the broader context of late medieval English government’.¹¹¹ To cite another example, Karin Sennefelt has observed of 18th- and early-nineteenth-century Scandinavia that petitions were ‘an informational channel for the absolute ruler which ... legitimized the political system’.¹¹² In the 20th century, the reception of petitions reinforced the authority of new international bodies. Commenting on Jewish and Arab petitions from Palestine to the League of Nations, Natasha Wheatley has written that ‘petitions enacted a jurisdictional hierarchy with the League at its apex’.¹¹³

p. 26 The utility of petitions as a mechanism for confirming authority was such that even if requests were not granted, the considerable bureaucratic resources that have been expended on receiving, considering, and archiving petitions testify to how seriously they have been taken in many polities.¹¹⁴ Similarly, while authorities may have occasionally circumscribed the right of petition, the value of petitions as an instrument of rule explains why few thought it politic to close it off entirely.¹¹⁵ ↵ For expanding empires, receiving petitions had the additional benefit of incorporating supplicants as subjects.¹¹⁶ Historical examples also demonstrate the correlation between petitions and state formation: new bureaucratic bodies developed out of the petitioning process and have subsequently spawned separate administrative structures, while other branches of states have been reshaped through the interaction with petitioners.¹¹⁷

Petitions have historically been a legitimisation tool for authorities. Writing of early colonial America, Da Cruz has observed that petitions ‘were a legitimating factor for distant governments that were otherwise unable to ensure the obedience of scattered overseas communities of settlers’.¹¹⁸ The same logic applied closer to home. This explains why new institutions or rulers seeking to establish their legitimacy, such as the Cromwellian protectorate of the 1650s, national legislatures founded during the ‘age of revolutions’ (1789–1848), or the German Democratic Republic, have welcomed petitions and frequently codified the right to petition as one of their first acts.¹¹⁹ Petitions could thus be foundational to a regime’s legitimacy, but states and authorities also had instrumental reasons to receive petitions. Petitions were a valuable source of local information for political elites, such as 18th-century British MPs.¹²⁰ For legislatures more

generally, petitions have been a mechanism for representation, including that of non-voters.¹²¹ In authoritarian contexts, where political expression was restricted to varying extents, petitions have offered states valuable intelligence about popular opinion and dissatisfaction.¹²² Petitions could also function as 'useful complaints' for central authorities, serving as a tool for checking and disciplining subordinate officials.¹²³

p. 27 So far we have focused on why petitions and petitioning have been important for both petitioners and authority. There are broader reasons why petitionary practices have been historically significant. We have already noted the relationship of petitions and petitioning with important historical processes such as the emergence of the public sphere, state formation, and democratisation, for example. As well as contributing to such developments over the *longue durée*, petitions and petitioning could be a catalyst for more unpredictable and sudden upheavals, even if these proved to be short-lived.

Petitions are an inherently unstable and ambiguous form of interaction between subjects and authority because of their dual character. As Prashant Kidambi has put it in his study of colonial Bombay, 'petitioning was both a routine reinscription of power relations and a potential "event" that could unsettle them'.¹²⁴ Because petitions were addressed to authority, often in superficially deferential or loyal language, they could be used to make coded criticisms and question the legitimacy of rulers. The 'hidden transcripts' of petitions may even contain 'an implicit threat of violence' or rebellion, clothed in a 'deferential tone of address', as James C. Scott has written.¹²⁵ This explains why petitioning has been intimately linked to revolts and rebellions, or the threat thereof, in numerous polities, including monarchies and republics across medieval and early modern Europe, as well as colonial societies such as mid-19th-century Jamaica.¹²⁶ Another example of this broader phenomenon would be the *pronunciamiento* that flourished in 19th-century Mexico, which has been defined as an 'extra-constitutional political practice that soldiers and civilians used to negotiate or petition forcefully for political change, both at a national and at a local level, in the absence of a clearly established constitutional order'.¹²⁷ Less dramatically, petitions could lead to slow-burning ruptures in the relationship between governors and governed, as in East Germany, by gradually exposing the gap between official rhetoric and the lived experiences of citizens.¹²⁸

We are not claiming that petitions inevitably trigger revolutions or regime change. But there are enough historical examples to suggest the potential of petitions to disrupt and destabilise established authority, and thereby engender sudden and unpredictable political change. On this basis, then, regardless of the outcome of specific requests, the effects of petitions and petitioning in the short term could be significant. It is tempting to conclude that the emergence of e-petitions contained within institutional petitions systems has tamed the unruly potential that has long been a latent characteristic of petitions and petitioning. Yet, given the long and chequered history of petitions and related forms over the *longue durée*, and because these forms have always existed outside, as well as within, formal institutional systems, such a conclusion would be premature.

p. 28

Scope and Structure

In covering a broad, diverse phenomenon across North America and Europe over several centuries, inevitably this volume has had to focus its scope on certain areas and not others. While many chapters recover and show the importance of petitions and petitioning to women, the book as a whole does not offer an extended account of the relationship between these practices and gender, although a number of excellent studies already exist.¹²⁹ While scholars have noted the similarity between rituals of petition and prayer,¹³⁰ and the historical relationship between religious communities and petitioning has been a feature of recent work,¹³¹ the book does not provide an overarching analysis of the interaction between petitions and religion, nor the phenomenon of petitions to religious authorities, such as the papacy.¹³² As already noted, the book's geographic focus means that it does not offer a global history of petitions, nor does it examine the culture of petitioning within colonial and imperial contexts in South America, Asia, Africa, or Australasia and the Pacific. While not running themes in this volume, these, and other areas for future research, are discussed in the conclusion.

p. 29

Turning to the content of the book, the chapters in Part I address definitional questions. In his chapter, David Zaret argues that rather than being defined by their formal qualities, petitions must be understood as shaped by the practice of reception: this distinguishes petitions from related practices. Providing a comparative etymology of petition, supplication, and related terms across Germanic and Romance languages, Joris Oddens argues that a historical understanding of the semantics of these terms is crucial to understanding the extraordinarily diverse nature of petitions, supplications, and related forms, albeit that he notes the increasing adoption of 'petition' across a number of languages from the late 18th century onwards. Surveying early modern Britain, Mark Knights explores the interrelationship between petitions and similar, but different, forms of 'subscriptional' practices, including associations, covenants, addresses, and remonstrances. In her chapter, Joanna Innes emphasises the fuzzy boundaries and hybridity of petitions as a genre, and importantly clarifies the different mechanisms for change through a study of late-18th- and early-19th-century England. Evaluating the growth of e-petitions, Cristina Leston-Bandeira outlines the key differences between digital and traditional forms, before arguing that e-petitions must be defined by the 'petition system', or the formal institutional processes that receive them.

The chapters in Part II examine petitioning within specific historical contexts over long stretches of time to examine and complicate our understanding of cycles of continuity and change within this ancient practice. In their contribution, Brodie Waddell and Hannah Worthen demonstrate that the famous outbursts of 'political' or 'radical' petitioning in 17th-century England were preceded by a surge in petitioning on local and quotidian topics, pointing to deeper continuities even in a period of political upheaval. The Dutch experience over three centuries, Maartje Janse, Joris Oddens, Anne Petterson, Joris van den Tol, Edurne de Wilde, and Elsa Miedema suggest, reveals that rather than there being a linear development from traditional to modern forms of representation through petitioning, petitioners continually shifted between different types of representative claims. In his study of Jamaica, 1664–1834, Aaron Graham shows that trends in petitioning were closely associated with patterns of legislation within the colony, and that petitions enabled a limited degree of participation for particular groups, such as free people of colour and Jews, who were otherwise excluded from direct political representation. Andreas Würigler's detailed study of Switzerland over the *longue durée* shows that the marked continuities in petitioning were partly obscured by the regime changes during the 'age of revolutions' before the practice was superseded by the adoption of referendums and initiatives in the later 19th century. Examining North America and Europe from the mid-19th century to the early 21st century, Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller chart the shift away from petitioning legislatures to other institutions, including new international authorities, while showing that petitions remained critical to fostering collective action locally, nationally, and globally.

Part III offers a series of detailed analyses to address the question of when, why, and in what contexts petitions and petitioning have mattered. Examining 14th-century England, Gwilym Dodd chronicles how the ‘common’ petition that claimed to speak on behalf of the wider community came to be a powerful tool to exert pressure on the king, not least because it shielded the real sponsors from reprisals. Marta Gravela highlights the historical importance of petitions for claiming citizenship and, crucially, fiscal exemptions, through a study of 15th-century Genoa. The key significance of petitions as a mechanism for claiming welfare – in this case, pensions for soldiers wounded during the English Civil Wars of the mid-17th century – is the subject of Ismini Pells’s chapter. Based on a database of 500,000 petitions to Congress, 1789–1950, Maggie Blackhawk and Daniel Carpenter provide a ground-breaking account of the way that petitioning provided a means of representation that operated independently of the electoral process and partisanship.

↳ The utility of receiving petitions to authoritarian states for consolidating their power and gauging the public mood is revealed in Lara Douds’s study of the early Soviet era.

Collectively, the chapters in this book consolidate and distil an emergent and dynamic field of scholarship. They aim to open up new approaches, understandings, and questions for historians, as well as social and political scientists, by addressing challenges relating to definition, chronology, and why people have petitioned and received petitions in historical and contemporary contexts. By such an undertaking we can begin to understand why petitions and petitioning have been ubiquitous in human societies, past and present.

Notes

Footnotes

- 1 Select Committee on Public Petitions, *Reports* (1852), Appendix 214.
- 2 H Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners: Petitions and Petitioning in the United Kingdom, 1780–1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 147–52[↗].
- 3 S M Stern, ‘Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 27 (1964), 1–32[↗]; S M Stern, ‘Petitions from the Mamlūk Period’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 29 (1966), 233–76[↗]; E R Foster, ‘Petitions and the Petition of Right’, *Journal of British Studies*, 14 (1974), 21–45[↗]; J E Bradley, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England: Petitions, the Crown, and Public Opinion* (Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 1986)[↗]; H Neuhaus, *Reichstag und Supplikationsausschuß: Ein Beitrag zur Reichsverfassungsgeschichte der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1977)[↗]; J Talsma, *Het recht van petitie, verzoekschriften aan de Tweede Kamer en het ombudsmannvraagstuk* (Arnhem, Gouda Quint, 1989)[↗].
- 4 C Nubola and A Würgler (eds), *Suppliche e gravamina: Politica, amministrazione, giustizia in Europa (secoli XIV–XVIII)* (Bologna, Società editrice il Mulino, 2002)/*Bittschriften und Gravamina: Politik, Verwaltung und Justiz in Europa (14.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2005); C Nubola and A Würgler (eds), *Formen der politischen Kommunikation in Europa vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert: Suppliken, Gravamina, Brief* (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2004)/*Forme della comunicazione politica in Europa nei secoli XV–XVIII: Suppliche, gravamina, lettere* (Bologna, Società editrice il Mulino, 2004); C Nubola and A Würgler (eds), *Operare la resistenza: Suppliche, gravamina e rivolte in Europa (1400–1800)* (Bologna, Società editrice il Mulino, 2006)/*Praktiken des Widerstandes: Suppliken, Gravamina und Revolten in Europa (1400–1800)* (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2006)[↗].
- 5 L Heerma van Voss (ed.), *Petitions in Social History*, Supplement 9 of *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001)[↗].
- 6 G Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007); W M Ormrod, G Dodd, and A Musson (eds), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (Woodbridge, York Medieval Press, 2009)[↗]; M Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Political Culture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005)[↗], Chapter 3; D Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2000)[↗].
- 7 C Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995)[↗]; C Tilly,

- Contentious Performances* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008)⁸.
- 8 C Phillips, 'The Lost Democratic Institution of Petitioning: Public Employee Collective Bargaining as a Constitutional Right', *First Amendment Law Review*, 10 (2011–12), 652–91 (p. 672)⁹. See also R Handley, 'Public Order, Petitioning, and Freedom of Assembly', *Journal of Legal History*, 7 (1986), 123–55¹⁰; S Higginson, 'A Short History of the Right to Petition Government for the Redress of Grievances', *Yale Law Journal*, 96 (1986–7), 142–66¹¹; G A Mark, 'The Vestigial Constitution: The History and Significance of the Right to Petition', *Fordham Law Review*, 66 (1998), 2163–75¹²; and R J Krotoszynski, *Reclaiming the Petition Clause: Seditious Libel, 'Offensive Protest', and the Right to Petition Government for a Redress of Grievances* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 83–103¹³.
- 9 L Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution: Covenanted Scotland, 1637–1651* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016)¹⁴; T Vallance, *Loyalty, Memory and Public Opinion in England, 1658–1727* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019)¹⁵; K Bowie, *Public Opinion in Early Modern Scotland, c. 1560–1707* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020)¹⁶; A Whiting, *Women and Petitioning in the Seventeenth-Century English Revolution* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2015)¹⁷; R A Houston, *Peasant Petitions: Social Relations and Economic Life on Landed Estates, 1600–1850* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2014)¹⁸; C Dennehy, *The Irish Parliament, 1613–89: The Evolution of a Colonial Institution* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019)¹⁹.
- 10 J van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company: Economic Interests and Political Decision Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656* (Leiden, Brill, 2020)²⁰.
- 11 E N Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2012)²¹.
- 12 D Carpenter, *Democracy by Petition: Popular Politics in Transformation, 1790–1870* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2021)²²; Miller, *A Nation of Petitioners*; B Agnès, *L'appel au pouvoir: Les pétitions aux parlements en France et au Royaume-Uni (1814–1848)* (Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018)²³; W Fowler, *Independent Mexico: The 'Pronunciamiento' in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2016)²⁴; J Oddens, *Op veler verzoek: Inclusieve politiek in Nederlands (1780–1860)* (Amsterdam, Boom, 2023)²⁵.
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- 14 Y Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2013)²⁷.
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- 16 Q Fang, *Chinese Complaint Systems: Natural Resistance* (London, Routledge, 2013)²⁹; Ho-fung Hung, *Protest with Chinese Characteristics: Demonstrations, Riots, and Petitions in the Mid-Qing Dynasty* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011)³⁰.
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