

Selective Welfare in Early Modern England: Poor Relief, Charity, and Regional Divergence, 1600-1786

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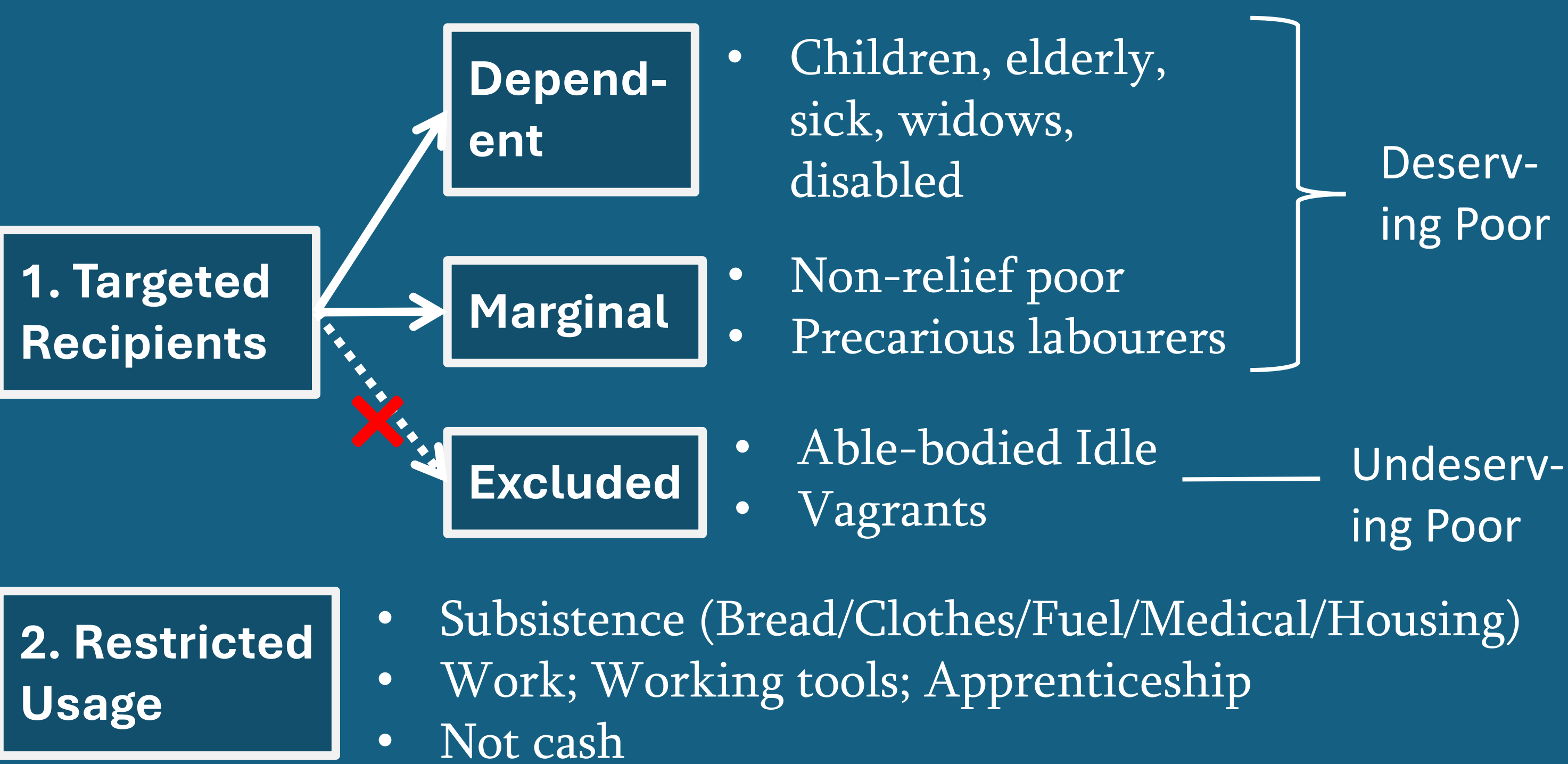


Motivation

Early modern English welfare increasingly distinguished between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, reflecting a shift toward more selective welfare.

We know relatively little about how this selectivity evolved in practice. Using granular parish-level data on poor relief and charitable endowments, this study asks: **how and why did welfare become selective?** Regional variation provides a key lens for identifying these mechanisms.

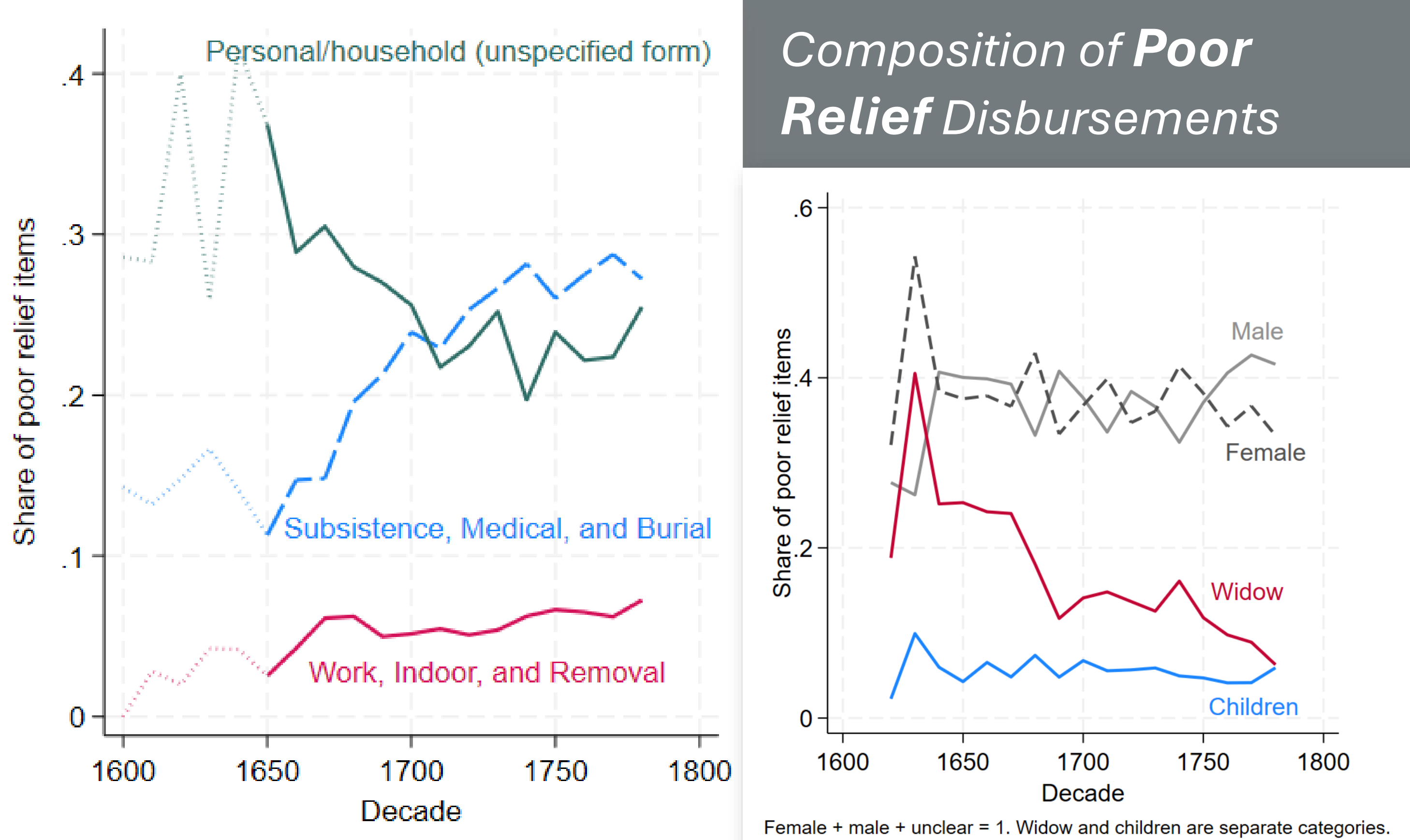
What Is “Selective Welfare”?



Data Source

- Statutory Poor Relief**: 312 parishes (180 from Waddell 2021, 132 from archives). 167k granular disbursement items from 121 parishes.
- Private Charity**: 7,421 parishes. 24k dated endowments from Gilbert Returns.

How “Selective” Was Early Modern Welfare?

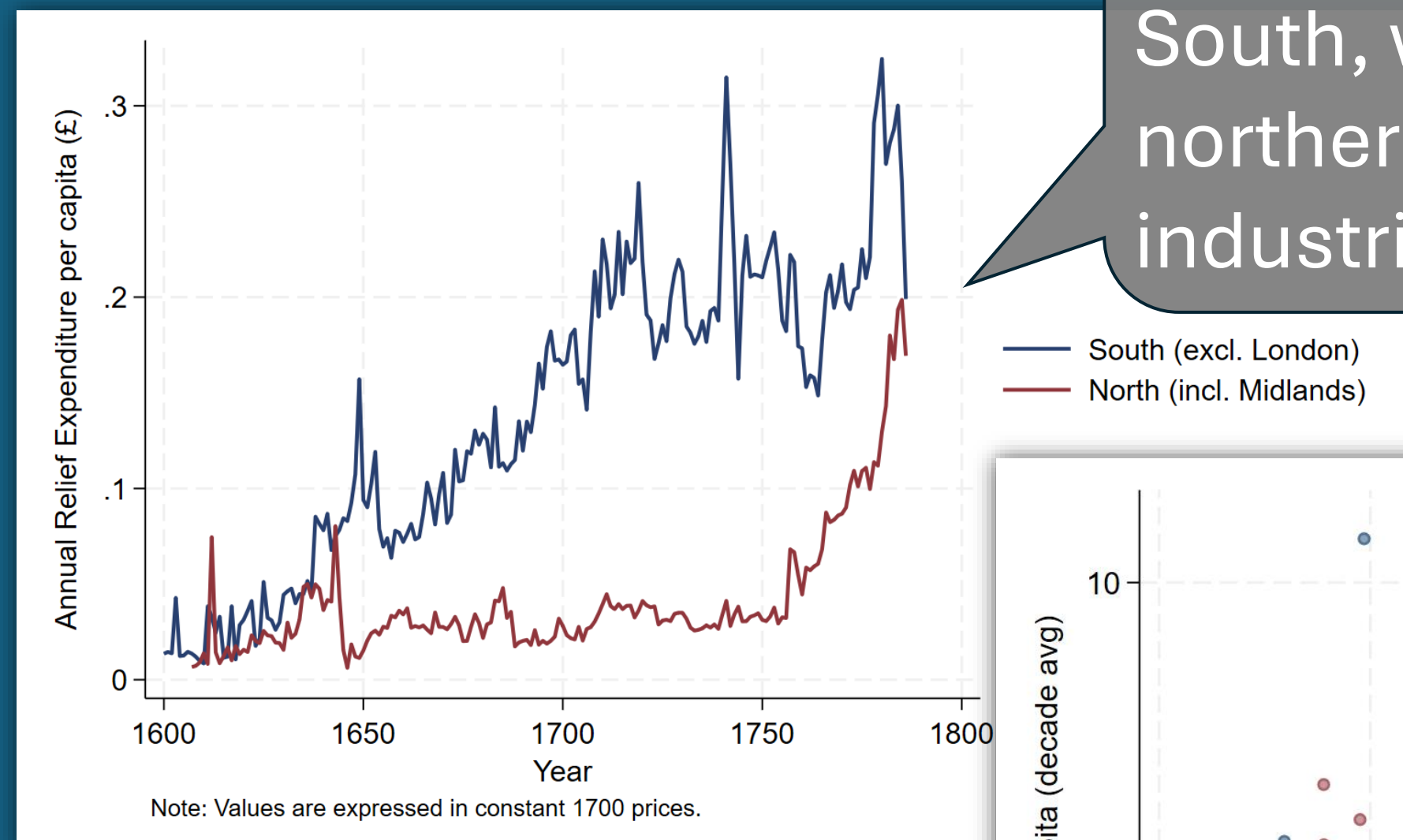


Charitable Endowments increasingly targeted specific groups, while untargeted gifts declined — more strongly in the South.

Why Did Welfare Become More Selective?

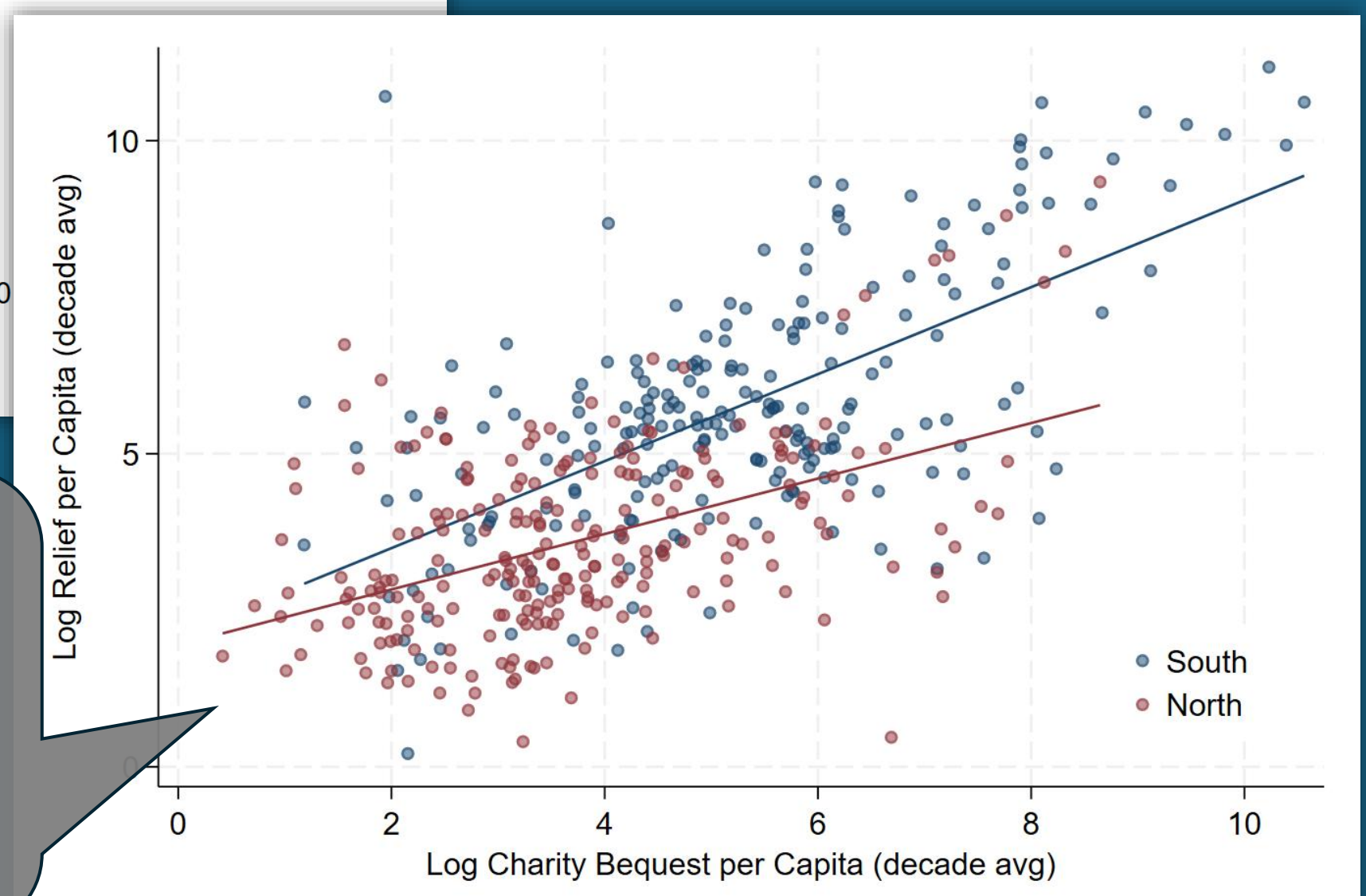
1. Welfare Structure?

The expansion and institutionalisation of parish poor relief—and its growing dominance within local welfare—may have contributed to the rise of more selective welfare practices.



Relief expanded earlier in the South, with late 18th-century northern catch-up driven by industrial towns.

The expansion of poor relief in the South left charity playing a more targeted role.



2. Economics and Institutions?

Market integration is associated with less targeted welfare, while stronger gentry presence appears to support more selective welfare practices.

* Control and other variables include geography, coal proximity, enclosure, valor, population density, and organizational features. Parish-clustered standard errors; year fixed effects.

Table 1: Determinants of Targeting in Poor Relief and Charitable Endowments

Variable	Percentage-Point Effects (AME, logit × 100)						
	Poor Relief Disbursement				Charitable Endowments		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Market (17c)	-5.81*** (1.82)	-5.01*** (1.57)	1.38** (0.61)	2.45 (2.81)	2.70*** (0.59)	-2.78*** (0.98)	6.52*** (1.08)
Gentry (18c)	0.54* (0.30)	0.68*** (0.25)	-0.00 (0.10)	-0.76** (0.31)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.19*** (0.07)	-0.10 (0.14)
Observations	103,826	103,688	103,499	103,871	14,020	13,738	14,454

3. Intertemporal Coordination?

Cross-decade correlations suggest interactions between specific forms of charity and relief may have contributed to the emergence and dynamics of selective welfare practices.

Year [T-10, T)	Year T
Subsistence Relief	Targeted Charity
Subsistence Relief	Subsistence Charity
Targeted Relief	Subsistence Charity
Housing Charity	Subsistence Relief
Targeted Charity	Housing Relief
Subsistence Charity	Indoor Relief

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