Postrevolutionary Democracy and Fatal Polarization in Weimar Germany

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Abstract

We look at the impact of revolutionary activity during the collapse of the German Empire in 1918 and the German Revolution to understand voting for extreme parties in the post-1928 crisis elections in the Weimar Republic. We examine this expectation using strike data at the regional level during the revolution and gauging its impact distally using techniques of ecological inference estimation. Our expectation is that in areas where revolutionary strike activity was high, we will be able to pinpoint the identities more prone to extremist politicization. Further, we expect to see substantially less voting for the ideological extremes in predominantly Catholic regions, due to the cross-class denominational basis of the Center Party. Along the lines suggested by the existing literature we expect Nazi support to be stronger in Protestant areas and that occupational support will vary according to how economic conditions and revolutionary legacies contribute to dissatisfaction with democracy and polarization. We find that the legacy of contentious behavior during the German Revolution had an important impact on voting behavior across occupational groups. On the extreme left, for the Communists, we found that this impact was strongly class-based, inducing similar voting patterns in both Catholic and Protestant spaces. On the extreme right, for the Nazis, the effect was concentrated in Protestant localities with the legacies of the revolution far more varied, suggesting a more complex interplay between economic conditions and class identity shaping support. This is in line with idea of the Nazis as a popular protest party that brought together a coalition of groups with disparate grievances against Weimar democracy.

The Dangerous Dynamics of Democratic Revolutions

Revolutions are relatively rare social events. In this account we move away from the understanding of revolution enshrined by Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), which pairs rapid political change with social change and a reforging of the structures of the state and society. Instead, we focus on rapid political change, defining revolution in more minimalist terms, eschewing the components that are great and social in Skocpol's conception.[1] In this definition, revolution is defined as a process of rapid and violent regime change, where the existing system of rule has lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and is challenged by competitors who seek to replace it with a new form of rule. The essence of revolution is the disintegration of extant state power, violent competition to seize it, and its reconstitution. When that process is completed by a competitor to the incumbent authorities, we have a successful revolution.

Over time liberal democratic revolution, sometimes in combination with reform, defeat in war, or the processes of social change that accompanies development has over time produced highly productive, powerful and even aggressive states, proving itself as a stable and durable form of rule. Such protracted processes include both periods of relative stability and periods of ferment which weaken the institutions of the antecedent ancien regime and social forces supporting it. In the absence of **social** revolution, such forces can recover some of their former power, block further change antithetic to their interests, and even rollback previous democratic gains. The construction of liberal democracy as a process is one of starts and stops with the power of ancien regime actors, structures, and ideas only neutralized and removed in stages. This is consistent with the view of European democratization promulgated by Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010) and Berman (2019).

The history of revolutions is often written backwards rather than forwards. The dominant narratives of the Bolshevik or Chinese Revolutions are dominated by accounts that focus on the actions of the revolutionary victor, the actor that reconsolidates state power, often downplaying the story of the losers. Revolutionary struggle is many sided, with authority splintered and multiple contending aspirants seeking power. The temptation is to cast this struggle as a bipolar conflict—e.g. red vs. whites, communists vs. nationalists. For this reason, revolution is often conceived as having a dual power phase, but frequently it is more complex as multiple actors assert conflicting claims over part or all of the territory of the state in the throes of revolution. The Russian Revolution involved liberals, anarchists, multiple secessionist movements, reactionaries, agrarian socialists, and the ultimately victorious Bolsheviks. It did not even approach bipolarity in its civil war phase. The narrative of Reds vs. Whites was a post facto construction. It is also a product of the outcome of the revolution, the victory of the Bolsheviks, projected backwards and obscuring the complexity of the process.

The Bolshevik or Chinese revolutions were neoauthoritarian in nature. Despite the rhetoric of liberation, modern dictatorship replaced the old regime. And in a very short time, a monopoly on political organization was imposed. Political competitors faced two options – exile or repression. Successful revolutions that clear the political playing field for the domination of a single ruling party are by their very nature highly durable (Levitsky and Way 2022). Revolutions that institutionalize democratic systems face an altogether different postrevolutionary situation. Like all revolutions they create a new system

[1] In this sense the German Revolution of 1918 has more in common with the modern urban revolutions explored more recently by Beissinger (2022), than Skocpol's great social revolutions. In this sense it was a harbinger of what was to come in terms of the growth of liberal democratic revolutions and their potential frailties.

of rule in a polity where one has recently disintegrated. However, by their very nature democratic systems cannot and do not impose political monopolies. And thus, postrevolutionary politics will by their very nature include opponents who were active participants in the revolution and whose preferred institutional outcomes lost out.

In this paper we examine the long-term effects of the German Revolution of 1918-1919 that brought an end to the German Empire and its replacement with the Weimar Republic. The main contenders for power were a center-left coalitions of parties who supported the creation of a democratic republic, the forces of Monarchist reaction (supplanted by fascists a decade later), and a revolutionary left that sought to create a Council Republic (Räterepublik) patterned on the early phases of the Russian Revolution. While the center-left emerged triumphant, its antagonists continued to constitute major forces in the political system. The post-revolutionary configuration of political forces put the emergent Weimar political system under extreme stress as the forces of reaction and emergent fascism on one hand, and those of the revolutionary left put extreme centrifugal pressure on the system of political representation. The result of this was an exceptionally polarized polity in which the possibilities of forming stable ruling coalition governments became impossible.

The German Revolution of 1918-1919 and its Aftermath

With the collapse of the Kaiserreich in the face of substantial military mutinies in the fall of 1918, a provisional government was formed by three democratic parties of the center and left – the Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany (Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, MSPD), the Catholic Center Party (Zentrumspartei, Z), and German Democratic Party (Deutsche Demokratische Partei, DDP). The MSPD was the mainstream of the German Social Democrats who supported the government during World War I (Koch 1984: 261). The Center Party was the party of German Catholics and included a wide diversity of Catholic social actors of all classes. Their confessional solidarity and commitment to democracy was the product of their discrimination under the Empire. The DDP represented the left of the longstanding and beleaguered bourgeois liberals (Winkler 1993: 63, Mommsen 1995: 65).

In the earliest phase of the revolution the greatest competition came from revolutionary socialists. The Social Democratic Party had split over their continued support of the war effort. Antiwar and revolutionary socialists, opposed to the conflict, formed an Independent Social Democratic Party (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, USPD) in January 1917. A group of revolutionary socialists split from the USPD and reconstituted themselves as the Spartacus League. The League dissolved itself and joined with other dissenting Social-Democrats to found the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in January 1919 (Koch 1984: 261. Winkler 1993: 40-1, Schanbacher 1982: 47).

In the initial phases of the revolution, the right was less politically organized though monarchist and counterrevolutionary sentiments were widespread in the bureaucracy, the office corps, and in *Freikorps* units (independent armed militias) that formed as Germany withdrew from the war. The German Army (*Reichsheer*) was also reorganized into a titularly more republican *Reichswehr* in 1919, and initially supported the parliamentary republic based on a pact between SPD leader Ebert and the Chief of the General Staff, Wilhelm Groener (Winkler 1993: 38-9). Despite this commitment covert units, often dominated by monarchist and reactionary officers, existed outside the formal command structure, the so-called Black Reichswehr (*Schwarze Reichswehr*) (Waite 1952).

In its first five years, the republic was forced to fight off a number of direct challenges to its authority from both the left and the right. The initial challenges came from the revolutionary left. These included the Berlin Christmas Battles of December 1918 which led to an end in cooperation between the MSPD and USPD early in the revolution, even though the cessation of hostilities was negotiated rather than solved on the barricades (Winkler 1993: 53-6) . This was followed in short order by the Spartacist Uprising of January 1919, which was put down by force, including the execution of its leaders, Luxemburg and Leibknecht by the *Freikorps* (Winkler 1993: 56-61).

There were also a series of strike waves that challenged the authority of the government from February to May of 1919. The largest concentrations were in the Ruhr, Central Germany (Sachsen, Thüringen, and Anhalt) and Berlin, as well as Upper Silesia, Württemberg, and Magdeburg (Winkler 1993: 74-6). Around this time Council Republics that rejected the Government's authority were declared in Braunschweig, Mannheim, Saxony, Bremen, and most famously in Munich (the Bavarian Soviet Republic). All these actions were also put down by force by the government relying on the Army and *Freikorps* units (Mommsen 1996: 47-8, Winkler 1993: 76-82, Kuckuk 2010, Pryce 1977, Bein 1990)

The early twenties saw the reactionary right emerge as an additional threat to the republic. The weapon of choice was the Putsch, an attempt to grab power directly. The hope was that the initial action would lead to mass support and overthrow of the government. The first was the so-called "Kapp Putsch," named after the reactionary politician Wolfgang Kapp, who was incensed by a government attempt to dissolve the *Freikorps* and other reactionary militias. With the support of the affected militiamen, he forced the government to flee Berlin on March 13, 1920, and formed a government with former army chief of staff Erich Ludendorff. The Putsch collapsed after several days with the declaration of a general strike that involved an estimated 12 million workers, the refusal of civil servants to follow its orders, and the failure of the parties of the parliamentary right to actively support it (Lepsius 1978: 47, and Rossiter 1963:40-2).

The response of radical workers to the Kapp Putsch emboldened the KPD and USPD to demand the replacement of government with one composed solely of socialists. In the Ruhr, a sizeable Red Army (ca. 50,000 soldiers) was formed, rebuffed encroaching *Freikorps* units and initiated a working-class uprising (*Ruhraufstand*). It was in turn repressed by the Army and *Freikorps*. There was an additional attempt by the KPD and other left groups to take power locally in Saxony (*Märzkämpfe in Mitteldeutschland*) in March 1921 (Tenfelde 2010, Koch-Baumgarten 1986).

The Rhineland crisis of 1923 provoked two further attempts to unseat the government. The best known was so-called Beer Hall Putsch in Munich which involved Hitler, other future Nazi leaders, and yet again Ludendorff. It was put down by force by the local forces of order in Munich after a few days, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of its leaders (Gordon 1972). Even more troubling was the German October launched by the Comintern, which was intended to provoke a revolution in Germany as the first step in world revolution. In response to the French occupation, widespread strikes broke out around Germany and in Thuringia and Saxony Communists and radical socialists formed revolutionary governments. There was also a short-lived uprising of workers' militia in Hamburg that was quickly squashed by the *Reichswehr* (Wenzel 2004).

These events, recounted above, demonstrate that revolutions that involve a high degree of violence, yet result in democracy have an inherent danger that other forms of democratic transition do not share. Specifically, because contenders for revolutionary power are not defeated in any final sense, they

instead remain on the scene and still contend for power. Some become actors in the democratic struggle for power, but quite often they are semi-loyal or disloyal antagonists to democracy and act to undermine the system both from within and without (Linz 1978).

This was the case in Weimar Germany. Monarchist conservatives remained organized in the form of the German National People's Party (DNVP) and were reluctant to cooperate with the SPD. They were focused on ways to move the state in a more authoritarian direction and organized their own paramilitary veteran's organization (*Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten*). It was linked to the Black *Reichwehr*, preserving a military reserve capacity in violation of the limitations placed on the German military under the Versailles Treaty. There were a host of other *Völkisch* organizations on the margins of Weimar, and from this soup of reaction, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), the Nazis, emerged as the prototype of a new modern rightwing extremist organization.

The radical left remained strong as well. It was dominated by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Under the leadership of Ernst Thälmann it increasingly became less independent and more focused on following the Comintern line promulgated by Moscow. The USPD weakened considerably in the early 1920s with its more revolutionary members migrating to the KPD and others migrating back to the SPD. It was a shell of itself by 1924 and completely lost representation in the *Reichstag* elections that year.

As the example of Weimar demonstrates, democratic revolutions can literally transpose the naked struggle for power under revolutionary conditions into the party system, thus creating potential problems if the revolutionary social fractures are not in some way resolved. When that pattern includes a democratic center surrounded on both sides by an anti-democratic reactionary right and a revolutionary left, there is a high propensity for polarization and what Sartori (1976) and Linz (1978) have highlighted as the kinds of centrifugal pressures in the party system that impede the formation of stable governments. This dynamic has been explored in depth in the Weimar context by Rainer Lepsius (1978). From this perspective, one can say that the Weimar constitution failed after the elections of 1930 when the KPD and NSDAP took better than fifty percent of the seats in the Reichstag. From this point onward, Weimar was ruled by presidential cabinets supported only by parliamentary minorities and relying on temporary emergency powers. The exercise of executive power became disconnected from the results of voting, marking the end of functional procedural democracy (Bernhard 2005: 66-68).

Does Democratic Transition by Revolution also Have Behavioral Ramifications that Reinforce the Structural Disadvantages?

The question is whether the violent process of revolution creates values and attitudes which incline voters to behave in particular ways. Does the macroenvironment described above promote microlevel behavior? While there are reasons to believe that political attitudes and partisanship are locked in early by socialization, and that changing those patterns is difficult (Eckstein 1988), disjunctive political events like revolutions are the most likely scenarios for short term change. Even if one believes that underlying values and attitudes are hard to change or change at a glacial pace as posited by Eckstein, the structures through which they are expressed are often very different after revolutionary political change. We believe that the potential sources of different behavioral patterns may be either a direct product of revolutionary experience or a question of how patterns of postrevolutionary power affect interests.

We begin with the latter. The choices to which political actors and citizens are inclined under the status quo ante are often not available or have different ramifications under the structure of postrevolutionary

possibilities. Thus, even relatively fixed preferences might well lead to different choices under a new set of institutions. So, for instance, a set of actors that did well under a monarchic *Rechtsstaat* may well be the most fervent defenders of the rule of law under the status quo ante. However, when the rule of law under democratic conditions erodes their advantages, they may become more agnostic or even antipathetic towards it and act in ways that are semi-loyal or disloyal under the new circumstances.

Such an example raises the possibility that the transformational nature of revolutionary change can have both empowering and disempowering impacts on different segments of society depending on their position prior to and following a revolution. With regard to interest there are three different possible postrevolutionary orientations. Those whose interests are adversely affected by the outcome of the revolution may well harbor greater doubts about the postrevolutionary order, and may well be disposed, given the right circumstances, to condone actions by parties that subvert it . At the same time those in society whose interests were positively affected by the outcome of the revolution are far more likely to be supporters of the postrevolutionary order. Finally, there may also be some actors whose interest position is unchanged by the revolution. Their orientation will be predicated on factors other than simple interest.

The experience of revolution can also change the disposition of citizens. They may find the experience of revolution threatening, affirming, or disillusioning. So, it is possible that segments of society that were invested in the status quo prior to its failure will find the process or outcome of the revolution threatening to their position in society. Exposure to the disintegration of the norms of the status quo, particularly when accomplished by force, should exacerbate this feeling of threat. At the same time, those segments of society whose values were embodied in the post-revolutionary regime may well feel empowered by the outcome of the revolution and are most likely to be the firmest supporters of the post-revolutionary regime. Finally, those for whom the change embodied in the revolution did not go far enough may be embittered by the outcome and are more likely to become detractors of the postrevolutionary regime. The logic here is not one of status loss and threat, but of the revolution betrayed. Such disillusioned revolutionaries may well be prepared to "return to the barricades" to finally realize their aims.

Thus, even if the fundamental political orientations of political actors remain relatively fixed, the way in which they are embedded in the postrevolutionary power structure may well mean that their orientations towards authority could be markedly different under the post-revolutionary regime and may well change their behavior. The sources of this are complex, involving the evolution of their ability to realize their interests under the new regime, how the experience of revolution affected their attitudes towards the post-revolutionary authorities, or a complex combination of the two.

Not Only Who Voted for the Nazis

One of the dominant approaches to the collapse of the Weimar Republic and its replacement by Nazi dictatorship is to seek an understanding of who voted for the Nazis.[2] However, the Nazis did not come to power electorally, but through the emergency powers granted to the president under Weimar's semi-presidential constitution. The key to understanding the failure of the republic is its deadlock from the point at which the most strident anti-system actors (the KPD and the NSDAP) controlled a larger share

[2] There is also the associated literature on who joined the Nazi Party. The two literatures are related but the scope of who voted for the Nazis is much broader than who became members (e.g., Mann 2004, Mayer 1955).

of the seats in the Reichstag, creating centrifugal paralysis and impeding the formation of a government (Sartori 1976: 311). From the election of September 14, 1930, rule by majority government came to an end and was replaced by minority governments which relied on presidential emergency decrees. This represents a classic case of executive aggrandizement in Bermeo's (2016) sense of the term.

Feasible cabinets would have to have included either the KPD or the monarchist reactionaries of the DNVP with the SPD, something neither of which was inclined to do at this moment. The DNVP was quite willing to see chancellors appointed by President Hindenburg from their camp, and the KPD, beholden to the Comintern at this point, stigmatized the SPD as "social fascists."[3] The epitome of this deadlock was the election of July 31, 1932, when the combined share of the Nazis (38 percent) and the communists (15 percent) exceeded fifty percent. Given our understanding of how a democratic revolutionary process can create a situation where both reactionary and ultra-revolutionary actors are afforded the protections of democratic rule of law, we will use the Weimar elections to examine if revolutionary activity in the formation of Weimar, had a distal effect on polarized voting patterns a decade or so later during the death throes of the republic.

Specifically, the three elections of the period 1930-32 were marked by extraordinary polarization, leading to the paralysis of the political system and the appointment of the Nazi party to lead the government by President Hindenburg after the election November 1932. This was the last free and fair election in interwar Germany, as once the Nazis took control of the state, they used it to undermine their opposition and subsequently used the Reichstag fire to pass the Enabling Act 1933. The next elections of March 1933 were even worse with harsher and more widespread violence used to suppress the opposition parties and their supporters. When Hindenburg died in August 1934 Hitler commanded a majority in the Reichstag and had himself declared Fuehrer.

What distinguishes our work from earlier work on the electoral side of the demise of the Weimar Republic and its replacement by Nazi dictatorship, is that it reads history forward (Ahmed 2010, Møller 2021). It is not only a question of who voted for the Nazis but who voted for the extremes of the right and the left, making executive power autonomous from the legislature, and serving as the basis for dictatorship based on the emergency power of the presidency. The Nazi vote is just a part of the story, one suggested by the outcome of crisis of Weimar democracy. If we are to understand why the Weimar system failed, as it failed in real time, we need to understand how polarization undermined the ability of parliament to select a government, opening the system up to the arbitrary selection of governments by the executive, and the institutional replacement of democracy with dictatorship. Thus, we see a distinct period of backsliding, followed by an out and out seizure of power making a punctuated breakdown of democracy.

The Social Articulation of Polarization

Due to the meso-level basis of our investigation and absence of individual level data for the Weimar period, we will be using aggregated data in medium to large geographical subunits of Germany. We have substantial information about the collective nature of these units, such as population, social stratification, unemployment, and confessional distributions. We also have an indicator of the intensity of revolutionary activity in the early days of the republic that will allow us to investigate how the

[3] For their part, the Social-Democratic leader Kurt Schumacher called the communists "red-lacquered Nazi doppelgangers." Schmeitzner 2007: 255.

experience of revolution contributed to the polarization that set in a bit over a decade later. We will thus try to identify which types of voters were most likely to vote for the right and left extremes of the party spectrum. The absence of individual level voter data necessitates the use of specially designed methods to navigate the problems of potential ecological fallacies, e.g., attributing the causes of individual behavior to the collective measure of a higher-level unit of observation.

We expect that polarization will be more acute in areas that saw greater revolutionary activity. Higher levels represent a greater degree of disruption of existing authority and a break in the existing relationship between capital and labor. The political economy of the Kaiserreich was based on an alliance between large-estate agriculture and heavy industrial capital, that promoted high tariffs to protect both sectors from foreign competition and labor repressive practices that depressed wages in both industry and agriculture (Moore 1966, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). The agricultural tariffs also protected family farmers and kept the price of food high for the rest of society.

On balance, our expectation is that higher levels of revolutionary activity will translate into greater levels of polarization and vote shares for both the NSDAP and KPD. The extant literature would lead us to believe that revolutionary activity has the potential to create anxiety among upper- and middle-class voters, rural voters, and other traditional groups. This is in line with the substantial literature on Weimar voting, which highlights social class as intrinsic in who voted for whom. Perhaps the most widespread and influential theory on the appeal of the NSDAP was that it was strongest among the lower middle classes (*Kleinbuerger*) who feared a loss of economic security and social status under Weimar. This so-called "*Panik in Mittelstand*" theory was supported by the work of a host important historians and social scientists (Geiger 1932, Neumann 1973, Lipset 1960, Kornhauser 1969, and Bracher 1970). Exposure to revolutionary socialist activity is precisely the sort of thing which would exacerbate such anxiety. While this theory does explain a part of the Nazi rise, it clear that the loss of vote by the liberal parties (DDP and DVP) was insufficient to explain the growth in NSDAP vote from 1928 to 1930 (Bendix 1953). Subsequent work has shown that defections from the conservative DNVP (composed of more upper middle class, upper class, and rural voters) was probably more consequent here, as was increased turnout (Hamilton 1982, 1986). The question is if and where revolutionary provoked parts of the middle classes to vote in large numbers for the Nazis.

That said we now turn to the important role of religion in extremist voting. It has been well-established that there are very different patterns of voting in the parts of the country that are predominantly Protestant and Catholic due to the persecution of the latter under the Kulturkampf (1872-1878). As a result, Catholics of all classes supported the Zentrum, which had developed a powerful commitment to political equality under the rule of law and democracy. Of all the parties, in the period of polarization of the 1930s, Zentrum was the most durable in terms of levels of support. The same durability also held for its smaller Bavarian cousin, the Bavarian People's Party (BVP). Combined, the two won a solid fifteen percent of the vote between 1928-1932. This historical pattern is documented by the Weimar voting literature that shows much weaker results for extremist parties in the regions of Germany that were predominantly Catholic (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2014; Falter 1991; Frøland, Jakobsen and Osa 2019). Thus, in Catholic areas we expect to see less centrifugal movement to the extremes in comparison to Protestant areas. Generally, we expect to see less polarization across occupational groups in Catholic areas of the country.

While the class and denominational base of the German party-system was important, the literature shows that the way in which these interests were articulated in voting was highly dependent on

economic performance. The salient economic fact of the period we consider is the impact of the Great Depression which began to be felt in earnest in 1930. Germany was particularly hard hit in this regard. Unemployment rose from 4.5 percent (1.3 million) in the summer of 1929 to 24 percent (over six million) in early 1932 (Dimsdale, Horsewood and van Riel 2006). Ultimately, however, some communities experienced much higher unemployment than this aggregate figure, while others experienced less. There is strong quantitative evidence that heightened unemployment during the depression had important differential effects on the propensity of different social classes to abandon the established parties for the Nazis (King et al. 2008, Frey and Weck 1981, Van Riel and Schram 1993) as well as the KPD (Stoegbauer 2001). Thus, we expect to observe much higher levels of polarization and voting for extreme parties in those areas where there is higher unemployment.

This longstanding, sophisticated and complex literature on the Weimar elections provides no parsimonious explanation of who voted either for the Nazis or extremism in general. This is particularly true of Nazi support which was drawn from many quarters of Protestant German society. It is clear that statistically significant attributes in many of the classic studies are hiding interactive effects of location including economic performance, class identification, religious denomination, and perhaps others not yet identified or perhaps not measurable given the distal nature of the events described or explained. This has led Falter (1990, 1991) to describe the NSDAP as a People's Protest Party (*Volkspartei des Protests*). By this he meant that they gathered the votes of segments of society which had grievances against the system. A similar argument was made by Childers (1983, 112) who saw the sources of NSDAP support as "the disaffected, the frustrated, and the desperate, regardless of social or economic background." We have designed this study to capture which segments of society were most supportive of that coalition and move the quantitative voting literature forward by looking at how their experience during the revolution conditioned their response to the final crisis of rule that brought the Nazis to power.

We will use the same approach to understand which parts of the working class were more likely to vote for the KPD. It was a period in which the SPD, cut out of government and unable to protect working class communities from the ravages of unemployment, lost strength. Clearly a large part of this went to the more radical KPD. However, the losses racked up by the SPD were greater than the gains of the KPD, so following Childers (1983) we expect to observe that in highly politicized areas, some measure of this support was picked up by the NSDAP. In this sense, the failure of Weimar is predicated on the disintegration of its bulwark party, the SPD, and the poaching of its constituencies by the KPD and NSDAP.

Research Design

Sample

Our unit of observation is the district (Wahlkreis) level electoral event (1928, 1930, 1932(VII), 1932(XI), 1933). The main independent variable, revolutionary activity, is available at the level of State (Land) and at the provincial level for the largest Land (Prussia). For a complete list of states see the appendix. For some years (1928, 1930, and 1933) electoral results for all towns with over 5,000 persons were reported independently, where this data is available we take advantage of it.

Dependent Variable

Our key dependent variables are the vote shares across occupational categories for the two extremist parties (the NSDAP and KPD) for the crisis period encompassing the elections of September 1930, July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933. We treat the results of the last precrisis election of 1928 as the baseline. We have electoral data at the level of the voting district (*Wahlkreis*) for all elections. We thus account for the deadlocking of the Weimar party system and undermining of the role of Reichstag at the level of different groups within the electorate. The electoral data and the demographic data are drawn from the GESIS data archive (Falter & Dirk 1990).

Independent Variables

The German Empire was among the most surveilled and best documented societies of its time. Both the census and the annual *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* (The Statistical Yearbook for the German Empire)[4] have very detailed data disaggregated to the level of state (Land) and often below. Our main independent variable, revolutionary activity, comes from several issues of the yearbook, while the demographic data comes from digitized census records drawn from the GESIS database (Falter & Dirk 1990).

Revolutionary Activity

We gauge revolutionary activity by looking at strikes in the period from 1917 to 1922. Our coverage is only partial – the records exist for 1917 (Statistisches Reichsamt 1920: 99-101), 1919 (Statistisches Reichsamt 1921: 58-61), 1920 (Statistisches Reichsamt 1922: 72-76), 1921 and 1922 (Statistisches Reichsamt 1924: 54-59). The absence of data for 1918 is unfortunate and puzzling, but we imagine that the compilation was disrupted by the outbreak of the revolution itself. For our purposes, the year of most intensive activity is 1919 and we have data for the year before 1918 and the three years following 1919 giving us a strong sense of where revolutionary activity was strongest in and around the revolution and the period of instability that followed the foundation of the republic. We take the log of the total man hours lost to strikes in each region to create an indicator of the magnitude of revolutionary activity.

Religious Affiliation

We code all geographic units based on the majority religious denomination of the inhabitants. In Catholic areas denominational identification and concerns were an essential organizing axis of politics and we see radically different voting patterns in different units on this basis. Both the communists and the Nazis gained far less traction in areas that were predominantly Catholic. The opposite holds in Protestant areas where the inhabitants were much more open to the appeals of the far ends of the political spectrum.

Occupational Structure

[4] Obviously, Germany was not an empire (Reich) after the declaration of the republic, thus perhaps it could just as easily be translated as realm.

We look at the class basis of votes for both the Nazis and Communists. We draw on the district level occupational data drawn from the census. The table below provides a frame of reference for the size of each of these groups in Germany based on the 1928 employment census. Clearly, the industrial and farm sectors are of critical importance due their size.

Table 2: Employment Structure in Germany (1928)

Occupational Group	**Raw Number**	**Percentage**
Pensioners	5,460,413	9.0%
Farmers	16,293,286	26.9%
Manufacturing/ Industry Employees	23,300,850	38.5%
Government Employees	2,986,234	4.9%
Trade/Commercial Employees	9,787,875	16.1%
Domestic Servants	1,793,131	2.9%
Health Employees	907,169	1.5%

The occupational categories are commerce (Handel und Verkehr), manufacturing/industry (Industrie und Handwerk), government service (Verwaltung, Heer, etc.), domestic servants (Häusliche Dienste), healthcare (Gesundheit), farming (Land und Forstwirtschaft), and pensioners (Beruflose Selbstaendige). Those who live with the employed but who are not currently working (including children, pensioners, wives, and other relations) are included as part of the count for each of these occupational groups. Thus, the stand-alone pensioner category only includes those who are living without other, familial economic support, a group that was particularly economically vulnerable.

Ecological Inference Estimation

Because of potential ecological fallacies, we analyze the data used methods specifically designed to estimate individual attributes based on aggregate data. We implement a Bayesian version of the ecological inference method deployed by King et al. (2008). It is analogous to the non-hierarchical, Bayesian version of the method, found in 'eiPack' (Lau et al 2006), but we chose to write our version of the model in STAN (Carpenter 2017).[5] Our approach, presented in this section, largely imitates the approach developed by Lau and coauthors.

At the center of the ecological inference model is the assumption that society can be divided up into groups by ethnicity, gender, or, in our case, occupational categories. From there, we assume that the votes received by each party in an election can be broken down into the proportion of the vote that came from the social divisions we just mentioned. Thus, we have a set of key parameters we hope to estimate: the share of the vote from each occupational group attributed to each party during an election. These figures are subject to two key restrictions in our model, which are expressed in the equations below. First, the sum of the contributions from each occupational group ($\sum_{r=1}^{R} \beta_{rci}\, Xri$) must sum to the total votes received by a party (T_{ci}), where β_{rci} is the rate at which a given occupational group voted for a given party and X_{rci} is the proportion of individuals employed in that

[5] STAN is a probabilistic programming language, which employs Hamiltonian Monte Carlo (HMC) sampling. HMC offers more efficient posterior sampling when compared to older approaches.

occupational category in a given district. Second, the total proportion of votes attributed to all parties by any given occupational group ($\sum_{c=1}^{C} \beta_{rci}$) must sum to one.

$$T_{ci} = \sum_{r=1}^{R} \beta_{rci} X_{ri} \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{c=1}^{C} \beta_{rci} = 1$$

Under the constraints articulated above, we calculate a series of regression equations (one for each vote share considered) to estimate the proportion of the votes cast in each occupational category for the parties listed in table 3.[6] The rates at which different occupational groups vote for different parties are treated as effects to be estimated for each of the potential outcomes considered.

Table 3: Parties Included in the Analysis

Vote Shares Analyzed
National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP)
Communist Party of Germany (KPD)
German National People's Party (DNVP)
Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)
Catholic Parties (Center Party and Bavarian People's Party [BVP])
Other Parties

The model is structured as follows:

$$T_{ci} \sim normal\left(\sum_{r=1}^{R} \beta_{rci} X_{ri}, \sigma\right)$$

$$\sigma_{ci} \sim exponential(5)$$

$$[\beta_{rci} \ldots \beta_{rCi}] \sim Dirichlet(2,1.2,3.2,1.2,1.2,1.2,2,2)$$

The prior placed on the Dirichlet distribution is effectively flat, though it assumes a larger outcome share for the non-voting portion of each occupational category (the third alpha value). The Dirichlet distribution itself is selected because it effectively implements the first of our two constraints, calculating each occupational category's beta values as part of a simplex (a vector of values that must sum to one). The exponential distribution also provides a relatively flat prior within the constraints discussed. We emulate the King et al. approach of analyzing our variables of interest by splitting the sample. We do this three times, separating districts by their majority denomination (Catholic or

[6] Additionally, because of the character of the occupational census data, which includes the families of workers and non-citizen workers we calculate the proportion of non-voters in each occupational category, which is not considered in our results. It is, however, a necessary control because of the differing rates of non-voters between occupational categories.

Protestant), the magnitude of their exposure to strike activity (logged total strike hours), and finally by their level of unemployment in 1930.

As King and coauthors did, we partitioned our samples by denomination because of the centrality of the Zentrum and the Bayerische Volkspartei to Catholic identity in regions where Catholic populations were high. Thus, we have little reason to expect our data to be independent and identically distributed across this division. Similarly, we split the samples based on strike activity because we expect economic identity to be more highly politicized in high strike areas and to thus exert a stronger influence on political behavior across occupational categories. For a break down of localities by strike activity and the relative size of each subsample, see the appendix.

This leaves us with eight subsamples, which are delineated in table 5. We estimate our parameters of interest separately for each of these subsamples and compare the differences to assess the impact of strike activity on voting behavior across occupational categories.

Table 5: Partitions and Sample Sizes[7]

Protestant, High Strike, High Unemployment (n = 197, 1932 n = 98)	Protestant, High Strike, Low Unemployment (n = 228, 1932 n = 69)	Catholic, High Strike, High Unemployment (n = 99, 1932 n = 38)	Catholic, High Strike, Low Unemployment (n = 360, 1932 n = 129)
Protestant, Low Strike, High Unemployment (n = 95, 1932 n = 46)	Protestant, Low Strike, Low Unemployment (n = 244, 1932 n = 59)	Catholic, Low Strike, High Unemployment (n = 29, 1932 n = 1)	Catholic Low Strike, Low Unemployment (n = 85, 1932 n = 17)

Our approach, as it is laid out here, allows us to make direct comparisons to the landmark King et al study. Our analysis differs in two key ways from this original work, first we divide our subsamples using a measure of strike activity (as opposed to unemployment) and second, we use occupational categories as opposed to class categories (that is, farming/manufacturing as opposed to blue-collar worker/white-collar worker). We believe these adjustments will offer important new insights. First, the original study used a blue-collar, white-collar, self-employed, unemployed distinction which made it difficult to identify substantive differences that might exist within these groups. For instance, a laborer working in a factory is likely to have different political motivations from a farmhand, but both would be considered blue collar. Additionally, we argue that spaces with a legacy of strike action are more likely to see highly politicized economic identities, which may lead to disparate patterns of voting behavior amongst the economically vulnerable.

Results

To assess differences between populations with a high exposure to strike activity during the revolution and those without it, we divide our sample based on the logged total number of strike hours. Secondarily, we divide the sample again based on a measure of unemployment taken in 1930 to identify those spaces that are more economically vulnerable. Finally, we divide these four samples by the majority denomination of the population (Catholic or Protestant).[8] These divisions leave us with eight subsamples, with four potential combinations of economic traits, laid out in the table below.

Table 6: Economic Dimensions - Vulnerability and Politicization

	Politicized Economic Identities	Non-Politicized Economic Identities
Economically Vulnerable	High Strike Activity, High Unemployment	Low Strike Activity, High Unemployment[9]
Economically Non-Vulnerable	High Strike Activity, Low Unemployment	Low Strike Activity, Low Unemployment

[7] For the years 1928, 1930, and 1933 the available electoral data is considerably more detailed, and we choose to take advantage of the increased sample size and smaller subunits where possible.

[8] This is in keeping with the approach taken by King et al (2008), who divided the samples based on denomination (measured in 1925) and the level of unemployment (measured in 1930).

[9] There are only two Catholic districts that fall into this category in 1932, so we do not analyze this subsample for the elections in that year.

The blue lines and dots in the charts below reflect the national average of support for the relevant party, while the red lines and dots represent the relevant subsample's average support for the relevant party. Our findings highlight that occupational support for different parties in the Weimar republic existed and was strongly shaped by both economic and social considerations. Essentially we show where the extremist parties derived unusually high levels of support. In the case of the bulwark parties of the republic, SPD and Zentrum, we also show where they were vulnerable.

It stands to reason that support for the KPD, as a party with a militant class identity, will be strongly affected by both levels of strike activity and unemployment and more likely to elicit clear patterns of voting along occupational lines. This is, indeed, what our analysis shows. Figure 1, below, presents the rate of support for the KPD across occupations in November of 1932. We have selected November of 1932 to showcase these dynamics as it is the year when KPD and NSDAP vote shares reach their highest level. For those who are interested, full results are available in an appendix. These charts compare the most economically tumultuous districts (high unemployment / high strike activity) against those that are calmest (low unemployment / low strike activity) in both Catholic and Protestant spaces.

Note that in high-strike/high-unemployment spaces in both Catholic and Protestant districts support for the KPD (the blue line) is generally higher than the national average (the red line) and we identify distinct, occupationally driven patterns of support. Not only do industrial workers exhibit a significantly higher rate of support for the KPD, but they are in fact the only occupation to do so. Indeed, more traditionally disposed groups such as agrarians, pensioners, and traders all exhibit significantly lower levels of support for the KPD. Furthermore, this antipathy is strongly associated with high levels of local strike activity during the revolution a decade earlier. This dynamic emerges consistently in both protestant and catholic spaces. Support for the NSDAP, on the other hand, exhibits strong cross-denominational differences.

Figure 1: Support for the KPD Across Occupational Groups in November of 1932

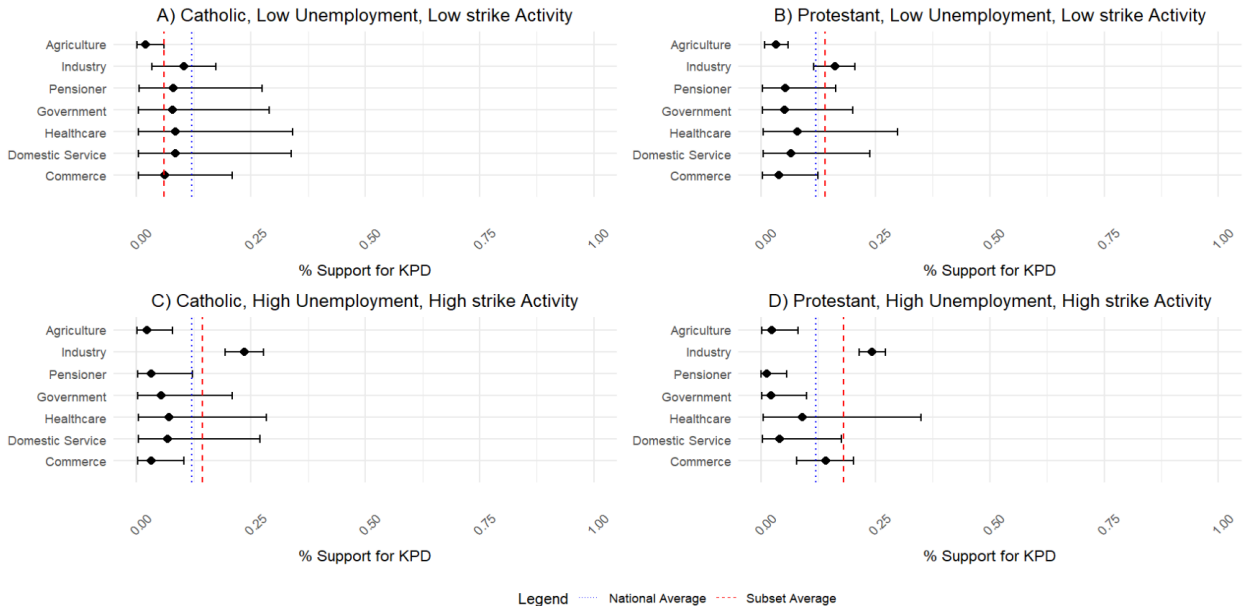
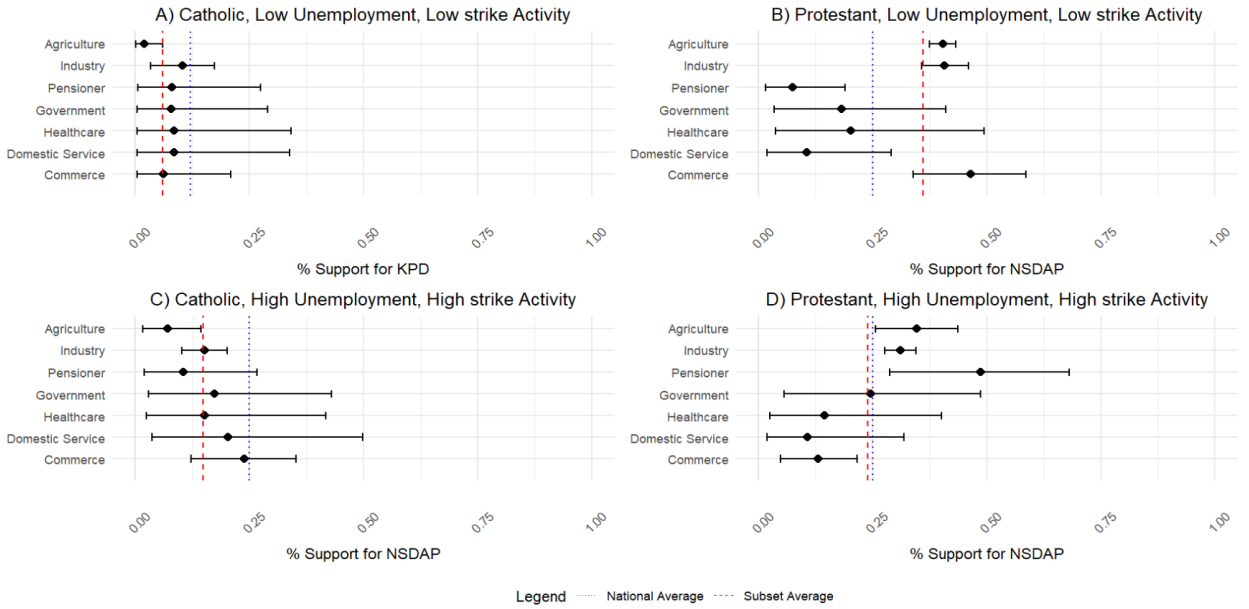


Figure 2: Support for the NSDAP Across Occupational Groups – November 1932



In Figure 2, even though subset averages are below national averages, we do not identify strong patterns of occupation based opposition to the NSDAP, except for those employed in agriculture. In high unemployment, high strike activity areas the agrarian populations vote for the NSDAP at significantly lower rates than nationally and the general population in those districts (95 percent confidence level). For those in low unemployment, low strike activity areas this just missed 95 percent confidence, but is significant at the 90 percent level. Workers in high strike, high unemployment spaces also vote less for the NSDAP compared to the national sample. In contrast, in protestant spaces we see agrarians living in low employment, low strike area, voting for the NSDAP at significantly higher rates than the general

population, both nationally and in the relevant district subsample. Additionally, workers in protestant areas vote in greater numbers for the Nazis both nationally and within the population of comparable districts. This is true both in high strike and unemployment districts, and low strike and unemployment districts (though in the latter this only at a 90 percent confidence level).

Finally, within protestant districts, we see further variation along occupational lines. Pensioners were more likely to support the NSDAP than the general population in high strike areas but were less likely in low strike areas. We also see some evidence of a Kleinbuerger affinity for the NSDAP – those employed in commerce in low strike-low unemployment areas vote for the NSDAP at a higher rate than the national level. The diversity of these patterns of support is in line with the arguments of Childers and Falter. The Nazis drew on different sources of support in diverse spaces. In some spaces the NSDAP is the party of the working poor (of which the industrial and agrarian sectors constituted the overwhelming majority) while in others these occupational categories clearly avoid voting for the party. Similarly, in some spaces isolated pensioners, who are both socially and economically vulnerable, support the Nazis while in other spaces they do not. While we do not posit a causal explanation for this variation, identifying it is enough to give credence to the argument that the Nazi party played on the dissatisfaction of different populations depending on a complex interaction of class, economic, denominational factors, and revolutionary experience.

It is also worth examining what happened during the crisis to the support for the SPD and the Zentrum as the most important foundational parties of the Republic. The performance of the SPD in November of 1932 is documented in Figure 3. In economically placid districts, the SPD does poorly among voters in the agricultural sector. In spaces where economic identities are highly politicized, the party continues to receive high support from industrial workers. In Protestant areas generally they outperform both the national and subset average. In economically politicized Catholic areas industrial support is higher than the subset average, but still below the national average.

Figure 3: Support for the SPD Across Occupational Groups

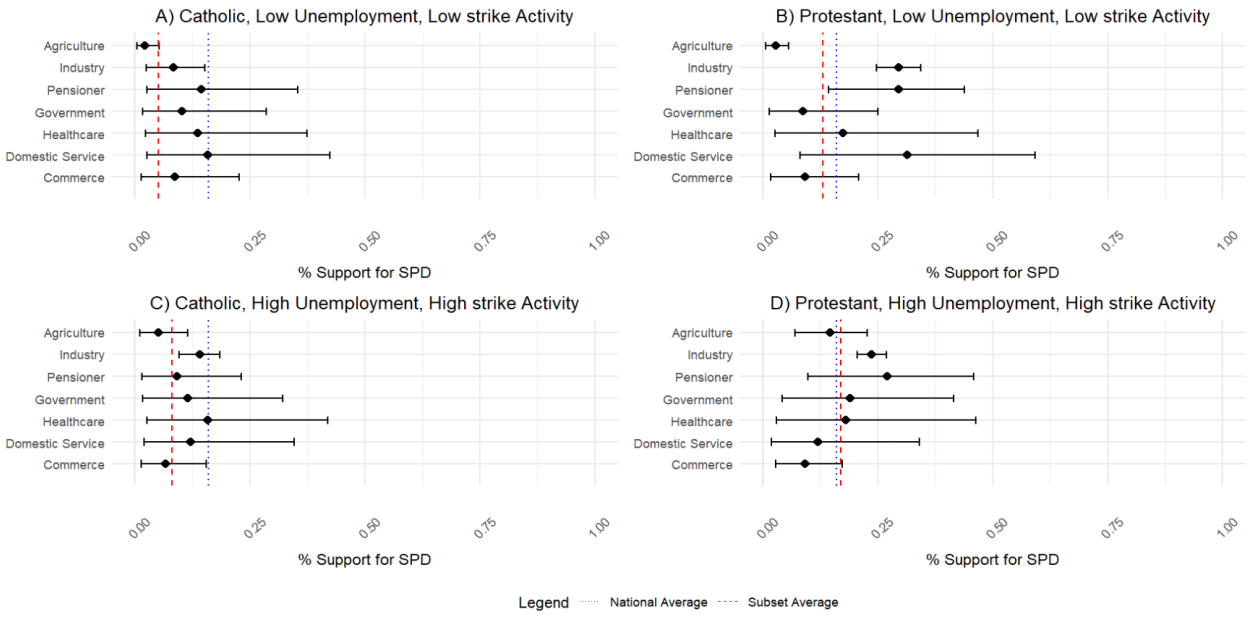


Figure 4 looks at the relationship between the SPD and industrial workers in Protestant districts from before the governing crisis (1928) to the Nazi orchestrated election in 1933. Although the SPD experienced a steady erosion in its support, industrial workers remained the core support of the party, regardless of context even as support for the party dropped generally. The party clearly stumbles in both elections of 1932 especially losing support among protestant workers in low strike, low unemployment areas. Taken in tandem with the results of figure 3, figure 4 present evidence of the SPD as a party that is losing its footing at the high point of the crisis in 1932.

Figure 4: Support for the SPD Amongst Workers in Protestant Districts Across Election Years

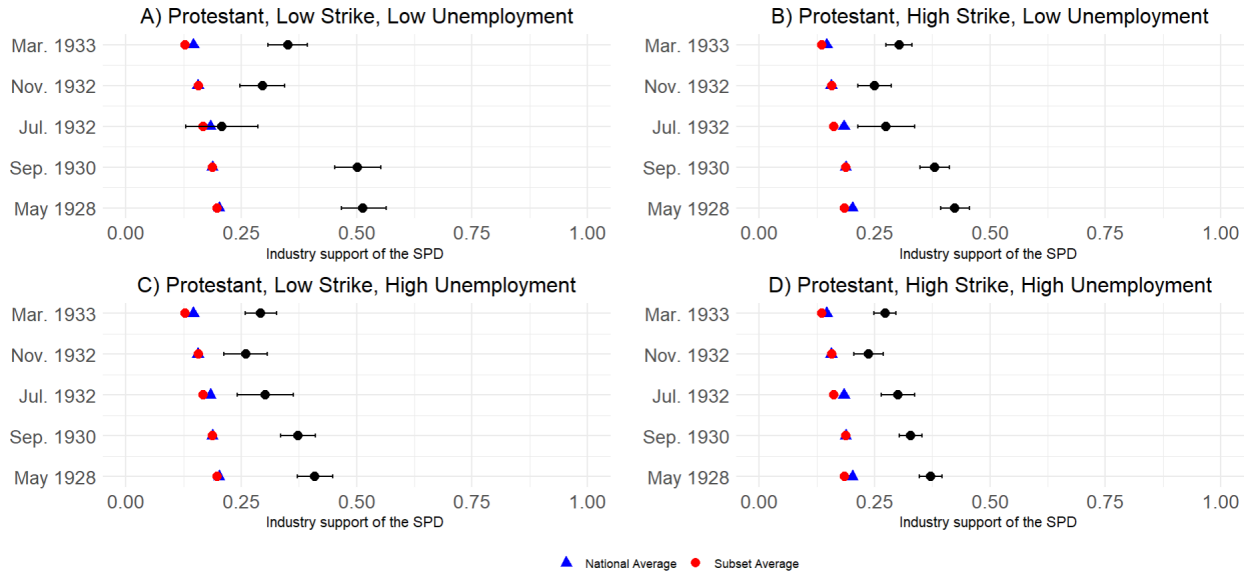
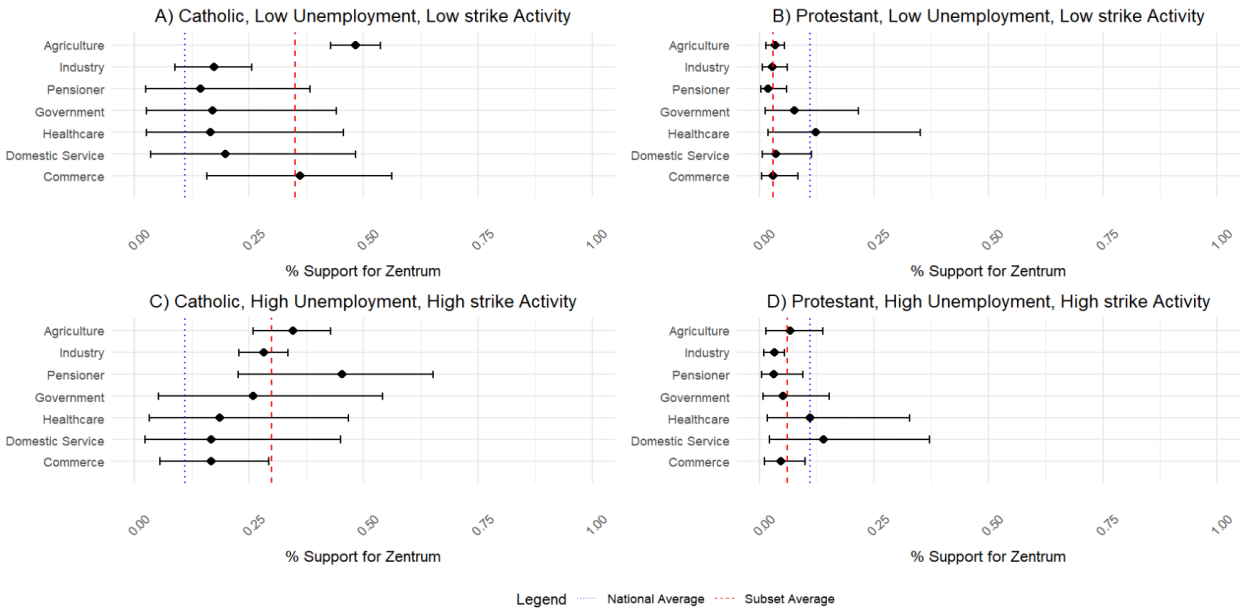


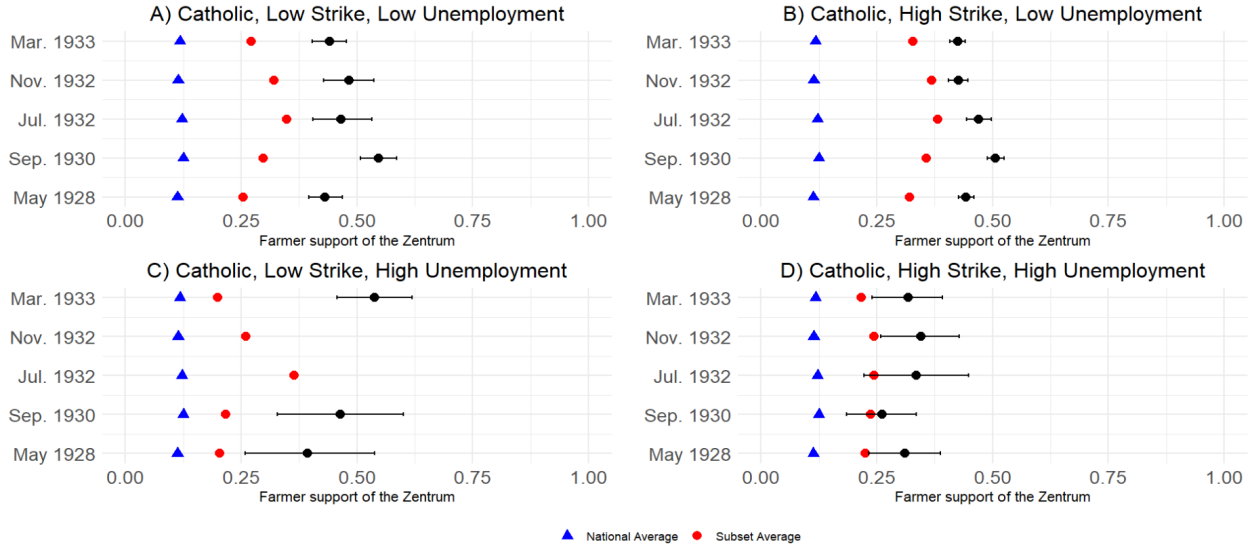
Figure 5: Support for the Zentrum Across Occupational Groups



While the class basis of the SPD vote (at least in protestant spaces) is clear, Zentrum's appeal was denominational and cross-class. In Figure 5, Protestant districts exhibit negligible support for the party, independent of class or occupation. In Catholic districts, the Zentrum did especially well in low unemployment spaces, many of which are rural, and is buoyed by a clear preference on the part of those working in agriculture. In high unemployment, high strike activity areas, the support is strong but not delineated by occupation. While Catholics working in agriculture and industry, and pensioners vote in much higher numbers for the Zentrum, their patterns of voting are not distinctive in comparison to other Catholics voting under the same conditions.

The pattern of support for the Zentrum amongst Catholic farmers is a strong one, as evidenced by figure 6, below. The Catholic parties were able to hold onto their rural support. Note however that this effect was weaker in high strike, high unemployment areas. On the Protestant side of the divide, rural voters were one of the groups which the NSDAP was able to draw strength from (recall Figure 2 above). This points to the complex interplay between economic and religious identities that shaped the electoral politics of interwar Germany. Populations in Protestant areas were clearly more easily drawn to supporting the extremist political choices offered by the party system.

Figure 6: Support for the Zentrum Amongst Farmers in Catholic Districts Across 5 Election Years[10]



Discussion and Conclusions

Weimar Germany is a classic case that has helped us to formulate our theories on how political polarization and anti-system actors pose a threat to democratic survival. The breakdown of Weimar democracy was also a world historical event which placed state power in the hands of a murderous megalomaniac who provoked a global conflagration that took the lives of tens of millions of people. In examining the causes of that polarization, we pinpointed Weimar's emergence via the revolution that followed the collapse of the German war effort at the end of the First World War as a potentially contributing factor to that polarization.

[10] The low strike, high unemployment Catholic subsample does not have enough observations for a point estimate to converge.

Specifically, we argued that democracies that emerge via violent revolutions are apt to leave strong, residual, unresolved class and political antagonisms that persist into the period of democratic government. Democratic revolutionary governments do manage to restore the fractured power of the state and its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, but they do so without neutralizing the political forces that have violently contested power in the revolutionary interregnum. Thus, post-revolutionary democracies are potentially very fertile grounds for polarized politics because formerly implacable adversaries confront each other according to the rules of democratic contestation and parliamentary opposition.

Because of this perspective, unlike many political scientists who focus on the rise of the Nazis, we look at the fatal polarization and deadlock of the governmental system as a two-sided process where the strengthening of the left anti-system pole, the KPD, is also critically important. Both the KPD and the Nazis have their origins in some sense in the armed combatants that struggled to rule the new republic. Their emergence as major electoral contenders disabled the system of parliamentary based cabinets as an effective system of rule.

We gauged insurrectionary activism through the contemporary collection of data on strike activity during the period of revolutionary upheaval. Using methods of ecological inference estimation, we found that areas wracked by greater revolutionary activity saw, in specific configurations, greater levels of support for both the NSDAP and KPD, while the support for the bulwarks of the Weimar system, the socialists, the Catholics, and liberals lost major support. The results we report are not causal but observational and are point estimates around which there is uncertainty as attested to by the size of the intervals around the points.

Our strategy for understanding the bases of polarization was to pinpoint those occupational groups of voters who voted in uncommonly high numbers (e.g., whose support exceeded national levels as well as in sociologically similar areas) for the extremist parties. These were the groups of voters who drove polarization. These results were compiled by building on the major competing theories of extremist voting and polarization in Weimar. Our findings are congruent with the differential effects of religious affiliation, with attention to the class bases of Weimar voting, and the earthquake-like effect of depression-era unemployment on the rise of electoral support for extremism. We do not nullify the insights of this previous work but clarify where they were most powerfully concentrated in the social order and how they were mitigated or exacerbated by their interaction.

We found enhanced support for the Nazis was widespread across working-class Protestant voters, and that past revolutionary violence had differential effects. Where strike activity and unemployment had been high both pensioners and workers voted for the NSDAP more frequently. In spaces with low strike activity and unemployment, those employed in agriculture and industry voted for the Nazis in higher numbers, but pensioners show a clear aversion to the party. Thus, while the Nazis were effective in attracting the working class in spaces where economic anxiety was both high and low, the differing components of this support suggest that the appeals used to garner this vote may not have been consistent in all places. And there was no comparable mobilization for the Nazis among Catholic occupational groups.

NSDAP support came from diverse sources, from different occupational groups in Protestant areas that faced different distal and proximal economic grievances. There was no generalized middle-class panic but a wider and more disparate set of voters. They overperformed among Protestant workers

generally, as well as farmers in areas with a weak revolutionary tradition and low unemployment, and among pensioners where past revolutionary strike activity and contemporary unemployment was high. Like contemporary populists, the NSDAP appears to have effectively assembled a coalition of the disaffected, which brought growing success in the fragmented party system of the late Weimar Republic. Despite the strength of the KPD among industrial workers in high strike areas, the NSDAP also was able to capture the votes of industrial workers in protestant areas. And unlike in Catholic areas this was irrespective of economic conditions, e.g., in both high and low strike and high and low unemployment areas.

In contrast, the main social constituency of the KPD were industrial workers. The confessional effects are not as strong here. Specifically, support for the KPD comes from both Protestants and Catholics in high unemployment, high strike areas. The KPD drew its growing strength from areas where class identity among workers was politicized by past violent class struggle and the punishing conditions of employment during the depression. In this sense, the electoral battles at the demise of the Weimar Republic hinged on the vote of the working class, whose support for the SPD wavered, assailed by the polarizing appeals of both the KPD and the NSDAP. The one bulwark of the republic that held up electorally was the loyalty of Catholic voters to the Zentrum and BVP. This, however, ended when the leadership of the party voted to support the Enabling Act in 1933 based on political guarantees for the Catholic community from Hitler. Those guarantees proved worthless and in July 1933, both Catholic parties were dissolved leaving the NSDAP the only legal party in the Third Reich.

There are two big takeaways from this paper. First, proximal social conditions as well as confessional and class identities of Germans were confirmed as important to the polarization of voting patterns in late Weimar Germany. Second, the revolutionary experience of the birth of the republic was also consequent. In areas where revolutionary activity was more intense, voting along confessional, class lines, and economic conditions sometimes was more extreme and in others we found mitigation dependent on occupational categories and confessional affiliation. This speaks to the importance of violent regime birth on the future prospects for regime breakdown and survival, as well as the importance of distal formative experiences on the eventual success of institutions in solving the evolving challenges that societies inevitably face.

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