

Elite Influence? Religion and the Electoral Success of the Nazis*

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Abstract

In Weimar Germany, the Catholic Church vehemently warned ordinary parishioners about the dangers of extremist parties. We establish that constituencies' religious composition is an important empirical predictor of Nazi vote shares—dwarfing the explanatory power of any other demographic or socioeconomic variable. Even after carefully accounting for observational differences, Catholics were far less likely to vote for the NSDAP than their Protestant counterparts. The evidence suggests that this disparity was, in large part, due to the sway of the Catholic Church and its dignitaries. At the same time, we show that attempts to immunize Catholics against the radical left failed to achieve the desired result. To explain the puzzling asymmetry in the Church's influence at the ballot box, we develop a simple theoretical framework of elite influence in electoral politics.

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1. Introduction

Few historical events have been more consequential than the failure of Germany’s first democracy and Adolf Hitler’s ensuing rise to power. While much has since been learned about the astonishing rise of the Nazis (see, e.g., Arendt 1951; Falter 1991; Fischer 2002; Lepsius 1966; Lipset 1963), “the literature as a whole [...] remains unsatisfactory even to its contributors” (King et al. 2008, p. 953). In this paper, we use modern econometric methods to shed additional light on how religion and the Catholic Church affected the electoral politics of Weimar Germany.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, support for the Nazis was by no means uniform. Even at the height of the economic depression, majority Catholic regions remained strongholds of democratic parties, especially the Zentrum (Centre Party).¹ By contrast, voters in predominantly Protestant areas abandoned their traditional allegiances and flocked toward the NSDAP and, to a lesser extent, the communist KPD.

Although scholars have long identified religion as one amongst several correlates of Nazi support—even contemporaries had done so (cf. Fandel 2002)—we contend that the role of religion in the downfall of the Weimar Republic is underappreciated. In the first part of the paper, we substantiate this claim by establishing that religion is an important predictor of NSDAP vote shares.

In the Republic’s last free election, constituencies’ religious composition alone explains more than 58% of the county-level variation in Nazi votes. This far exceeds the explanatory power of any other demographic or socioeconomic variable. Voter’s religion even explains more variation in the data than all other available variables *combined*. Thus, to fully comprehend the failure of Germany’s first democracy, one has to understand the role of religion and whether the Catholic Church was able to wield influence at the ballot box.

Yet, the extant evidence remains purely descriptive. That is, the literature is first and foremost concerned with determining “who voted for Hitler” (e.g., Childers 1983; Falter 1991; Hamilton 1982; O’Loughlin 2002). But even if we could know with absolute certainty which groups of German society supported the Nazis more than others, it would still be insufficient to answer the deeper question of *why* some groups radicalized while others did not.

To see the problem, note that the south and west of Germany were not only more Catholic than the north and northeast but also much more agrarian. Did the NSDAP perform poorly in the former regions because the party’s agricultural policies held little appeal to farmers? Were majority Protestant constituencies more likely to back the Nazis because they were

¹Our description of the Zentrum Party and its election results always includes its Bavarian sibling, the Bavarian People’s Party (BVP).

hit harder by the economic depression? Or, did ordinary Catholics refrain from supporting radical parties because they were instructed to do so by the clergy?²

Given the descriptive focus of the empirical literature, it is hardly surprising that there exists no consensus on why the NSDAP was more successful in predominantly Protestant regions. Some claim that Catholics' resistance was due to a distinct Catholic culture with a close-knit network of clubs, unions, and other civic organizations (e.g., Burnham 1972; Lepsius 1966). Others emphasize the importance of observational differences between Protestants and Catholics. King et al. (2008), for instance, contend that different constituencies simply had divergent economic interests, and that "ordinary economic voting" provides a straightforward rationalization of the patterns in the data. None of these explanations accord with what Hitler himself believed. According to Hitler, the NSDAP would only be able to win over Catholic voters if the curia gave up its opposition to National Socialism (see Scholder 1977).

To the best of our knowledge, there exists no rigorous econometric evidence on why Catholics eschewed the NSDAP. In the second part of the paper, we therefore ask whether religious differences in support for the Nazis were due to observational, socio-economic differences, or whether they are better explained by the influence of the Catholic Church.³ We show that religious differences in NSDAP support actually *widen* upon carefully accounting for constituencies' other characteristics. All else equal, Catholic voters were on average even *less* likely to support the Nazis than Figure 1 suggests.

Moreover, we provide direct evidence in support of the idea that the Church's influence over parishioners contributed to the resistance of ordinary Catholics. To do so, we draw on a novel data set that allows us to geographically locate members of the Catholic clergy who ignored the directives of their bishops and instead openly sympathized with the Nazis. We find that religious differences in the propensity to vote for the NSDAP are 32–41% smaller in villages that are plausibly influenced by a "brown priest." Put differently, Catholics and Protestants voted much more alike in settings where the Catholic Church's official warnings about the dangers of National Socialism were directly contradicted by the local clergy. We further find that after the Catholic bishops gave up their opposition and took a position that was favorable to Hitler, parishioners' relative resistance crumbled as well.

The third part of the paper speaks to the limits of the Church's electoral influence. Contrary

²In seminal work, Falter (1991) calculates that Protestants were about twice as likely to vote for the NSDAP than Catholics. At the same time, he acknowledges that the assumptions required for his estimates to have a causal interpretation are "in many cases unrealistic" (p. 443).

³Although King et al. (2008) suspect that the Catholic Church "added to the incentives for voters to favor the Catholic parties," they also state that "one might, of course, doubt whether voting suggestions by the Catholic parish priest were heeded in the polling booth," and that they have "not been able to unearth sources that speak directly to this issue" (pp. 964).

to conventional wisdom, we establish that, all else equal, Catholics were just as likely as Protestants to support the communist KPD. Why would the Catholic Church be able to immunize parishioners against the far right but not radical left?

To explain this theoretical puzzle, we develop a simple framework of elite influence in electoral politics. Among our theory’s key predictions is an *asymmetry* in the Church’s ability to “guide” the votes of the faithful. In particular, we show that the electoral influence of the Church interacts in important ways with the ideological positioning of the Catholic party. As a consequence, the Zentrum’s right-off-center position both *aided* and *hindered* the Church hierarchy’s efforts to counter extremist movements.

Succinctly summarizing, our paper makes three contributions: (i) We provide additional, more rigorous evidence on “who voted for the Nazis.” (ii) We emphasize and clarify the role that religion played in the downfall of the Weimar Republic. (iii) We shed light on the (in)ability of religious elites to wield influence at the ballot box.

Political scientists are increasingly recognizing the importance of religion (e.g., Gill 1998, 2007; Kalyvas 1996, 2000; Toft et al. 2011).⁴ Yet, we are only beginning to understand the mechanisms through which religion and religious dignitaries affect politics. Warner (2000) casts churches as interest groups seeking political influence, and Grzymala-Busse (2015) argues that successful churches use their moral authority to gain institutional access. This paper focuses on the the electoral process itself. By developing a simple framework that explains why some voters are more susceptible to electoral control than others, even when they are all equally religious, we hope to contribute theoretical insights that travel beyond the narrow context of the Weimar Republic.

2. Religious Interests in Weimar Politics

With the end of World War I came the end of Germany’s monarchy. Her post-war democracy, however, lasted a mere fourteen years. Even during the *Kaiserreich*, the Catholic Church had hardly confined itself to the sidelines of politics. Scarred by Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, the Church had traditionally backed the democratic Centre Party (Zentrum). Promoting the political and cultural ideals of Germany’s Catholic minority, the Zentrum had been the spearhead of Political Catholicism ever since its founding in the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only were many high-ranking party officials ordained Catholic priests, but the clergy tried to use its influence to sway ordinary Catholics to vote for the Zentrum. Anderson (2000) notes that “the most important of all of the parish clergy’s task was to make sure that the Zentrum’s ballots got distributed” (p. 131). It was also common for Sunday sermons to

⁴Think, for instance, of the Catholic Church’s involvement in the struggle against autocratic regimes in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and South-East Asia (Gill 1998; ?), the Religious Right in the U.S. (??), or Islam’s role as a touchstone of legitimacy for extremist movements in the Arab Middle East (?).

remind parishioners of their “obligation” to “vote according to their conscience”—a formula beloved by the clergy for the nod it made in the direction of voters’ freedom, all the while reminding them of what “conscience” required of every good Catholic (Anderson 2000, p. 132).

During the Weimar Republic, the Catholic Church continued to back the Zentrum. Moreover, it actively discouraged Catholics from supporting the far right, especially the NSDAP (Scholder 1977). Alerted by the Nazis’ sudden success at the polls and afraid of anticlerical movements within the party, the Catholic bishops took an explicit anti-Hitler stand in the fall of 1930. In the diocese of Mainz, for instance, Catholics were officially forbidden to be members of the Nazi Party, and noncompliers could not receive any of the sacraments (Müller 1963). Deuerlein (1963) observes that, in the last phase of the Republic, nobody of public standing opposed the Nazis more than the Catholic clergy.

Anecdotal evidence supports this assertion. For example, in the small village of Waldsee the local Catholic priest is said to have warned parishioners that “whoever votes for Hitler will have to justify himself on Judgment Day. There is no bigger sin than voting for Hitler!” (quoted in Fandel 1997, p. 35). Others called Hitler a “vagabond” and withheld Easter communion or absolution from suspected Nazi supporters (see Fandel 1997, 2002). Parish priests even went above and beyond the orders of their bishops. Kißener (2009) reports from a Sunday sermon entitled “Heil Christ, not Heil Hitler!” during which the priest chastised parishioners for supporting the NSDAP in the previous election.

Importantly, the Catholic Church’s disapproval of radical parties was by no means limited to the political right. In fact, the Church had long declared “*every* form of socialism and communism as incompatible with Christendom” (Horstmann 1985, p. 69, italics in original). To dissuade Catholics from supporting leftist parties, such as the socialist SPD or the communist KPD, the clergy frequently withheld the sacraments, or used the confessional box for pressuring parishioners into renouncing their political convictions (cf. Schulte 1928). Sun (1997) even describes meticulously organized, month-long “home visitation” campaigns. In an attempt to bring suspected communists back into the Catholic fold, some priests are reported to have made personal contact with more than a hundred households per week

By contrast, neither the German Evangelical Church Confederation nor any of its member churches got officially involved in Weimar politics (Scholder 1977). While some of the Protestant clergy were appalled by Hitler’s ideology, others fancied the Nazis’ goal of creating a German Unity Church. Since Protestants outnumbered Catholics by about two to one, such a Unity Church would have likely been under Protestant leadership. In light of a waging internal debate about the perceived merits of National Socialism, the official guidelines of the Protestant member churches stipulated that priests were to remain politically neutral.

In practice, this often meant that members of the NSDAP and its paramilitary groups would be allowed to attend mass in full uniform and that “the ‘Amen’ of the pastor was drowned out by the ‘Sieg Heil’ of the brown formations” (Scholder 1977, p. 182).

Although the Catholic Church and its dignitaries had been vigilant in resisting the Nazis until the very last election in 1933, their resistance collapsed shortly after passage of the Enabling Act. On March 28, 1933, Bishop Bertram issued an official statement calling the “general proscription and warnings of National Socialism [...] no longer necessary” (quoted in Kißener 2009, p. 19). While the same statement contained other more carefully worded passages, it was widely perceived as the “episcopacy’s approval of the Third Reich and its Führer” (Scholder 1977, p. 320).

3. A Fresh Look at Old Data

Our empirical analysis relies on official election results combined with information from the 1925 and 1933 Censuses. These data were compiled by Falter and Hänisch (1990) from official publications by the *Statistisches Reichsamt*. For most years, election results are available at the county as well as the municipality level. Unfortunately, the *Statistisches Reichsamt* never released municipality-level results for the *Reichstag* elections in July and November of 1932. Since these were the last two elections of the Weimar Republic that were undoubtedly free, much of our analysis is conducted at the county level. Unless otherwise noted, we restrict attention to the 982 counties with nonmissing information on religious composition and election outcomes in November 1932.

To find out whether religion remains correlated with Nazi vote shares, even after carefully controlling for differences in constituencies’ observable characteristics, we focus on the November election of 1932 and estimate models of the following form:

$$(1) \quad v_c = \mu_d + \beta \text{Catholic}_c + X_c' \theta + \varepsilon_c.$$

Here, v_c denotes NSDAP vote shares (among all eligible voters) in county c , Catholic_c measures the share of Catholics, X_c is a comprehensive vector of controls, and μ_d marks an electoral district fixed effect.⁵

The parameter of interest is β . It indicates the percentage point change in the NSDAP’s vote share associated with a percentage point increase in a county’s share of Catholics, holding observational factors equal. Since the estimate is based on an ecological regression, β need not coincide with the difference in Nazi support between Protestant and Catholic

⁵We always calculate vote shares relative to the entire voting-eligible population, as this allows us to better account for endogenous turnout. Our results are robust to using the “traditional” definition of vote shares instead (see Appendix E).

voters themselves—though the results in Section 4 suggest that the discrepancy is minor.

Table 1 presents results from estimating the coefficients in (1) by weighted least squares, with weights corresponding to counties’ voting-eligible population. To allow for arbitrary forms of correlation in the residuals of nearby counties, standard errors are clustered by electoral district.

The first column of Table 1 shows that Catholicism and electoral support for the NSDAP are strongly negatively correlated—just as one would expect based on Figure 1. Remarkably, by itself, counties’ religious composition accounts for about 58% of the variation in the share of Nazi votes. In fact, constituencies’ share of Catholics alone explains more than 40% of all variation in the data.⁶

The next columns add covariates related to various demographic characteristics, economic conditions as proxied by unemployment rates in different occupations, as well as detailed controls for the composition of the workforce. The latter are intended not only to account for the well-known differences in the voting behavior of certain groups, like farmers or factory workers, but also to control for potential heterogeneity in the impact of the economic depression. Column (5) additionally accounts for geographical differences, such as latitude, longitude, distance to the nearest major city, etc. (see Appendix Table A.1 for a complete list), and column (6) adds electoral district fixed effects.

Surprisingly, all other covariates *together* explain a smaller share of the variation in the data than religion. Given that R^2 is weakly monotonic in the set of included controls, we conclude that constituencies’ religious composition accounts for a greater fraction of the differences in NSDAP vote shares than all other available variables—either individually or combined.

Notwithstanding stark observational differences between predominantly Catholic and Protestant regions, the relationship between Catholicism and NSDAP vote shares becomes, if anything, *more negative* with the inclusion of controls. Holding all observational factors equal, voters in Catholic counties were even *less* likely to support the Nazis than implied by the raw data in Figure 1.

To put the magnitude of the estimates into perspective, Adena et al. (2015) find that a standard deviation increase in radio listeners who were exposed to the Nazis’ propaganda caused a 2.0 percentage point increase in NSDAP vote shares in 1933; and the results of Satyanath et al. (2015) indicate that a standard deviation increase in the density of social clubs (a proxy for social capital) led to about a 1.0 and 1.5 percentage point increase in NSDAP support in the elections of 1930 and 1933, respectively. By contrast, based on the

⁶Appendix Table A.2 demonstrates that the explanatory power of religious composition is similarly high in the July elections of 1932 as well as the Weimar Republic’s last election in 1933.

results in column (6) of Table 2, one would conclude that a standard deviation increase in the share of Catholics is associated with a reduction in Nazi vote shares by 9.6 percentage points, relative to a basis of 26.7%.

Importantly, these results are *not* specific to the November election in 1932. We obtain quantitatively very similar estimates when we focus on *any* of the Weimar Republic’s last three elections, or on the increase in Nazi votes between November 1932 and May 1928. Thus, to better understand why the Nazis were so much more successful in some areas of the Weimar Republic than others, one has to understand the role of voters’ religion and whether the Catholic Church was able to wield influence at the ballot box.

4. Religion and the Electoral Success of the Nazis

So far, however, our estimates do not address issues of ecological inference, and we cannot rule out that other, unobserved variables are driving the relationship between constituencies’ religious composition and Nazi votes. In Appendix B, we prove that standard instrumental variables (IV) techniques are not only useful for dealing with omitted variables bias, but that they simultaneously solve the ecological inference problem (see also Spenkuch 2017a).

Below, we build on this insight and use an IV approach to determine whether voters’ religious affiliation is the (proximate) cause for the observed county-level disparities in NSDAP vote shares. Our IV strategy is based on the historical determinants of the geographic distribution of Protestantism.

4.1. *The Peace of Augsburg and Religion in Weimar Germany*

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the German Lands were fragmented into several hundred independent (secular and ecclesiastical) territories and free Imperial Cities. Although formally headed by an emperor, political power within the Holy Roman Empire lay, for the most part, with its territorial lords.⁷

Despite widespread discontent, the religious monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church remained essentially unchallenged until the “Luther affair” in 1517. What those in power initially perceived as a dispute among clergymen quickly spread to the urban (and later rural) laity and became a mass movement.

After the Diet of Speyer in 1526, the German princes assumed leadership of the Reformation. The Diet instituted that until a synod could settle the religious dispute, territorial lords should proceed in matters of faith as they saw fit under the Word of God and the laws of the Empire. Princes who had privately converted to Lutheranism took this as an

⁷The following summary borrows heavily from Spenkuch (2017b).

opportunity to proceed with church reform in their state. As a devout Catholic, Emperor Charles V, however, was determined to defend the (old) Church.

Ending more than two decades of religious conflicts and war, the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 established princes' constitutional right to introduce the Lutheran faith in their states (*ius reformandi*). According to the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion"), the religion of a lord became the official faith in his territory and, therefore, the religion of all people living within its confines. Only ecclesiastical rulers were not covered by the *ius reformandi* (*reservatum ecclesiasticum*). A bishop or archbishop would lose his office and the possessions tied to it upon conversion to another faith. Ordinary subjects who refused to convert were, conditional on selling all property, granted the right to emigrate (*ius emigrandi*).

There exists ample evidence that, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *ius reformandi* was often strictly enforced.⁸ Even residents of Imperial Cities—although formally free—were frequently forced to adopt a particular faith. In these towns, political power lay in the hands of local elites who virtually imposed the Reformation (Dixon 2002).

Historians report that rulers' choice of religion depended on multiple factors. Most lords were deeply religious and cared not only about their own salvation, but also about that of their subjects (Dixon 2002). Moreover, political considerations, such as ties between noble families or the formation of alliances, contributed to the decision (Lutz 1997). The fact that territories' official religion often changed more than once, especially when a new generation of princes took reign toward the end of the sixteenth century, suggests that idiosyncratic factors also played an important role.

Cantoni (2012) and Rubin (2014) provide otherwise rare empirical evidence on rulers' choices and the spread of the Reformation. Cantoni (2012) finds that "latitude, contribution to the *Reichsmatrikel* [a proxy for military power], ecclesiastical status, and distance to Wittenberg [the origin of the Reformation movement] are the only economically and statistically significant predictors" of princes' decisions (p. 511). He rationalizes these findings through a theory of strategic neighborhood interactions, in which territorial lords followed the lead of their more powerful neighbors. Although individuals were formally free to choose their own faith after 1648, on a local level, most areas remained religiously homogenous until the mass migrations associated with World War II.

⁸In the Duchy of Upper Saxony, for instance, those who did not adhere to the official state religion faced the death penalty (Lutz 1997).

4.2. Instrumental Variables Estimates

Figure 2 depicts the spread of Protestantism in the aftermath of 1555. As the comparison with Figure 1 illustrates, the geographic distribution of Protestants and Catholics due to lords’ choices in the second half of the sixteenth century still resembles that during the Weimar Republic. We exploit this fact and use individual princes’ decisions whether to adopt Protestantism as an instrumental variable for the religion of voters living in the same areas more than three and a half centuries later.

Specifically, we assign each county at the end of the Weimar Republic the religion of the lord who reigned over the corresponding area after the Peace of Augsburg. The information necessary to determine the official religion of each of the German Lands’ several hundred independent territories comes from the regional histories by Schindling and Ziegler (1992–96).⁹ Although there existed notable differences between and within different reformed faiths, as a whole, the teachings of Lutherans, Calvinists, and Zwinglians were much closer to each other than to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. We, therefore, abstract from differences between reformed denominations and differentiate only between Protestant and Catholic territories.

Whenever Catholic and Protestant princes reigned over different parts of the same county, or whenever its area encompassed an Imperial City or an ecclesiastical territory, the religion assigned to this county is the likely religion of the majority of subjects. Since population estimates for the period are often not available, relative populations are gauged by comparing the size of the areas in question (assuming equal densities). In cases in which this procedure yields ambiguous results, the respective counties are classified as neither “historically Protestant” nor “historically Catholic,” but as “mixed.”¹⁰

In the upper panel of Table 2, we demonstrate that rulers’ choices are heavily correlated with the religion of Germans living in the same areas over three hundred years later. The estimates therein correspond to the following econometric model:

$$(2) \quad Catholic_c = \kappa_d + \alpha_0 Historically\ Catholic_c + \alpha_1 Historically\ Mixed_c + X'_c \phi + \eta_c,$$

where $Catholic_c$ denotes county c ’s share of Catholics during the Weimar Republic, $Historically\ Catholic_c$ and $Historically\ Mixed_c$ are indicator variables for whether c is classified as “his-

⁹To rule out that our results depend on the choice of base year, we have created assignments based on the religious situation around 1624—the “normal year” set in the Peace of Westphalia—*as well as* the situation directly after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Since the situation in 1624 is a slightly stronger predictor of the geographic distribution of Protestants and Catholics about 300 years later, we use the first assignment for the regressions in the main text, and report robustness checks in Appendix E.

¹⁰This is the case for 10.1% of counties. The results in this section are robust to classifying these counties as either Protestant or Catholic.

torically Catholic” or “mixed,” and X_c marks a comprehensive vector of controls, including all factors that Cantoni (2012) and Rubin (2014) have shown to be correlated with the spread of the Reformation movement. We also add electoral district fixed effects, κ_d .

Conditioning on the electoral district, our estimates indicate that the share of Catholics is about 42 percentage points higher in counties formerly governed by a Catholic ruler than in those governed by a Protestant one. Similarly, historically mixed counties have a 22 percentage points higher share of Catholics at the end of the Weimar Republic. Rulers’ religion, therefore, satisfies the requirement that the instrument is correlated with the regressor of interest.

For territories’ official religion in the aftermath of 1555 to be a valid instrument, it must also be the case that rulers’ choices are uncorrelated with unobserved factors determining Nazi vote shares. That is, princes’ religion may influence voters’ decisions to support the NSDAP only through its impact on covariates that are included in the regression. This assumption is fundamentally untestable. The historical record, however, suggests that princes’ decisions may plausibly satisfy this exogeneity assumption, especially after controlling for economic conditions at the end of the Weimar Republic as well as all factors known to have influenced rulers. Intuitively, identification in our IV approach comes from idiosyncrasies in rulers’ choices.

If one accepts the exclusion restriction, then IV methods recover the true, *individual-level* difference in Nazi support between Catholic and Protestant voters, *holding all else equal*(cf. Spenkuch 2017a). Formally, we estimate

$$(3) \quad v_c = \mu_d + \beta \widehat{Catholic}_c + X_c' \theta + \varepsilon_c$$

by two-stage least squares, where $\widehat{Catholic}_c$ denotes the *predicted* share of Catholics based on the first stage in equation (2).

The lower panel of Table 3 displays the results. Taken at face value, the IV estimates suggest that, *ceteris paribus*, Catholics were about 25 percentage points less likely to vote for the Nazis than their Protestant counterparts. Importantly, due to the strong first stage, the point estimates are quite precise. According to the numbers in column (12), the 95%-confidence interval for the difference in NSDAP support between Catholic and Protestant voters ranges from -21.8 to -32.8 percentage points. All in all, the estimates from our IV approach are remarkably similar to the ecological regression results in Table 2. Substantively, our estimates imply that the ratio of Protestants to Catholics among NSDAP voters is about eight to one, relative to a population ratio of only two to one (cf. Section 6).

In Appendix C, we present evidence from an alternative instrumental variables strategy.

The results therein rely on the instrument proposed by Becker and Woessmann (2009), i.e., distance to the small town of Wittenberg—the origin of the Reformation movement. They note that, in Lutheran times, Protestantism spread in approximately concentric circles around Wittenberg. “The main reasons for a circular dispersion around Wittenberg may have been the costs of traveling and of information diffusion through space, and these transportation and transaction costs played a crucial role at the time [...]” (Becker and Woessmann 2009, pp. 557).

The evidence from this alternative IV approach supports our findings. In fact, formal over-identification tests fail to reject the null hypothesis that results based on either instrumental variable are identical.

In Table 3, we demonstrate that our conclusion about religious differences in Nazi support does not depend on the level of aggregation. Since municipality-level election results are not available for either of the two elections in 1932, we focus on those in 1933—noting that they were only partially free. Despite considerable Nazi propaganda and political persecution of Communists and Social Democrats, voters could still choose among all major parties and mark their ballots in secret. Irregularities in vote counts are believed to have been minor (see Bracher et al. 1960).

Within each set of regressions, the leftmost column contains the county-level baseline estimate. The middle column estimates the same model, but on the municipality level, while the last column adds county fixed effects. Identification in the rightmost column comes from variation across villages *within* the same county. Intuitively, the IV estimator compares NSDAP vote shares across villages that are geographically very close, but were nonetheless governed by different princes, who chose different religions more than three hundred years prior.¹¹

Reassuringly, our estimates remain qualitatively unchanged when we include county fixed effects. This is important because the Weimar Republic’s institutions did not vary within individual counties. We can, therefore, rule out that institutional differences between predominantly Protestant and Catholic areas are driving our results.

Of course, Protestant and Catholic regions developing different institutions in the aftermath of 1555 is only one of potentially several ways in which the exclusion restriction required for a valid instrument could be violated. In Appendix D, we use Bayesian methods to assess the robustness of our results with respect to the assumption that rulers’ choices of religion did not directly affect NSDAP vote shares. The results show that, as long as one is willing

¹¹To be able to pursue our instrumental variables strategy while using county fixed effects, we have recreated our instrument on the municipality level, differentiating as much as possible between the religion of lords who ruled over different municipalities within the same counties.

to rule out direct effects larger than about 12 percentage points, it is still possible to reject the null hypothesis of no differences between Catholic and Protestant voters.

To put this number into perspective, 12 percentage points corresponds to almost one-half of *all* NSDAP supporters in the November elections of 1932, or, taking the point estimates in Table 1 at face value, to the estimated impact of moving the entire workforce from agriculture into manufacturing.

In sum, even after allowing for sizeable violations of the exclusion restriction, the evidence indicates that Catholics were much less susceptible to the allure of the Nazis than their Protestant counterparts, and that this difference cannot be attributed to systematic socioeconomic differences between both groups, as assumed in much of the prior literature.

5. Elite Influence at the Ballot Box?

Through which channel did religion affect the voting decisions of ordinary Germans? Was it, as Hitler himself believed, that Catholics eschewed the NSDAP because the Church and its dignitaries opposed National Socialism?

To test the hypothesis that religious dignitaries influenced parishioners, we draw on a novel data set that enables us to locate “brown priests” geographically. In a decade-long research project, Spicer (2008) collected the names and biographical information of 138 Catholic priests (or ordained members of religious orders) who officially joined the NSDAP or made their Nazi convictions otherwise publicly known, e.g., by speaking at party meetings or blessing SA cadres.

We digitized the lists in Spicer (2008) and geocoded where each priest happened to be stationed at the end of the Weimar Republic. We then say that a given village had a “brown priest” if one of the men named by Spicer (2008) resided within a 10-kilometer radius.

Using municipality-level election results, Table 4 compares religious *differences* in NSDAP vote shares between villages with and without a known “brown priest.” The two rightmost columns show that, in municipalities without a “brown priest,” Catholics were far less likely than Protestants to vote for the NSDAP at the end of the Weimar Republic. In villages where the local priest *is* known to have openly sympathized with the Nazis, however, the difference between Catholic and Protestant voters shrinks by 32–41%. That is, Catholics and Protestants voted considerably more alike in areas where the Catholic Church’s official warnings about the dangers of National Socialism were directly contradicted by the local clergy.

Importantly, the finding that religious differences in Nazi support depended on the political leanings of the local clergy does not appear to be driven by unobserved differences between villages with and without a “brown priest” at the end of the Weimar Republic. As the

remaining columns in Table 4 demonstrate, in 1924—when the NSDAP first participated in national elections by forming an alliance with other right-wing extremist parties—religious differences in the vote share of the *völkisch* bloc were almost equally large in both sets of villages. Although Catholic voters were always somewhat less likely to support the far right than their Protestant counterparts, the comparison of municipalities that ended up having a “brown priest” in 1933 with those that did not reveals little to no evidence of preexisting differences.

If anything, there are several reasons to believe that our results understate the true importance of “brown priests.” First, a number of them did not have regular parish assignments, but instead worked in diocesan service or chaplaincies. Being further removed from ordinary Catholics would tend to reduce the impact of these clergymen. Second, there is anecdotal evidence that bishops strategically stationed or moved “brown priests” to parishes where their example was less likely to be followed. Third, it is improbable that the lists in Spicer (2008) identify every single Catholic priest who openly supported the Nazis. This introduces measurement error in the classification of priests, which biases the estimated difference between both sets of villages toward zero.

Additional support for the idea that the Catholic Church wielded direct influence at the ballot box comes from the curia’s abandonment of its opposition to National Socialism. Most Catholic dignitaries had resisted the Nazis until the very last election in Weimar Germany. Shortly after passage of the Enabling Act, however, the Church’s leadership backed down. On March 28, 1933, Bishop Bertram issued a statement calling the “general proscription and warnings of National Socialism [...] no longer necessary” (quoted in Kißener 2009, p. 19). Despite other, more carefully worded passages, the German public perceived this announcement as the “episcopacy’s approval of the Third Reich and its Führer” (Scholder 1977, p. 320).

After Catholic dignitaries reversed course and took a position favorable to Hitler, did ordinary parishioners follow? To answer this question, we rely on NSDAP vote shares and party membership as proxy variables for Nazi support before and during the Third Reich. In Table 5 we report results from regressing these outcomes on constituencies’ religious composition (and our standard set of covariates).

The evidence shows that in 1930 and 1932 Catholics were vastly underrepresented among members of the NSDAP. Among the *Märzgefallene*, however, we detect no religious differences whatsoever. Put differently, directly after the Church leadership abandoned its opposition to the Nazi government, Catholics and Protestants joined the NSDAP in equal proportions.

Table 5 also shows that there had been religious differences in Nazi vote shares as early as

1928. With the onset of the economic crisis, these differences widen dramatically—both in absolute as well as relative terms. At the end of the Weimar Republic, Catholic constituencies are estimated to be 28 to 32 percentage points, or about three standard deviations, less likely to vote for the Nazis than their Protestant counterparts.

After the episcopate allied itself with the new regime, Catholics' relative resistance faded. Although all parties but the NSDAP had already been banned, in November of 1933 the Nazi government held formal elections as well as a referendum to withdraw from the League of Nations. Another plebiscite about merging the offices of President and Chancellor followed in August 1934. Notwithstanding reports of SA members dragging unwilling citizens to the polls, the ballot was still secret and it was possible to oppose the regime by voting “no” or by casting invalid ballots. Wehler (2009) even argues that outright manipulation and voter intimidation were inconsequential enough that, by and large, the published results reflected the people's support of the new regime (see also Kershaw 1998).

We measure support for the regime by the fraction of voting-eligible Germans who approved of the Nazis or their plans. On average, this was the case for nearly nine out of ten citizens. Overall approval rates, however, mask considerable regional heterogeneity. In the cities of Berlin, Bremen, Lübeck, and Leipzig, for instance, more than one in five eligible voters did *not* express their support.

The estimates in Table 5 imply that religious differences in Nazi vote shares declined from almost three standard deviations at the end of the Weimar Republic to less than half a standard deviation in November of 1933. That is, within a year, the estimated difference between Catholics and Protestants shrunk by more than 80%.

Although religious differences in Nazi support remained well below the level reached at the end of the Weimar Republic, Catholics' relative resistance ticked up again in 1934. This is not surprising. In 1934, Hitler made the neo-pagan Alfred Rosenberg responsible for the “ideological and philosophical education” of the Reich (Deutsches Führerlexikon 1934/35, p. 394). The Church hierarchy was deeply troubled by this appointment, and sent a clear, public signal to parishioners by placing Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* on the Index of Prohibited Books. Disappointed with the level of support expressed in the referendum, Goebbels noted in his diary “I expected more. The Catholics failed. Rosenberg!” (quoted in Urban 2011, p. 43).

Next, we analyze religious differences in overt anti-Semitism, before and after the Catholic bishops gave up their opposition to Hitler. To do so, we draw on the data of Voigtländer and Voth (2012), who have compiled city-level information on the number of pogroms during the 1920s, attacks on synagogues during the *Reichskristallnacht* (1938), letters to the editor of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* (1935–1938), and the number of deportations of Jews

(1933–1945).

The results in Table 6 suggest that predominantly Catholic cities experienced, if anything, fewer pogroms during the 1920s. After the Church hierarchy arranged itself with the new regime, however, cities with larger Catholic populations saw *more* deportations of Jews, *more* letters to *Der Stürmer*, and *more* attacks on synagogues. Broadly summarizing, the evidence supports the idea that the Catholic elite held significant sway over ordinary parishioners.

Alternative Explanations. In Appendix F, we empirically test several other potential explanations for the patterns in the data, including a distinct Catholic culture and milieu (Burnham 1972; Lepsius 1966), Luther’s teachings regarding obedience to worldly authority (von Kuehnelt-Leddin 1952), long-lasting effects of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, religious disparities in human capital (Becker and Woessmann 2009), as well as differences in religiosity itself. Although we find little evidence in support of these theories, we stress that we do not claim that the influence of the Church constitutes the only reason that Catholics initially withstood the Nazis more than Protestants. In fact, most explanations are *a priori* nonrival, in the sense that different aspects of religion may have contributed simultaneously to Catholics’ relative resistance. For instance, while an explanation based *solely* on Catholic social capital cannot explain the effect of “brown priests” on the voting behavior of their flock, the data do not allow us to conclude that social capital exerted no influence at all.

6. On the Importance of the Catholic Party and the Limits of Elite Influence

Perhaps one of the *a priori* most plausible explanations for why Catholics eschewed the NSDAP is that they had their own party, the Zentrum. Whenever the Catholic religious identity is highly salient—possibly because it is instrumentalized by the Church and its dignitaries—one may expect Catholics to provide support for the Zentrum and withhold it from all other parties, including the Nazis. While it is undoubtedly true that Zentrum voters were overwhelmingly Catholic, Catholics did *not* withhold their support from all other parties.

In fact, in Table 7 we establish that, at the end of the Weimar Republic, there were no religious differences in votes for the communist KPD. This is not only surprising because, at the time, Catholics were perceived as more conservative than Protestants, but also because the Church hierarchy had always taken a firm stand against Communism. Nonetheless, contrary to conventional wisdom, Catholics and Protestants were equally likely to back the radical left.

The finding that Catholics shunned the NSDAP but not the KPD gives rise to a theoretical puzzle. If the Catholic clergy is able to “guide” the votes of the faithful, why would its electoral influence be asymmetric? In other words, given that the Church fought vigilantly

not only against National Socialism but also Communism, why would the Church be able to “immunize” parishioners against the far-right but not the far-left?

To explain this puzzle we develop a simple theoretical framework of elite influence in electoral politics. The theory relies on two ingredients: (i) the existence and ideological positioning of a Catholic party, i.e. the Zentrum, and (ii) explicit pressure by Church dignitaries. Our key insight is that both ingredients exhibit complementarities. As a result, the Zentrum’s ideological position did simultaneously *enhance* and *limit* the electoral influence of the Church.

A bit more formally, suppose that Protestants choose among four major nondenominational parties, A (KPD), B (SPD), C (DNVP), and D (NSDAP). In addition to these four, Catholics also consider voting for Z (Zentrum). Further assume that A and B occupy the left of the ideological spectrum, whereas Z , C , and D are positioned to the right of the political middle. That is, in line with the historical record, $A < B < Z < C < D$. All voters care about parties’ positions relative to their own bliss points t , i.e. their ideological type. Catholics and Protestants share the same distribution of preferences, but the former are also subject to political control by the clergy.

We model individuals’ decisions in a straightforward, familiar fashion. Specifically, we assume that Protestants derive utility $U(X) = -(X - t)^2$ from voting for party X . By contrast, the utility of Catholics is given by

$$U(X) = \begin{cases} -(X - t)^2 & \text{if } X = Z \\ -(X - t)^2 - \lambda & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} .$$

In words, our theory assumes that Catholics suffer a utility loss λ whenever they choose to support a party other than the Zentrum. This penalty parameter represents the “punishments” that the clergy would mete out in order to bring political deviants back into the fold, i.e., refusal of the sacraments, public reprimands, or even home visitations. To impose analytical discipline, we refrain from assuming that voters are differentially religious, or that λ varies within the Catholic population.

Figure 3 sketches out the predictions of our model. The panels on the left depict the situation among Protestants. As in standard theories of spatial politics, Protestant voters support whichever party in their choice set is closest to their own ideal point. Thus, in times when most individuals are “moderates,” extremist parties enjoy only little support. When preferences in the electorate bifurcate, however, say in response to an economic crisis, then the vote shares of radical parties on the left as well as the right grow dramatically.

The middle panels in Figure 3 show the choices of Catholics when λ is very small or even zero. In such a case, parishioners who are better aligned with parties other than the

Zentrum support these instead. Hence, a bifurcation of the electorate leads to a similar sized increase in the support for radical parties among both Catholics and Protestants. The mere existence of the Zentrum is, therefore, insufficient to significantly slow down the rise of political extremists.

In the rightmost panels, we present our framework’s predictions for cases in which the clergy *is* able to exert influence, i.e. $\lambda \gg 0$. Intuitively, Catholics trade off congruence between parties’ positioning and their own preferences with the sanctions they expect to incur if they deviate from the prescription of the Church. If the anticipated penalty is “large enough,” then Catholics with diverse interests would rather support the Zentrum than the party they actually prefer.¹² The influence of the clergy thus explains why the Zentrum’s basin of support was initially much broader than that of any nondenominational party.

As long as λ is not “too large,” however, there will be some individuals who defy the Church and choose radical parties instead. Our model, therefore, posits that Church dignitaries are able to choke off the rise of extremists by “guiding” the votes of the faithful, but only to a point. Importantly, the framework also predicts *which* parishioners are likely to defy the Church and which are not—even though everyone faces the same penalty and there are no intrinsic differences in religiosity.

To see this point, note that a particular voter will obey the political prescription of the Church if and only if

$$(4) \quad \lambda \geq (Z - t)^2 - (X^* - t)^2,$$

where X^* denotes the party whose position is closest to t . In words, holding the congruence between a voter and her favorite party fixed, she will go along with the Church’s preferred choice only if its ideological position is not too far removed from her own ideal point.

Interpreting the condition above probabilistically, Catholics should not only be weakly underrepresented among the supporters of major nondenominational parties, but the degree of underrepresentation ought to depend *negatively* on the ideological distance between the supporters of these parties and the Zentrum (i.e. $|Z - t|$). If the gap becomes unacceptably large, then voters would rather be harassed by the clergy than support the Catholic party. Thus, among parishioners whose preferences are very different from Z the Church enjoys little to no influence and religious differences in voters’ choices vanish.

Importantly, unless the Zentrum occupies exactly the ideological middle, the electoral

¹²Consider a voter who is equidistant from Z and C , i.e. $|Z - t| = |C - t|$. Since $\lambda > 0$, such a voter will end up supporting Z . Since $U(\cdot)$ is continuous in t , it follows that even some types that are located strictly closer to C than to Z , will pick the latter. It also follows that the set of types who support Z is increasing in λ .

influence of the Catholic Church will necessarily be *asymmetric*. To see why, note that the right-hand side of equation (4) is increasing (decreasing) in Z whenever $Z - t$ is positive (negative).¹³ This means that, as the Zentrum moves from the political middle to the right, the condition that determines whether the Church can bring a particular voter back into the fold becomes *more* likely to hold for parishioners whose ideal points are already to the right of Z . By contrast, the condition becomes *less* likely to be satisfied for individuals whose preferences put them on the left. The Catholic party’s ideological positioning, therefore, *interacts* with the ability of the Church to affect voters’ decisions. As a consequence, the Church will be endogenously more influential among some Catholics than others. This feature of our model contrasts sharply with conventional theories according to which the Catholic Church can uniformly pressure parishioners into withholding their support from other parties.

Testable Implications. Despite its name, the historical record leaves no doubt that the Zentrum was positioned distinctly to the right of the political center—even more so towards the end of the Weimar Republic. As such, its conservative ideology was closer to that of the DNVP and NSDAP than to the SPD or the KPD. In light of parties’ relative positions, our theoretical framework gives rise to the following testable predictions: *(i)* Given that the DNVP was less radical than the NSDAP, Catholics’ should have been *underrepresented* among DNVP supporters to a greater extent than among Nazi voters. *(ii)* Since the SPD was less extreme than the KPD, there should have also been relatively fewer Catholics among SPD than KPD voters. Both of these predictions follow from the fact that the Church’s electoral influence is reduced as $|Z - t|$ increases. *(iii)* Lastly, Catholic’s relative underrepresentation should exhibit a clear asymmetry. That is, we would expect to find a higher ratio of Protestants to Catholics when we compare Nazis with communists *and* when we juxtapose DNVP and SPD voters.

Figure 4 puts these predictions to the test. Specifically, we rely on our workhorse empirical model in equation (3) to estimate religious differences in the vote shares of all important parties (i.e. any party that received at least five percent of the vote in any of the Republic’s last four elections). Since the resulting estimates are difficult to compare in light of very different baseline levels of support, we report the implied ratio of Protestants to Catholics among the respective set of voters (see Appendix G for details). Consistent with our theory, Catholics are more severely underrepresented among DNVP than NSDAP voters. There are also relatively fewer of them among followers of the socialist SPD than the communist KPD. Perhaps most importantly, the ratio of Protestants to Catholics is much higher among supporters of the nondenominational parties on the right than on the left. In short, the data

¹³Formally, $\frac{d}{dZ} [(Z - t)^2 - (X^* - t)^2] = 2(Z - t) \geq 0$ whenever $Z \geq t$.

support our framework’s predictions.

7. Discussion

The results in this paper contribute to an enormous Nazi voting literature. Our approach, however, is unique in that we go beyond descriptive estimates of “who voted for Hitler.” By emphasizing *ceteris paribus* comparisons, we directly address the myriad confounders that may explain why Catholic constituencies eschewed the NSDAP. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to present rigorous, econometric evidence in support of the idea that the influence of the Church and its dignitaries immunized ordinary Catholics against the radical Nazi movement.

Notably, we also show that the Catholic Church’s fight against Communism did *not* have any measurable electoral impact. To explain the puzzling asymmetry in the effectiveness of the Church’s political prescriptions we develop a simple theory of elite influence in electoral politics.

Viewed through the lens of our model, the Catholic hierarchy was able to effectively combat National Socialism because, in the eyes of the radicalized laity, the Zentrum constituted a less-extreme but ultimately acceptable alternative to the Nazis. At the same time, the Catholic party’s conservativeness meant that equally vigilant efforts to bring communist supporters back into the Catholic fold were bound to fail. For the actions of the clergy to affect the choices of voters on the far left of the political spectrum the Church would have needed to offer a real left-off-center alternative to the KPD. The positioning of the Zentrum thus both enhanced and limited the clergy’s ability to fight political opponents.

Our theory also offers some lessons for dealing with radicalized electorates today. According to the framework in the previous section, political elites will be more successful at countering extremist movements when they use a *combination* of “carrots and sticks.” In particular, the effectiveness of explicit proscriptions (i.e. the stick) depends critically on whether elites are able to offer voters a palatable alternative (i.e. a carrot). Elites that only appeal to their moral authority as they take a principled stand against radicals are likely to see their electoral influence dwindle. By contrast, elites who are willing to make political concessions are more likely to retain their sway over voters, and are thus in a better position to choke off the growth of extremist parties. Depending on the circumstances, a populist but influential elite may ultimately be preferable to a weak, principled one. Paradoxically, our work suggests that it may take a populist to save democracy from the fanatics.

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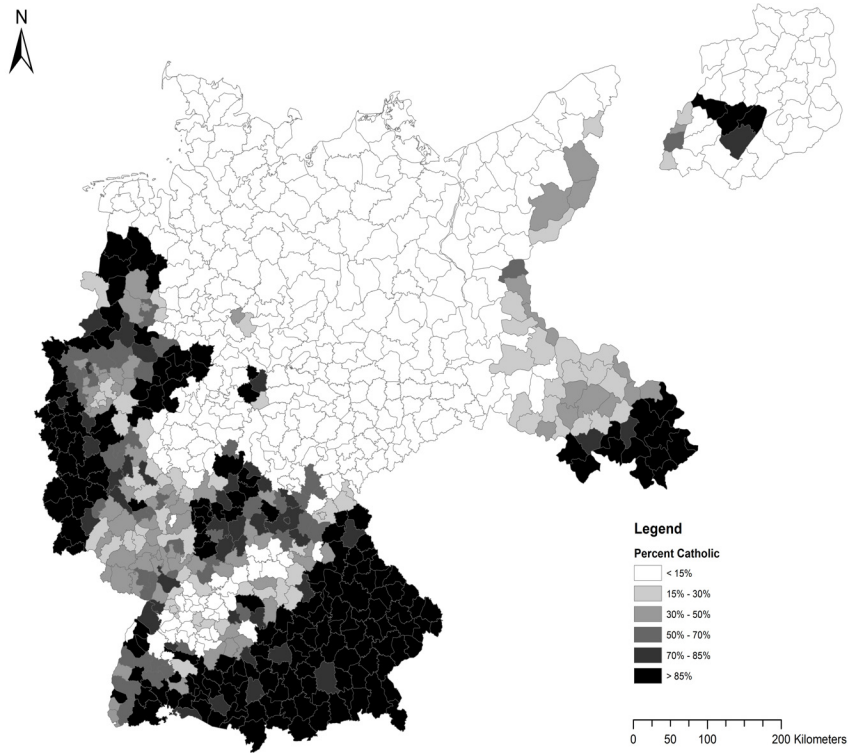
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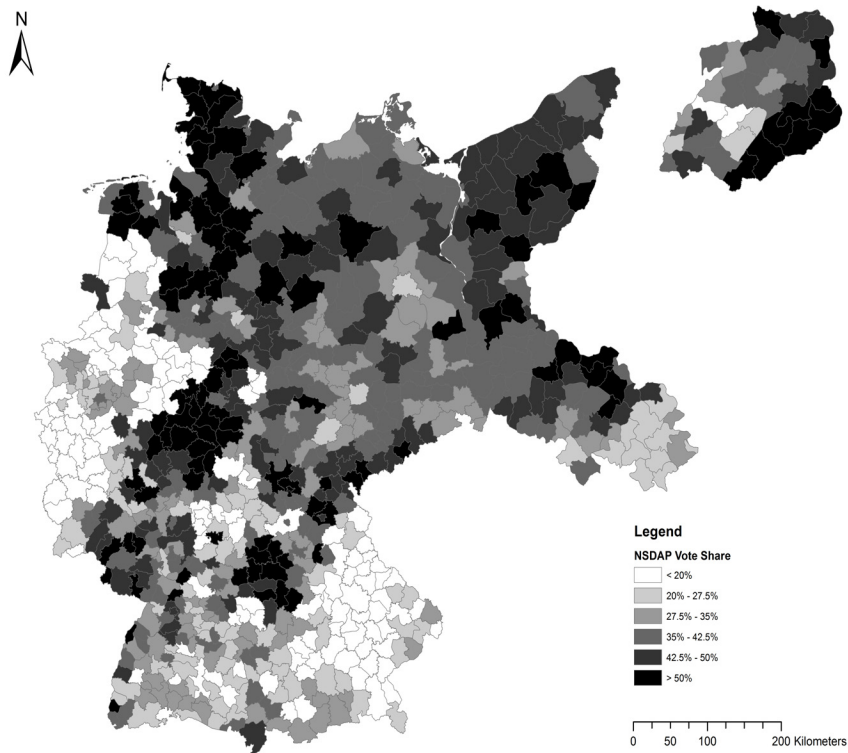
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Figure 1: Religion and Nazi Vote Shares

A. Geographic Distribution of Protestants and Catholics

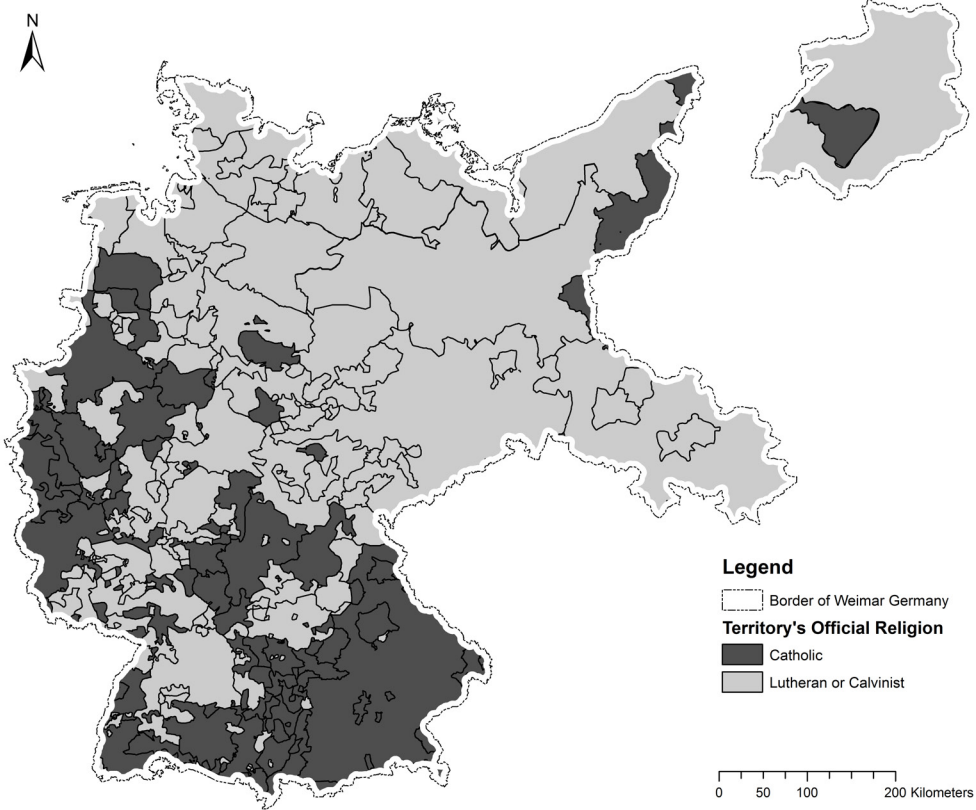


B. Geographic Distribution of the Nazi Vote, November 1932



Sources: Based on von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1952)

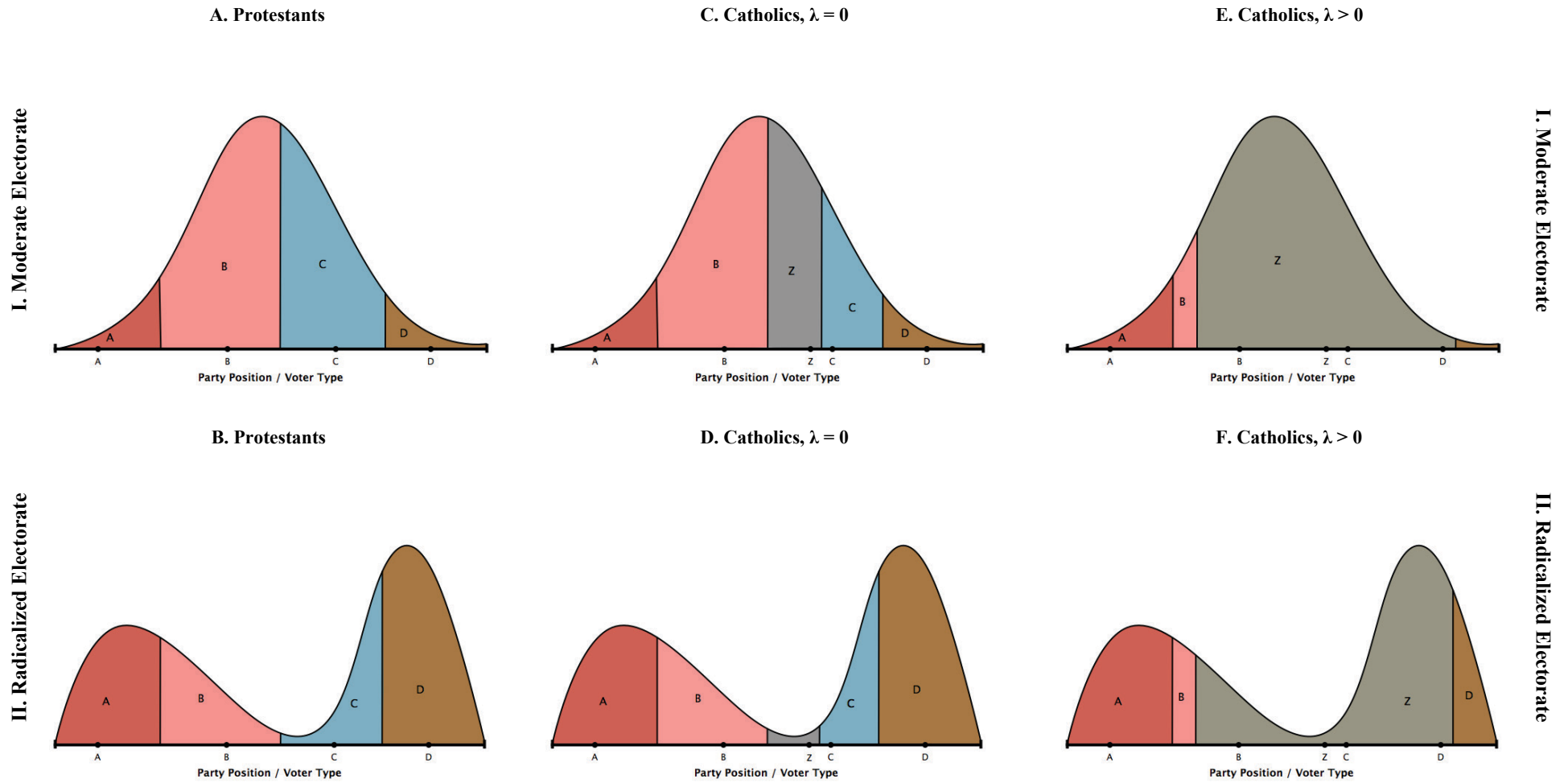
Figure 2: Territories' Historical Religion



Notes: Figure depicts territories' official religion at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. Only areas which fall within the boundaries of the Weimar Republic are shown.

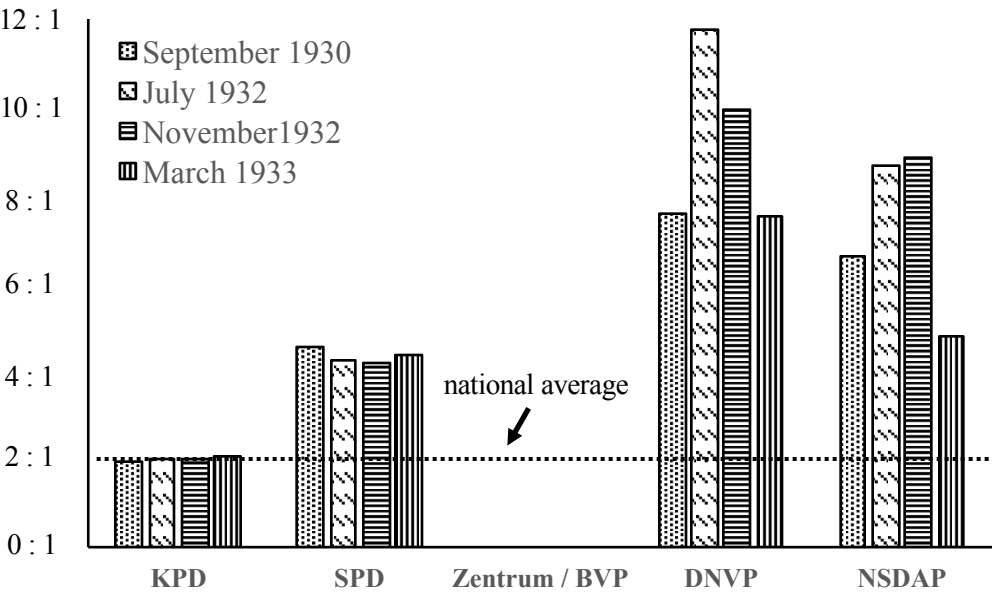
Sources: Based on Kunz (1996) and the information in Schindling and Ziegler (1992–96).

Figure 3: Theoretical Predictions of Our Elite Influence Model



Notes: Graphs illustrate the predictions of the model sketched out in Section 6.

Figure 4: Ratio of Protestants to Catholics Among Supporters of Major Parties, 1930–1933 Elections



Notes: Figure depicts the estimated ceteris paribus ratio of Protestant to Catholic supporters for all of the Weimar Republic's parties that gained at least five percent of the popular vote in any election between 1930 and 1933. For details on the underlying calculations, see Appendix G.

Table 1: Religion as a Predictor of Nazi Vote Shares, November 1932

Independent Variable	NSDAP Vote Share						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Percent Catholic	-.250 (.019)	-.237 (.016)	-.243 (.018)	-.245 (.020)	-.269 (.030)	-.287 (.025)	
Percent Jewish	-.225 (.286)	.051 (.407)	-.041 (.414)	-.055 (.393)	.338 (.442)	-.003 (.269)	
Percent Nonreligious	-1.316 (.195)	-.977 (.150)	-.855 (.150)	-.823 (.144)	-.717 (.147)	-.648 (.113)	
Demographics:							
Percent Female		.447 (.503)	1.143 (.566)	1.180 (.537)	1.771 (.546)	.650 (.443)	1.216 (.679)
Urban County		-1.482 (1.012)	.424 (1.217)	-.191 (1.179)	-.800 (1.237)	-.140 (1.083)	-4.395 (1.660)
Log Population		-1.750 (.423)	-1.183 (.393)	-.852 (.488)	-1.113 (.489)	-.682 (.386)	-2.028 (.470)
Economic Conditions:							
Unemployment Rate, White Collar Workers		.337 (.147)	.379 (.150)	.402 (.139)	.415 (.147)	.240 (.098)	.870 (.136)
Unemployment Rate, Blue Collar Workers		-.023 (.059)	.028 (.069)	-.063 (.098)	-.085 (.084)	-.204 (.074)	-.270 (.099)
Unemployment Rate, Domestic Servants		.044 (.122)	-.004 (.124)	.114 (.107)	.082 (.095)	.078 (.054)	.150 (.120)
Female Labor Force Participation Rate		.157 (.065)	.057 (.114)	.004 (.118)	-.010 (.109)	.025 (.069)	.206 (.140)
Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):							
Manufacturing and Artisanry			-.117 (.069)	-.064 (.128)	-.109 (.105)	-.022 (.063)	-.066 (.103)
Trade and Commerce			-.222 (.077)	-.295 (.136)	-.412 (.142)	-.110 (.131)	-.397 (.145)
Services			.008 (.075)	-.396 (.135)	-.470 (.124)	-.154 (.123)	-.873 (.242)
Domestic Labor			-.041 (.304)	-.690 (2.161)	-.900 (1.655)	-2.105 (1.676)	-3.366 (2.558)
Occupational Composition (in %):							
White Collar Workers				.107 (.213)	.215 (.220)	-.055 (.177)	.518 (.274)
Civil Servants				.615 (.245)	.861 (.256)	.413 (.203)	1.714 (.319)
Blue Collar Workers				-.108 (.171)	-.090 (.134)	-.203 (.103)	.345 (.194)
Domestic Servants				.838 (2.341)	.709 (1.909)	2.036 (1.795)	4.271 (2.882)
Self-Employed				.125 (.324)	.096 (.290)	-.066 (.211)	1.148 (.419)
Constant	39.256 (1.632)	23.208 (24.611)	-9.159 (25.578)	-12.285 (24.974)	91.185 (100.52)		-58.810 (142.40)
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
R-Squared	.584	.628	.644	.655	.672	.820	.400
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982	982

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating equation (1) by weighted least squares. The dependent variable is a county's NSDAP vote share in the November elections of 1932. Weights correspond to the number of eligible voters in a given county. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. The omitted category in Sectoral Composition of Workforce is Agriculture, and that in Occupational Composition is Helping Family Members. The set of Geographical Controls includes all geographical covariates listed in Appendix Table A.1. In addition to the variables shown in the table, indicator variables for missing values on each covariate are also included in the regressions. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.

Table 2: Instrumental Variables Estimates, November 1932

<i>A. First Stage</i>						
	Percent Catholic					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
County's Religion in 1624:						
Catholic	66.666 (3.232)	62.498 (3.466)	61.588 (3.375)	59.663 (3.488)	48.887 (2.887)	42.117 (3.681)
Mixed	39.270 (4.320)	36.666 (4.984)	34.079 (5.490)	32.848 (5.433)	25.954 (3.692)	22.005 (3.322)
Demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Conditions	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sectoral Composition of Workforce	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupational Composition	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
R-Squared	.769	.789	.797	.804	.861	.892
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982
<i>B. 2SLS</i>						
	NSDAP Vote Share					
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Percent Catholic	-.254 (.018)	-.242 (.016)	-.246 (.018)	-.247 (.021)	-.260 (.028)	-.273 (.028)
Demographic Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Conditions	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sectoral Composition of Workforce	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupational Composition	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
First Stage F-Statistic	212.74	163.91	170.59	153.73	149.78	71.38
Overidentification Test [<i>p</i> -value]	.275	.148	.167	.232	.626	.581
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating the difference in the propensity to vote for the NSDAP between Protestants and Catholics via the instrumental variables strategy described in Section 4. The upper panel presents results from estimating the first stage, i.e. equation (2), by weighted least squares. The lower panel contains the weighted two-stage least squares results based on equation (3). The dependent variable in the lower panel is a county's NSDAP vote share in the November elections of 1932, and the share of Catholics is considered endogenous. In all panels, heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. The control variables included in Demographic Controls, Economic Conditions, Sectoral Composition of Workforce, and Occupational Composition are the same as the ones listed under the respective heading in Table 1. The set of Geographical Controls includes all geographical covariates shown in Appendix Table A.1, and Historical Controls includes the variables that Cantoni (2012) and Rubin (2014) have shown to be correlated with territorial lords' choices.

Table 3: Comparison of County- and Municipality-Level Results, March 1933

	NSDAP Vote Share					
	OLS	OLS	OLS	IV	IV	IV
Percent Catholic	-.287 (.020)	-.289 (.018)	-.307 (.019)	-.276 (.023)	-.276 (.022)	-.241 (.053)
Unit of Observation	County	Municipality	Municipality	County	Municipality	Municipality
Standard Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geographical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
County Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
First Stage F-Statistic	--	--	--	71.32	44.03	4.51
R-Squared	.830	.770	.919	--	--	--
Number of Observations	981	3,502	3,502	981	3,502	3,502

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating the empirical models in equations (1) and (3) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. Within each set of regressions, the leftmost specification is based on county-level data, whereas the middle and rightmost ones rely on municipality-level data. Unless otherwise indicated, the set of included controls is the same as in Table 2. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses.

Table 4: Religious Differences in Support for the Far Right, by Political Attitude of Catholic Priest

	NSFP Vote Share, May 1924		NSFB Vote Share, December 1924		NSDAP Vote Share, March 1933	
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
Percent Catholic	-.062 (.013)	-.056 (.011)	-.032 (.007)	-.033 (.007)	-.296 (.019)	-.291 (.022)
Percent Catholic × "Brown Priest" in 1933	-.002 (.011)	.012 (.022)	-.002 (.010)	.015 (.014)	.094 (.026)	.119 (.039)
H ₀ : Interaction Term = 0 [<i>p</i> -value]	.867	.590	.838	.285	.001	.002

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic and Percent Catholic interacted with an indicator for whether a village had a "brown priest" in 1933. Villages are said to have had a "brown priest" in 1933 if a priest listed in Spicer (2008) was stationed within a 10 kilometer radius. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. We control for the same set of covariates as in the most inclusive specifications in Tables 1 and 2, allowing for differences in effect size depending on whether a village had a "brown priest" in 1933. The last row displays *p*-values from a *t*-test of the null hypothesis that the coefficient on the interaction term is equal to zero.

Table 5: Religious Differences in Nazi Support, Before and After March 1933

Outcome	Religious Difference		Mean and SD of Outcome (in p.p.)
	OLS	IV	
<i>Before March 1933:</i>			
NSDAP Party Membership (as percentage of population):			
End of 1930	-.017 (.005)	-.018 (.007)	1.64 [1.49]
End of 1932	-.022 (.006)	-.023 (.008)	2.66 [1.88]
NSDAP Vote (as percentage of voting eligible population):			
May 1928	-.025 (.007)	-.022 (.007)	2.03 [2.26]
September 1930	-.143 (.018)	-.132 (.023)	14.73 [6.00]
July 1932	-.330 (.026)	-.316 (.029)	30.84 [10.93]
November 1932	-.287 (.025)	-.273 (.028)	26.42 [9.99]
March 1933	-.286 (.019)	-.276 (.023)	38.64 [9.99]
<i>After March 1933:</i>			
NSDAP Party Entry, April & May 1933 (<i>Märzgefallene</i>) (as percentage of population)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.15 [.11]
NSDAP Vote, November 1933 (as percentage of voting eligible population)	-.022 (.011)	-.028 (.010)	88.10 [5.12]
Referendum to Withdraw from the League of Nations, November 1933 (as percentage of voting eligible population)	-.012 (.011)	-.021 (.010)	90.19 [4.89]
Referendum about Merging the Offices of President and Chancellor, August 1934 (as percentage of voting eligible population)	-.098 (.011)	-.103 (.013)	84.47 [7.15]

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating equations (1) and (3) for different left-hand side variables. The respective outcome is shown in the column on the left. Measures of counties' NSDAP party membership rates have been constructed based on the raw data of Falter and Kater (1993). All specifications rely on our standard set of covariates, i.e. those contained in the most inclusive specifications in Tables 2 and 3. The instrumental variable used for the IV estimates is territorial lords' religion, as described in Section 4.

Table 6: Religious Differences in Proxies for Anti-Semitism, Before and After March 1933

Outcome	Religious Difference		Mean and SD of Outcome
	OLS	IV	
<i>Before March 1933:</i>			
Pogrom in the 1920s (× 100)	-1.347 (1.243)	-1.075 (1.738)	2.66 [16.11]
<i>After March 1933:</i>			
Attack on Synagogues During the <i>Reichskristallnacht</i> , 1938 (× 100)	13.609 (4.025)	17.284 (5.589)	81.40 [38.93]
Letters to <i>Der Stürmer</i> , 1935–1938 (per 10,000 residents)	.755 (.431)	1.089 (.662)	1.88 [5.01]
Deportations, 1933–1945 (as fraction of Jewish population)	.195 (.062)	.149 (.075)	.342 [.523]

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating models akin to equations (1) and (3) for different proxies of anti-Semitism. The respective outcome variable is shown in the column on the left. The data used for this table come from the city-level data set constructed by Voigtländer and Voth (2012). We use Voigtländer and Voth's (2012) original set of covariates, i.e. cities' religious composition, an indicator variable for whether a city experienced pogroms during the Black Death (1348–50), and log population, but rely on their extended sample to preserve as much information as possible. The instrumental variable used for the IV estimates is territorial lords' religion, as described in Section 4. For a detailed description of the data used in this table, see Voigtländer and Voth (2012), or the Data Appendix to this paper.

Table 7: Religious Differences in Support for the Communist KPD

	KPD Vote Share	
	OLS	IV
May 1928	-.001 (.008)	-.003 (.013)
September 1930	.002 (.009)	.004 (.014)
July 1932	-.001 (.007)	.002 (.013)
November 1932	-.002 (.008)	.002 (.013)
March 1933	-.005 (.007)	-.001 (.012)

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating equations (1) and (3) with KPD vote shares as the dependent variable. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. All specifications rely on our standard set of covariates, i.e. those contained in the most inclusive specifications in Tables 1 and 3.