

Two Germanys?

Investigating the Religious and Social Base of the 1930 Nazi Electorate

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*By applying data from the 1930 Reichstag election we test whether the NSDAP was a workers-, bourgeois, or a catch-all party. We argue that the degree to which the different groups in society voted NSDAP is dependent on the share of Protestants and Catholics in their respective Kreis. We build on two important works on the Nazi electorate, namely Jürgen Falter's *Hitlers Wähler* (1991) and King, Rosen, Tanner, and Wagner (2008). We specifically make one important alteration to Falter and King et. al.'s models, as we introduce the interaction between religious affiliation and social groups as an explanation of Nazi vote. Similar arguments have been made by other historians, yet this has not been tested on data for the whole of Germany until Falter's work in 1991. We find significant explanatory power in the interaction between religion and social groups on the propensity to vote for the Nazi party.*

Introduction

“Über Nacht ist aus dem verachteten und verlästerten kleinen Häuflein eine Massenpartie allergrössten Stils geworden, und der Sieg, den sie am 14. September an ihre Fahnen heften konnte, steht ohne Beispiel da in der gesamten Parteiengeschichte”, Joseph Goebbels (1930) acclaimed in the Nazi bulletin *Der Angriff* after the 1930 Reichstag election. The German National Socialist Worker’s Party (NSDAP) had won 18.3 % of the vote while only 2.6 % in the previous 1928 election. The 1930 election was the Nazi’s political breakthrough. The popular vote provided longed-for confidence and the party acted on the offensive. In July 1932, it caught 37.4 % of the vote and in March 1933, its share was 43.9 %. Even though the Nazis were firmly anti-democratic, their electoral success made the rise to power possible.

Ever since Theodor Geiger’s (1930) contemporary analysis of the Nazi electorate, it has been common to divide it into social groups or classes by referring to their socioeconomic interests. In the course of its research history the classification of groups have been made more distinct, by taking account of sociocultural, e.g. protestant/catholic and rural/urban, and geography-specific factors (Mühlberger 2003). However, the lack of proper data has made it difficult to reach consolidative conclusions as to which groups voted for the Nazis. Surely aggregate data exist, but as there were no survey studies at the time, it is difficult to infer knowledge from the aggregate to the individual level (ecological fallacy). Unsurprisingly therefore, psephological research has drawn different conclusions as to whether the NSDAP was predominantly appealing to specific socioeconomic groups or whether it was a catch-all party. An important work within this field is provided by Jürgen Falter (1991), who maintain that, although keeping with the traditional view that the middle classes made up a core of the Nazi vote, the NSDAP was basically a “Volkspartei des Protests” appealing to many groups.

Yet, Falter (1991) also identified a strong religious effect as Protestants were far more inclined to vote for the Nazis than Catholics. This confessional pattern persisted when tested in interaction with the urban-rural dimension, yet slightly strengthened in rural areas and slightly weakened in urban areas. Lately, two excellent contributions have taken the thesis of the different voting pattern between Protestants and Catholics as their point of departure for further scrutiny. Gary King et al. (2008) accepted the different voting pattern but assumed that this followed from divergent economic interests and looked for economic incentives. The relatively low appeal of the Nazi party in Catholic areas, they concluded, was because it did not appeal to farmers: “[t]he agricultural policies of the Nazis did not suit well the preferences of the people living in southern and western Germany, that is the Catholic regions” (King et al. 2008: 959). Hence, the notion of a religious effect was spurious, and research had not observed that it worked as a proxy for socioeconomic interests. In 2014, Jörg Spenkuch and Philipp Tillmann contradicted King et al. by showing correlation between the geographic distribution of the confessional divide historically and in the Weimar republic. The confessional divide itself caused the voting pattern, they argued: “[r]eligion is the single most important predictor of Nazi votes.” As to why confession mattered they argued that “[t]he effect of religion operated through the Catholic Church leaning on believers to vote for the Zentrum Party, while the Protestant Church remained politically neutral” (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2014: 2, 31). Whereas King et al. (2008) saw Catholics pursuing economic self-interest Spenkuch and Tillmann (2014) saw identification and loyalties towards the elites.

In this article, we analyze the Weimar 1930 election by systematically combining elements of the two approaches. We take issue with Spenkuch and Tillmann and assume there were two confessional Germanys in operation, one Catholic and one Protestant. We test this

hypothesis by modelling the conditional effect of social class and religion on the Nazi vote. However, we do not build our model from scratch. Instead, we take as our point of departure the dataset “Wahl- und Sozialdaten der Gemeinden und Kreise des Deutschen Reiches 1920–1933” collected by Jürgen Falter, which has been aggregated for comparison with several elections by King et al. This dataset includes information on five social classes. Though our main focus is on the 1930 election, we also present results from the 1928, the two 1932 elections and the 1933 election in the appendix.

By running models without taking into account the interrelation between religious divide and social classes, we find little support for the NSDAP being anything other than a chiefly Protestant and white collar party. However, we argue that whether or not the five social groups voted NSDAP depended on in which of the two Germanys their particular *Kreis* was situated. Falter presented trivariate models looking at the interaction of confessional context and the affinity of social groups (1991: 214, 217, 220). An earlier studies by Waldman (1973) introduced an interaction term in his multiple regression models to explain the NSDAP vote. Here he specified an interaction term between the proportion of Protestants and the proportion of workforce in the agricultural sector, finding that the combination of these two categories increases the vote for the NSDAP. Falter and Hänisch (1986) performed a trivariate analysis of workers and confession, arguing that the working class were reluctant to vote NSDAP only when they were integrated in either a proletarian or a Catholic-political environment.

We present models in which this conditional effect is taken into account for five different social groups. The results show clear correlations between percentage of each social group and the Nazi’s share of the votes in each *Kreis*, but the effect of each group is more often than not the opposite in the Protestant and Catholic precincts. Of the five social classes included in the model, only for blue-collar workers do results show the same trend in both Protestant and Catholic areas. For the four other classes – unemployed, white-collar, self-employed and

domestic workers – results depended on which religious denomination was the prominent. Hence, we have found strong support for the two Germanys hypothesis.

The results not only contribute to the understanding of the Nazi electorate. They also conform to German historians' Confessionalism Theory (*Konfessionalisierungsthese*), which argues that religious divide operated as a long-term historical structure in German territories since the 16th century and retained its potency during Germany's Weimar era.

First, we present the historical Confessionalism Theory and the conceptual framework in psephological research that most evidently takes account of the confessional divide. Subsequently we present the hypothesis, data and the method employed, before we analyze results and link them to existing literature of relevance.

Two Germanys: the confessional divide in historiography and psephology

According to the Confessionalism Theory developed by German historians of early modern Europe, the 16th century Protestant reformation and Catholic revival (counter-reformation) caused a denominational divide in the Holy German Reich. The theory maintains that by the 17th century a denominational confessional uniformity had taken root within the different political territories, whether Protestant or Catholic. One early advocate of the theory went so far as to indicate that the “Zwang zu Konfessionalisierung” even tended to divide households and families (Reinhard 1977). Few others would go so far but they would still claim that by the 17th century a rather uniform confessional conscience had settled in the different political units of German speaking Europe while rather sharp antagonism prevailed between the confessions (Reinhard 1983; Schilling 1988; Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann 2002; Ziegler 2008).

The theory is based on the historic fact that political units within the German Reich, such as principalities and towns, were allowed to choose their confession within their territory. The principle that religion of the ruler should be the religion of the ruled (*cuius regio, eius*

religio) was written into the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Further, it takes into account that the chosen confessions were not only religious doctrines. Because they were also movements of a highly political character, chosen by elites and causing political coalitions and religious wars, they were followed by social disciplining. Common people who were displeased with the dominant confession and its related repression were allowed to emigrate, thereby also contributing to mono-confessional cultures. The result was religious unity within the principalities but a fragmentation within the German Reich as a whole.

The Confessionalism Theory claimed to represent an epochal paradigm and contribute to modernization theory. It has since been heavily criticized for both. Today most historians would argue that the denomination process was not as fundamental and uniform as originally claimed. However, and although the 1648 Peace of Westphalia allowed for religious freedom, no serious historian would deny that it caused a dominant confessional socio-culture within each of the different political units of the German Reich. Hence, our notion of two Germanys takes its historical origins in the Reformation.

It was for long a dominant view among scholars that West-European Enlightenment had weakened confessionalism by introducing religious tolerance. Representing Enlightenment Napoleon in 1806 gave the Holy German Reich an annihilating blow by introducing the Code Civil on the west bank of the Rhine and in some other territories, in addition to establishing new territorial borders. The ecclesiastical territories, so central to Confessionalism Theory, disappeared and those political and juridical structures that had sustained mono-confessional socio-cultures were weakened. Accordingly, secularization would characterize 19th century developments.

Yet 19th century modernity did not remove the confessional divide in Germany (Nipperdey 1988). The sociologist Mario Rainer Lepsius (1966) even made the confessional divide a bearing element in his analysis of electoral behavior during the Kaiserreich and the

Weimar period. In an influential study he showed that the party system remained rather stable. He argued that this reflected rather stable socio-cultural communities (*Gesinnungsgemeinschaften / sozialmoralische Milieus*), and that their preferences were largely formed before the German party system was established. He distinguished between four large “camps”: the conservative-protestant, the liberal-protestant, the catholic, and the social-democratic. From this structural pattern, in which the confessional divide was an effectual constituent, he formulated an overall interpretation saying that confessional antagonism contributed to persistent polarization among the communities, thereby hindering political compromises and societal reforms which again caused the weak Weimar state and subsequently Hitler’s assumption of power (Lepsius 1966). Lepsius’ perspective was further elaborated by Karl Rohe (1992), who reduced the number of “camps” to three (*Dreilagerthese*): “Nationals” consisting of the protestant bourgeoisie and secularized Catholics, Catholics, and socialists. Rohe even stronger than Lepsius emphasized that the continuous religious divide was a decisive factor in German society and politics.

Lepsius’ broad interpretation made up a core element of the so-called Sonderweg-thesis of German history, which sought to explain the Nazi seizure of power in light of structural continuities from the Kaiserreich. Although this strand of thought increasingly accepted that the confessional divide was a profound continuity in German history, Helmut Walser Smith’s (1995) assertion that historians’ focus on class relations had left the impact of religious cleavages unexplored, was in a fair way right. Along with Wolfgang Altgeld he has made a significant contribution to understanding the separate cultures of the confessional divide, their mutual antagonism, and its political implications (Altgeld 1992; Smith 2008). Yet none went as far as Olaf Blaschke (2001, 2008), who, referring to the Confessionalism Theory of early modern Europe, even talked of “a second confessionalist era” (*zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter*) enduring well into the 20th century. Admittedly, Blaschke’s assertion has been impetuously

contested by fellow historians. For instance, Walser Smith (2003) accepted that mechanisms toward stronger confessional identities often were in operation but argued that Blaschke generally exaggerated their monolithic character, concluding that the term “a second confessionalist era” was unjustified.

For all the disagreements about Blaschke’s thesis most historians would accept the notion that the confessional divide endured. The main argument goes somewhat like this: The German Kaiserreich after unification would have a population that was about 62 % protestant and 35 % catholic. Majority Protestantism, whether combined with conservative or liberal preferences, developed a more secular attitude (*Kulturprotestantismus*) which identified strongly with the new German nation-state, while minority Catholicism, in opposition, took up a more conservative and autarkic attitude in defense of the Church. Catholics as well as Protestants tended to choose their own schools, associations, newspapers, publishers and political parties. The entrenchment was reinforced by Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, which pursued the values of enlightened Prussian Protestantism.

Rohe (1992) found no reason to weaken the the *Dreilagerthese* with regard to the Weimar period, and historians have showed that the confessional divide endured. Whereas Catholicism had felt threatened by the dominant national-protestant movement during the Kaiserreich, Manfred Kittel (2001: 250) has argued that the defeat of the Kaiserreich and the Weimar revolution made Protestant communities feel threatened: “Der politische Katholizismus stand mit Masse im Lager der Republic, der Protestantismus im Lager ihrer Gegner”. He concluded that both camps pursued a strategy of dissociating from each other during the Weimar years, creating much social tension in mixed areas. On national level the cleavage found its way into political disputes in particular between the Catholic Zentrum and the Protestant DNVP (Kittel 2001).

Adolf Hitler referred to the confessional cleavage in *Mein Kampf*, maintaining that Catholics and Protestants sought to wipe out each other. Officially, the NSDAP was neutral and advocated a supra-confessional *Volksgemeinschaft*. However at lower levels of the Party there was a clear bias towards Protestantism (May 1991). Even though the Protestant clergy was officially neutral about the NSDAP many of its bishops saw in Nazism the fulfillment of Protestant politics (Steigmann-Gall 2000). The Catholic clergy, on the other hand, officially opposed the Nazis (Waldmann 1976).

Having outlined the historiography of the confessional cleavage to justify our hypothesis, how has it been treated by psephological research on the Nazi's move to power? The dominating explanatory framework was for long class-based, assuming that social classes in Weimar Germany had homogeneous interests and were able to convert these into forms of political expression. Although this framework excludes no classes its most conspicuous thesis pointed to the Protestant middle classes, arguing that these had earlier voted for the middle-class parties of the Weimar coalition but voted for Hitler in frustration as they felt betrayed by their traditional parties. Geiger already in 1930 saw the middle class in panic shifting their sympathies toward the Nazis (Geiger 1930). The view was accepted by American sociologists and most succinctly expressed by Seymour M. Lipset, who claimed the ideal-typical Nazi voter was a middle-class self-employed protestant living in a small community who strongly opposed big business and big labour (Lipset 1960). Also Lepsius (1980) and leading German historians concurred to this interpretation.

For long this interpretative framework was only challenged by mass-theory, which basically argued that people not coping with the modern condition, in which old institutions were constantly replaced by new, were alienated and tended to vote for extremist alternatives. The theory was most strongly advocated by Reinhard Bendix, who argued that Hitler managed to mobilize the alienated masses and that former abstainers dominated the Nazi electorate

(Bendix 1953). Rightly, King et al. (2008) maintain that mass-society theory has been mainly supported by political philosophers and hardly subjected to empirical analysis. Further, Bendix' argument that previous nonvoters dominated the Nazi electorate has later been emphatically disproven. Only in 1933 was the party able to attract the votes of this group (Falter 1991). The differences between the two group-based views became apparent through the Lipset-Bendix controversy, ending with Bendix almost converting to Lipset's view in a co-written article in 1959 (Bendix and Lipset 1959).

The class-based framework prevailed unchallenged well into the 1980s. However, a variety of studies, often restricted to local or regional areas, nuanced or contradicted the initial argument that the middle-classes were responsible for voting Hitler to power. Richard Hamilton (1982), who focused his study on the larger cities, argued that the higher strata of the middle-classes were much more important than the lower strata. Thomas Childers (1983) and several others maintained that working class support was considerably higher than earlier accounted for. Although using different methods and disagreeing profoundly, Hamilton and Childers were early proponents of the view that the NSDAP appealed to a broad spectrum of social groups (Childers 1984). They also agreed that larger communities tended to have a smaller share of Nazi votes than smaller communities (Hamilton 1982). Childers (1983) concluded that "[T]he NSDAP by 1932 had become a unique phenomenon in German electoral politics, a catch-all party of protest". This catch-all theory had taken strong hold by the early 1990s, not least due to the works of Falter and his research group, whose methodology and data were unforeseen.

Catholics' reluctance to vote for Hitler as compared with Protestants was long acknowledged Falter and Hänisch (1986), while primarily advocating the catch-all theory by showing that also the working class voted for Hitler, revealed that blue-collar workers integrated in Catholic-political environments were less inclined to do so. This pointed at one of Falter's most cogent results: the dominant resistance among Catholics, in particular those

belonging to rural communities (Falters 1991). O'Loughlin, Flint, and Anselin (1994) and subsequently Christian Stögberger (2001) also found strong support for Catholic resistance, leading the latter to conclude that the confessional cleavage was the most conspicuous political cleavage among the Weimar electorate.

For long the American political scientist Walter D. Burnham's (1973) conceptual framework for understanding the different voting pattern between Protestants and Catholics dominated. Agreeing that the Nazi vote came predominantly from the Protestant middle class, Burnham himself fell under the class-based framework. Yet his theory of political confessionalism was applicable also to the catch-all framework. By political confessionalism Burnham meant a specific form of party identification among individuals which resembles individual faith because the identification involves a total worldview. This worldview would find expression in networks and social organizations. Hence, he spoke of political parties characterized by political confessionalism as "political churches", in which individuals find existential meaning well as much as they were instruments to redeem situational material interests. Political confessionalism would tend to cause enduring "political immunization" due to party identification. The confessional electorate would tend to react well as much toward external attacks than to economic depression. Burnham saw three Weimar parties more or less fitting with the criteria: the Zentrum's relation to the Catholics and further the SPD's and KDP's relation to the organized working class electorate. If not immune, these groups would show less acquiescence towards the Nazis. In contrast, the middle-class parties would tend to enjoy less "ideological intensity" and more easier give in: "[i]t was the politically unchurched middle classes and smallholder peasantry which "went overboard" in 1929-33, and not the German electorate as a whole" (Burnham 1973: 15). Burnham's explanation of Catholic resistance was seriously challenged by King et al. (2008), who rejected that party identification was in

operation, whereas Spenkuch and Tillmann (2014) argued that elite mobilization by the clergy was needed to convert party identification into votes.

The reviewed historiography as well as the review of psephological scholarship suggest a consistent cleavage between Catholics and Protestants both religiously and regionally, which affected the way the electorate voted. Accordingly, our point of departure when running model is that the tendency of a given social group to vote for NSDAP differed depending on which religion is predominant in a given precinct.

Hypothesis about the interaction between social class and religious belonging

From the literature review above we assume a consistent cleavage between Catholics and Protestants both religiously and regionally, which affected the way the electorate voted. In this section we test a set of hypothesis derived from this assumption to see how religious belonging affected social class. This assumption has previously been explored by Falter (1991), Falter and Hänisch (1986) and Waldman (1973). The former consisted of trivariate models including religion as a moderating factor, while the latter employed regression models including an interaction term of religion and social groups. Our main contribution is to include this approach to all 5 social groups, each with different proposed causal effects on nazi vote depending on religious affiliation.

We apply the data set from King et al. (2008), which classification is based on five different social groups: (1) unemployed, (2) blue-collar workers, (3) white-collar workers, (4) self-employed, and (5) domestic workers. The latter category includes domestic employees in domestic services. We formulate individual hypotheses for each of these groups.

The first group is (1) unemployed, which grew leading up to the election in 1930. Hitler had a clear goal of trying to mobilize the unemployed in his favor and for long historians assumed he was successful. However, the efforts largely failed. As pointed to by Falter (1991),

on average the NSDAP performed poorer the more unemployment whereas the opposite applied to the KPD.¹ Yet we would expect most of the unemployed to be in urban areas, where the Catholics more often than in rural areas voted for the Nazis. Hence our hypotheses appears:

H1a: Protestant precincts with many unemployed would see relatively fewer votes for the NSDAP compared to Protestant precincts with few unemployed.

H1b: Catholic precincts with many unemployed would see a larger percentage of votes for the NSDAP compared to Catholic precincts with few unemployed (we would expect this effect to be moderate, see explanation after H2b).

The second group is blue-collar workers. Falter (1991) concluded that the higher share of employed blue-collar workers in an area the higher share of votes for the NSDAP.² Yet in general the working class would rather turn to counterparts on the political left. We assume that blue-collar workers would have somewhat equal interests as the unemployed, and as the unemployed, mostly lived in urban areas. Since the Nazis faced trouble finding support in urban Protestant areas and in the working class, we would expect it to be a negative relationship between blue-collar workers and Protestant votes for the NSDAP. In Catholic areas the effect should be opposite, since the NSDAP found more support in Catholic urban areas. Thus, the following hypotheses are deducted:

H2a: In Protestant precincts with a large working class the NSDAP would receive fewer votes than in Protestant precincts with less blue-collar workers.

¹ Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, 299-300.

² Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, 202.

H2b: Catholic precincts with a large working class tended to vote for the NSDAP compared to those Catholic precincts with less blue-collar workers.

Since we expect the unemployed and blue-collar workers to have largely equal interests, and that the political parties on the left best defended those interests, we would expect the positive effect proposed in H1b and H2b to be moderate. The main reason to believe that there was a positive effect in Catholic precincts is that the NSDAP tended to get fewer votes in Catholic rural areas than in Protestant rural areas (Falter 1991: 182, 184).

The third group is white-collar workers, also a category of mainly urban belonging. The divide between Protestants and Catholics with regard to this social class is well established in the literature. Already Brown (1982) presented evidence that the NSDAP received a larger share of the votes in Catholic areas with many white-collar workers, yet lost votes in comparable Protestant areas.³ Falter and Zintl (1998) concluded that “Catholic white-collar worker and civil servants voted NSDAP somewhat more frequently than non-Catholic member of the salaried middle classes.”⁴ From this we expect the following hypotheses to be confirmed:

H3a: In Protestant precincts with a large population of white-collar workers the NSDAP received fewer votes than in Protestant precincts with a smaller share of white-collar workers.

³ Courtney Brown, “The Nazi Vote: A National Ecological Study”, *The American Political Science Review*, 76, 285-302.

⁴ Jürgen W. Falter and Reinhard Zintl, “The Economic Crisis of the 1930s and the Nazi Vote“, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 19, 1988, 55-85, quote 73.

H3b: In Catholic precincts with a large population of white-collar workers the NSDAP received more votes than in Catholic precincts with fewer white-collar workers.

The two last social groups under investigation, self-employed and domestic workers, are more rural based than the first three. Yet the former also includes some urban population. Sometimes called the old middle-class, the self-employed group is a mix of landowners, small shop-owners, and others from the *Mittelstand*. It is often pointed to this group as the core of the Nazi-electorate. With this in mind we propose the following hypotheses connected to the group of self-employed:

H4a: In Protestant precincts with a large population of self-employed the NSDAP would receive more votes than in Protestant precincts with fewer self-employed.

H4b: In Catholic precincts with a large population of self-employed the NSDAP would receive fewer votes than in Catholic precincts with fewer self-employed.

The final group is the domestic workers. Constituting the most rural based group of the five we have chosen it consisted mostly of agricultural laborers and peasants workers. This group had on many levels concurrent interests with the self-employed, and we would expect the effect to be similar. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

H5a: In Protestant precincts with a large population of domestic workers, the NSDAP would receive more votes than in Protestant precincts with fewer domestic workers.

H5b: In Catholic precincts with a large population of domestic workers, the NSDAP would receive fewer votes than in catholic precincts with fewer domestic workers.

Data

The data are taken from King et al. (2008), which again is based on the Election and Social Data of the Districts and Municipalities of the German Empire from 1920 to 1933.⁵ From this dataset we have focused on the vote for NSDAP.

King et al. (2008) based their information on occupational status from the 1933 census and their information on religious affiliation from the 1925 census. Hence our information about the social classes derives from the 1933 census. Our information about whether a precinct was predominantly Catholic or Protestant derives from the 1925 census, which provides information on the share of Protestant population. From this we deduct that in Precincts with few Protestants the Catholics were more numerous. Ideally, of course, we would use censuses from the election year 1930. However, as we would expect social mobility to be low in the Weimar republic this caveat does not render our results futile. In addition, King et al. (2008) have limited the number of precincts to 681 from originally 1248. This was done because some of the boundaries changed over time, so in the interest of contiguous units, they were limited to the boundaries that were most stable.

Using this type of aggregated data to investigate voter behavior is problematic. The data are on the precinct level, as the Weimar Republic had a secret ballot and no voter surveys were conducted in this time period. This can be illustrated through an example: We can assume that in districts with a high number of blue collar workers there were also high numbers of white

⁵ Jürgen W. Falter and Dirk Hänisch, Election and Social Data of the Districts and Municipalities of the German empire from 1920 to 1933. English and German versions available at <http://www.gesis.org/>. For a description, see Dirk Hänisch, Inhalt und Struktur der Datenbank Wahl- und Sozialdaten der Kreise und Gemeinden des Deutschen Reiches von 1920 bis 1933, *Historical Social Research/ Historische Sozialforschung*, 14, 39-67.

collar workers. As such, we cannot in a good way differentiate between these groups when it comes to our results. King et al. (2008: 970–974) employs a new method to break this data down to an individual level, however this will always to a certain extent be based on educated guesses. Thus, we make use of data on an aggregated level, which is not an ideal solution, but they are the best data available. Regarding the complication with ecological fallacy, the definition of classes from this period has been heavily debated. Without details about family background, education and income level, it is difficult to draw strict social class boundaries.⁶

Method, analysis and results

As already specified, we have taken into account the religious division when modeling the effect of having the different social groups in a precinct. We make use of Ordinary Least Squares regression models when predicting values for the NSDAP vote share, as is shown in the equation below.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{percentage NSDAP} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln \text{population} + \beta_2 \text{protestants} + \beta_3 \text{social group} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{protestants} \times \text{social group} + e \end{aligned}$$

The dependent variable is votes for the NSDAP in the 1930 *Reichstag* election as a share of eligible voters. We also include the logged precinct population as a control variable. Share of Protestants in a precinct is an independent variable in all five models presented. In each model a different social category and its corresponding interaction with Protestant share is included. We present five linear regression models (table 1), one for each of the social groups. The independent variables will here be, (1) the given social group, (2) share of Protestants, and (3) an interaction variable (the given social group * share of protestant). The interaction variable is

⁶ For a good summary of this debate, see Mühlberger (2003: 17–37).

important for our main hypotheses, as it looks directly at how the effect of social class is conditioned by the religious majority of a given precinct.

Since we examine the whole population of German precincts, and not just a sample of it, we are generalizing within stochastic model theory rather than within sample theory. Following sample theory, when investigating the entire population one should get perfect predictions and thus there would be no need for significance tests. However, when following the logic of stochastic model theory we are generalizing from our observations to the process or mechanism that brings about the present data (Gold 1969; Henkel 1976; Mehmetoglu and Jakobsen 2016).⁷

⁷ Any lack of statistical significance would indicate that the co-variation produced by nature is no more probable than that produced by chance (Gold 1969: 44).

Table 1. Different social classes with religion (Catholic/Protestant), regression of 681 precincts (*Kreise*) in Weimar Germany, dependent variables is votes for NSDAP in the 1930 *Reichstag* election as share of total eligible voters

	Unemployed	Blue collar	White collar	Self employ.	Domestic
Constant	0.115*** (0.027)	0.150*** (0.025)	0.161*** (0.024)	0.164*** (0.036)	0.220*** (0.034)
Ln populat.	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.011*** (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.007*** (0.002)
Protestants	0.154*** (0.012)	0.137*** (0.026)	0.163*** (0.011)	0.014 (0.002)	0.027** (0.013)
See top line	0.197*** (0.055)	0.015 (0.061)	0.433*** (0.062)	-0.189** (0.083)	-0.188*** (0.036)
Interaction	-0.352*** (0.071)	-0.106 (0.084)	-0.518*** (0.080)	0.497*** (0.123)	0.305*** (0.048)
<i>R</i> ²	0.345	0.325	0.366	0.338	0.359

*significant at 10%, **significant at 5%, ***significant at 1%, standard errors are in parentheses. Units are weighted according to their population.

The results of the five regression models are summarized in Table 1.⁸ We see that the interaction term is significant for all social groups except blue-collar.⁹ This indicates that the effects differ depending on whether the precinct is predominantly Protestant or Catholic when investigating how having a large share of unemployed, white-collar, self-employed or domestic workers in a precinct influences the NSDAP vote. This does to a large extent support our main argument, confirming that social class support for NSDAP is mediated by religious denomination.

Taking into account that it is difficult to intuitively interpret a table with an interaction composed of two continuous variables, we have chosen to present the findings in five graphs (see figure 1). The values have been calculated using the following equation:¹⁰

⁸ It should be noted that the variable *protestants* account for the lion's share of the variation in our dependent (31.1 %).

⁹ Technically, the effect is opposite, however, the effect for Catholics is close to zero and not significant.

¹⁰ Share Protestants: Min: 0.002, Mean: 0.634, Max: 0.987

Unemployed: Min: 0.02, Mean: 0.185, Max: 0.397

Blue collar: Min: 0.114, Mean: 0.316, Max: 0.541

White Collar: Min: 0.022, Mean: 0.145, Max: 0.519

Self-employed: Min: 0.058, Mean: 0.162, Max: 0.313

Domestic: Min: 0.037, Mean: 0.192, Max: 0.526

$$\hat{y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{mean}) \ln \text{population} + \beta_2(\text{min} / \text{mean} / \text{max}) \text{ protestants} + \beta_3(\text{min} / \text{mean} / \text{max}) \text{social group} + \beta_4(\text{min} / \text{mean} / \text{max}) \text{ protestants} \times (\text{min} / \text{mean} / \text{max}) \text{social group}$$

Nine calculations have thus been made for each social group, replacing the minimum, mean, and maximum values for religion and the given social group. The minimum values on Protestant are assumed to indicate a large share of Catholics in the graphs. We have chosen this approach, as it is an easily interpretable way to test the hypotheses presented. In addition we have added a graph that describes the general difference between Protestants and Catholics in regards to vote for the NSDAP in the 1930 elections, also based on min, mean, and max values of the variable “share of Protestants”.

Figure 1. Reichstag Election, September 14, 1930

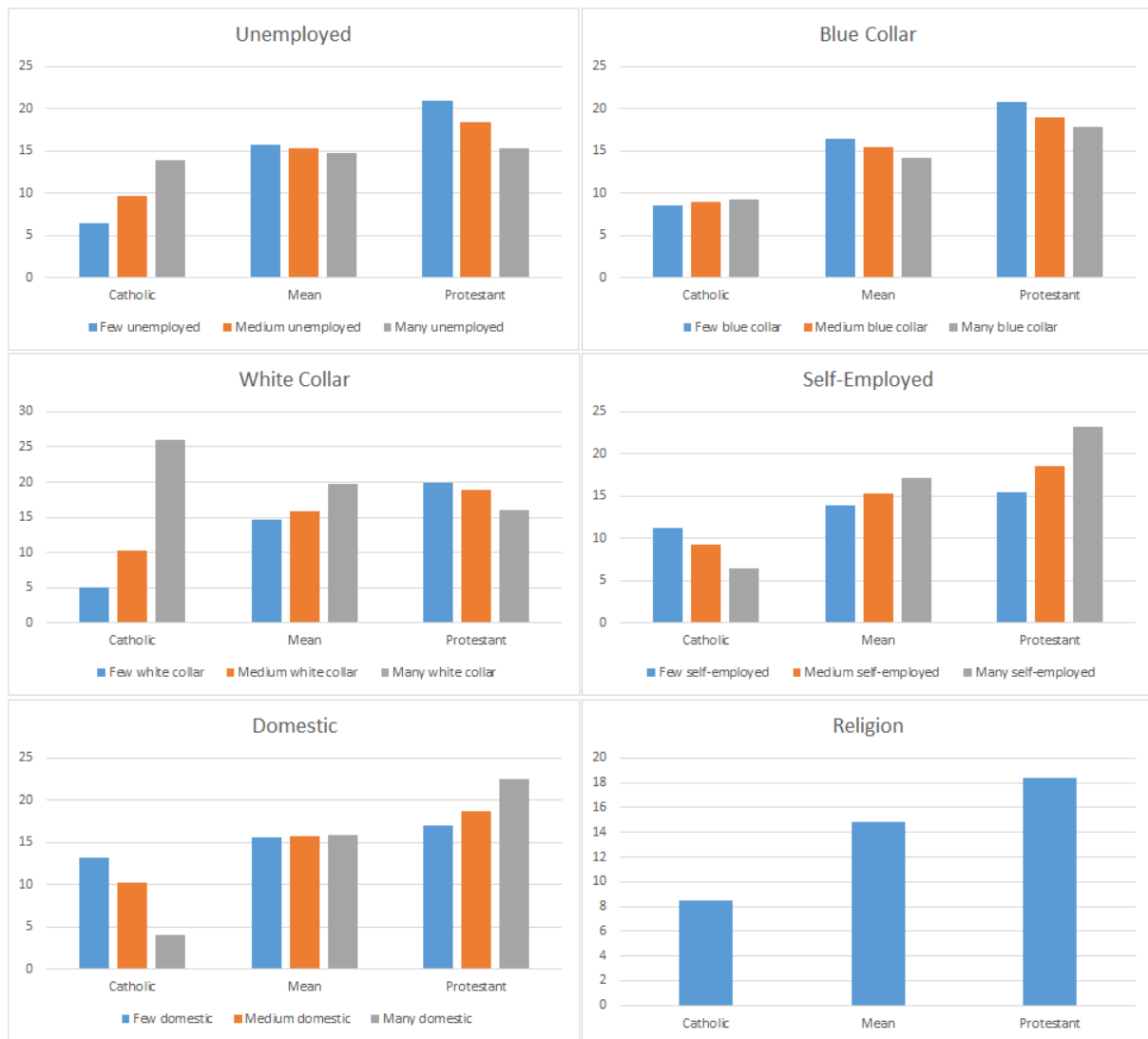


Figure 1 shows that the trends are opposite for all groups except for blue-collar workers. In the four other groups, Catholic and Protestant precincts seem to behave completely opposite and predicated precincts with an equal size of the two denominations are placing themselves in between. Unsurprisingly, the stronghold for Protestants voting for the NSDAP is found in the two more rural classes: the self-employed and domestic workers. Further, it seems to have been a problem for the NSDAP to find support in predominantly Protestant areas with many unemployed, whereas the opposite effect was true for precincts with a Catholic majority. Of the interaction hypotheses, all is confirmed except H2b. This shows a close to zero trend with

regard to NSDAP votes and blue-collar Catholic workers. The trends found in the 1930 election is to a large extent consistent with the findings from the 1928 and the two 1932 elections (see Appendix). An overview of the hypotheses and their test results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Confirmed	Rejected
Protestant unemployed, negative on NSDAP votes (H1a)	X	
Catholic unemployed, positive on NSDAP votes (H1b)	X	
Protestant blue-collar workers, negative on NSDAP votes (H2a)	X	
Catholic blue-collar workers, positive on NSDAP votes (H2b)		X
Protestant white-collar worker, negative on NSDAP votes (H3a)	X	
Catholic white-collar worker, positive on NSDAP votes (H3b)	X	
Protestant self-employed, positive on NSDAP votes (H4a)	X	
Catholic self-employed, negative on NSDAP votes (H4b)	X	
Protestant domestic workers, positive on NSDAP votes (H5a)	X	
Catholic domestic workers, negative on NSDAP votes (H5b)	X	

We find the biggest differences among the white-collar workers, the self-employed and domestic workers. The strongest NSDAP support among Catholics occurred in precincts with many white-collar workers.¹¹ Conflicting theories have been presented over the years, with

¹¹ Two case examples from the data-set can help to illustrate the findings. Both precincts situated in the southeast area of Bavaria, which had a high share of Catholics. In the electoral district of Passau S there was a high share of white-collar workers (about 31 percent). Here the NSDAP got approximately 31 percent of the votes, which is high for a Catholic dominated precinct. On the other hand, the precinct of Bogen only had about 2 percent white-collar workers and here the NSDAP only managed to get approximately 5 percent of the votes. In Bogen the self-employed and domestic workers dominated and the *Bayerische Volkspartei* party did extremely well, receiving almost 40 percent of the votes, confirming the idea that traditional voting loyalties played a vital part on the Catholic countryside.

regard to white-collar workers. Hamilton (1982) argued that this group was a key part of the NSDAP-electorate, whereas Childers (1983) argued that they were far behind most other social groups in voting for the NSDAP. This confusion might be due to the conflicting results from Protestants and Catholic precincts, as revealed by Falter (1991) with regard to *Angestellten* yet less so with regard to *Beamten*.¹² Our findings seem to further confirm that notion. Protestant voting loyalties towards other parties in this social group might help to explain some of the difference, as the middle class Protestant was more likely to vote for Conservative or Center parties than their Catholic counterparts. This finding is especially important, since the success of the NSDAP in Catholic precincts with many white-collar workers is only second to that of rural Protestant precincts. That the former group is mostly urban based also hints toward it being a stronghold for Catholic and not for Protestants. We have seen that more religiosity in Protestants areas leads to more votes for the NSDAP, and that the opposite is true for Catholics. Since it is plausible to assume that they are more religious in rural areas, this can be part of the explanation. Still, it is clear that among urban Catholics there is a division between the working-class and the middle-class. The working-class seems to have opposed the NSDAP whereas the urban middle-class looks to have been more inclined toward voting for the NSDAP.

We assumed the same expected effect for blue-collar workers as for unemployed. Countering our hypothesis H2b, the trend for blue-collar workers was negative in Protestant precincts and no effect in Catholic ones. One explanation might be that we have underestimated the appeal of KDP and SDP even in Catholic precincts. It seems at first sight counterintuitive that the effect for unemployed and blue-collar workers in Catholic precincts would differ. However, the explanation might be that there was a higher level of unemployed white-collar Catholics who had more in common with the middle-classes than the working class. It could also be that the urban unemployed Catholics had a weaker connection to the Catholic Church,

¹² Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, 235, 248.

and therefore fell outside the institutions that insulated Catholics from voting for the NSDAP. With regard to the Protestant unemployed, these were generally associated with the working class, and lived in areas where the KPD had a tendency of receiving a larger share of the protest votes. Blue-collar workers is the only social group that does not show a clear opposite trend for both confessions, so it seems safe to say that the NSDAP did not have strong support among the working class. Still, for the two first groups it is difficult to draw strict conclusions based on this study. This is as expected, with the reservation made in regard to H1b and H2b.

Conclusion

Having taken as its point of departure, and sought to further and improve on the works of Falter and King et al., we have tested the interaction effect of religion and social groups on the Nazi vote. We find support for our main argument that voting of the various social groups in 1930 would depend on whether they lived in a predominantly Catholic or Protestant precinct. This holds true for all groups except for blue-collar workers, where there was no trend for Catholics. This renders support to earlier conclusions that the NSDAP was a worker's party only by name. In Catholic precincts many white-collar workers meant sundry votes for the NSDAP. For Protestant precincts it was the more rural social classes, the self-employed and domestic workers, which were most receptive to the Nazi-appeal. The rural based Catholics had in general strong voting loyalties towards the *Zentrum* and the BVP, and therefore they were more difficult for Hitler to win over to his side. When it comes to white-collar Protestants it seemed they supported more reformist parties, among them the SPD. Though this argument has been proposed by others, we have tested this empirically on data for the whole of Germany, thus contributing to the debate on the origin of the Nazi vote.

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Appendix

Figure A1. Reichstag Election, May 20, 1928

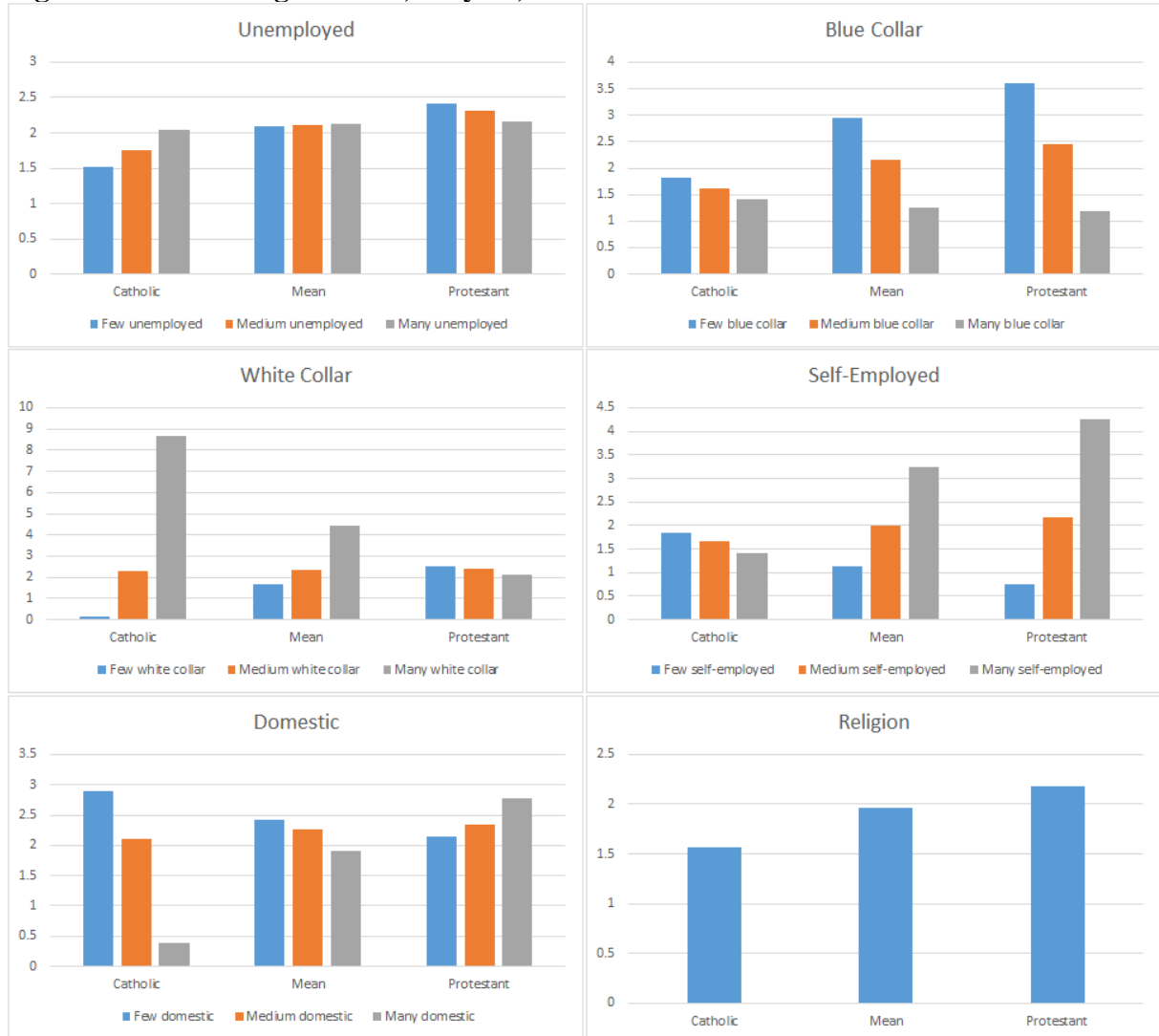


Figure A2. Reichstag Election, July 31, 1932



Figure A3. Reichstag Election, November 6, 1932

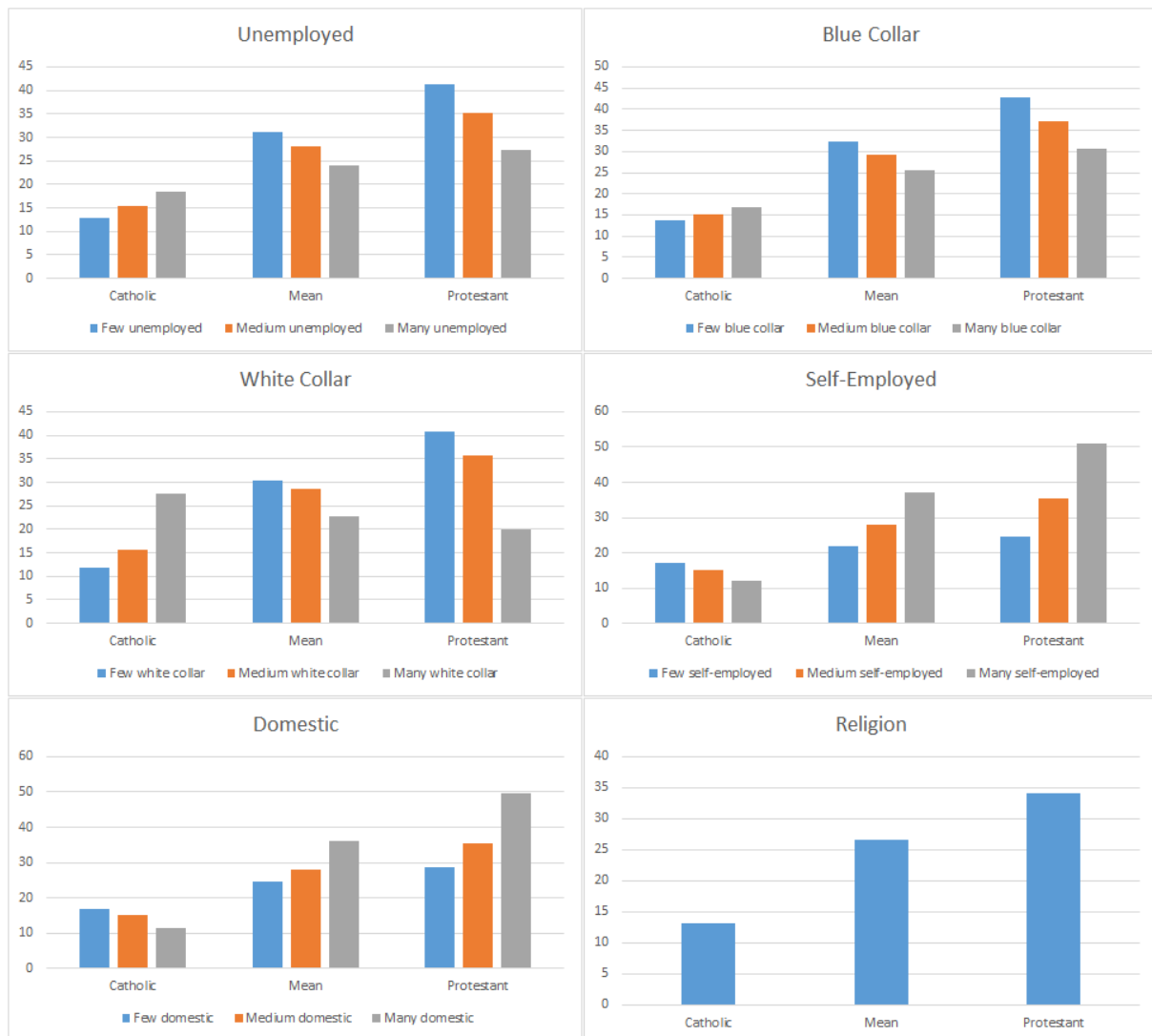


Figure A4. Reichstag Election, March 5, 1933

