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## Elite Influence? Religion, Economics, and the Rise of the Nazis

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# Elite Influence? Religion, Economics, and the Rise of the Nazis\*

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## Abstract

Adolf Hitler's seizure of power was one of the most consequential events of the twentieth century. Yet, our understanding of which factors fueled the astonishing rise of the Nazis remains highly incomplete. This paper shows that religion played an important role in the Nazi party's electoral success—dwarfing all available socioeconomic variables. To obtain the first causal estimates we exploit plausibly exogenous variation in the geographic distribution of Catholics and Protestants due to a peace treaty in the sixteenth century. Even after allowing for sizeable violations of the exclusion restriction, the evidence indicates that Catholics were significantly less likely to vote for the Nazi Party than Protestants. Consistent with the historical record, our results are most naturally rationalized by a model in which the Catholic Church leaned on believers to vote for the democratic Zentrum Party, whereas the Protestant Church remained politically neutral.

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## 1. Introduction

Social scientists have long analyzed the role of elites in democratic transitions and breakdowns, revolutions and mass movements, as well as various other social phenomena (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2005; Michels 1911; Mills 1956; Mosca 1896). Pareto (1916), for instance, argues that true democracy is an illusion and that a ruling class will always emerge to enrich itself. Consequently, he characterizes elites as those who are the most adept at using the two modes of political rule: force and persuasion.

For centuries, the Catholic Church was a master of both. In medieval times it could exploit its unique position at the intersection of spiritual and worldly authority to strong-arm rulers and peasants alike. The advent of mass democracy, however, brought about fundamental changes. If the Church or any other group of elites wanted to achieve their political goals they now had to persuade the populus (for examples see Ekelund et al. 2006, Gill 1998, or Warner 2000). Such a radical shift in the “rules of the game” raises important questions. Are voters susceptible to this form of influence from above? To what extent are elites, such as the Church and its dignitaries, able to wield power by “steering” the masses?

To shed light on these issues we present evidence from the Weimar Republic. Few historical events have been more consequential than the failure of Germany’s first democracy and Adolf Hitler’s ensuing rise to power. Almost none are more difficult to understand. Even contemporary observers were surprised by the Nazis’ rapid success. In 1928 the Nazi Party (NSDAP) won only 2.6% of votes. Within two and half years, however, its vote share increased by a factor of seven, only to double again by 1932. At the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933, the NSDAP obtained 43.9% of the popular vote and was by far the largest faction in parliament (see Figure 1).

With few exceptions Germany’s traditional elites either condemned the Republic and supported conservative parties that sought to abolish it, or they remained politically uninvolved (see, e.g., Mommsen 1989). By contrast, the Catholic Church remained supportive of the new democracy. Scarred by Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, the Church backed its traditional ally, the democratic Zentrum (Centre Party).<sup>1</sup>

Promoting the political and cultural ideals of the Catholic Church, 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 Church had traditionally tried to use its influence to sway Catholics to vote for the Zentrum (Anderson 2000). Between 1919 and 1932, the party participated in all of the Weimar Republic’s governing coalitions.

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<sup>1</sup>Although formally separate, our description of the Zentrum Party and its election results always includes its Bavarian branch, the Bavarian People’s Party (BVP).

Alerted by the NSDAP's sudden success at the polls, the Church took an explicit anti-Nazi position after the September elections of 1930. The German bishops even went so far as to officially forbid believers to join the NSDAP or to vote for it. Noncompliers were threatened with excommunication, and in many instances, publically shamed (see, e.g., Abel 1938; Fandel 1997, 2002; Scholder 1977).

As one would expect if the Church's proscription was, indeed, effective, Figure 2 shows that support for the Nazis was by no means uniform. Despite the onset of the World Economic Crisis majoritarian Catholic regions remained strongholds of the Zentrum. Voters in predominantly Protestant areas, however, abandoned their traditional parties and flocked toward the Nazis.

Although the link between religion and NSDAP vote shares may be surprising, we are not the first to recognize it. In fact, the rise of the Nazis is one of the most studied topics in modern history, and scholars of fascism have unearthed numerous factors associated with Nazi support (see, e.g., Brown 1982; Childers 1983; Falter 1991; Hamilton 1982; O'Loughlin 2002, among many others). However, as pointed out by King et al. (2008), this literature draws only rarely on adequate econometric techniques, and the quantitative evidence that does exist remains purely correlational.<sup>2</sup>

In the first part of this paper we show that religion is the single most important predictor of Nazi votes. More specifically, constituencies' religious composition explains slightly more than 40% of the county-level variation in NSDAP vote shares. All other available variables combined (including electoral district fixed effects) add only an additional 41%. We, therefore, argue that in order to fully comprehend the failure of Germany's first democracy one needs to understand the role of religion and that of the Catholic Church.

While descriptive evidence on who voted for Hitler may by itself be interesting, it is insufficient to judge whether religion had a *causal* impact on the rise of the Nazis, and, if so, through which channels it operated. King et al. (2008), for instance, argue that Protestants and Catholics simply had divergent economic interests, and that the relative weakness of the NSDAP in predominantly Catholic areas is attributable to its inability to appeal to farmers.

The second part of the paper is devoted to showing that the effect of religion on the voting behavior of Germans was indeed causal. Our evidence from the last fully free elections held in November 1932 indicates that Catholics were about 28 percentage points less likely to vote for the NSDAP than Protestants. Compared to an overall Nazi vote share of 33.1%, the effect of religion is not only statistically, but also economically highly significant. Taken at

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<sup>2</sup>Two recent exceptions are Adena et al. (2013) and Satyanath et al. (2013). Adena et al. (2013) estimate the impact of radio propaganda on NSDAP vote shares, while Satyanath et al. (2013) examine the relationship between cultural capital and support for the Nazis. Both papers use state-of-the-art econometric methods to estimate causal effects.

face value, our point estimates suggest that, *ceteris paribus*, Protestants were three to four times more likely to vote for the Nazis than Catholics.

To obtain the first causal estimates we exploit plausibly exogenous variation in the geographic distribution of Catholics and Protestants due to a stipulation in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Ending decades of religious conflict and war, the Peace of Augsburg established the *ius reformandi*. According to the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (“whose realm, his religion”), territorial lords obtained the right to determine states’ official religion and, therefore, the religion of all their subjects. While the treaty secured the unity of religion within individual states, it led to religious fragmentation of Germany as a whole, which at this time consisted of more than a thousand independent territories.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 3 depicts the spread of religion in the aftermath of the Peace. As the comparison with Figure 2 demonstrates, 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, *and* it is highly correlated with NSDAP vote shares.

Nevertheless, for our instrumental variable estimates to have a causal interpretation it must be the case that princes’ choices are orthogonal to unobserved determinants of individuals’ voting decisions in 1932. This assumption is fundamentally untestable, but one may be willing to judge its plausibility by considering the process that led to the adoption of a particular faith.

Historians argue that most rulers were deeply religious and not only concerned about their own salvation, but also that of their subjects. Thus, their religious conscience often dictated a particular choice (see, for instance, Dixon 2002 and Lutz 1997). Moreover, politics of the day, such as existing feuds or alliances, are believed to have played an important role (Scribner and Dixon 2003). Cantoni (2012) provides otherwise scarce available statistical evidence, finding 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.<sup>4</sup>

Although plausible (especially after controlling for the factors mentioned above), there is no guarantee that the exclusion restriction required for a valid instrument is exactly satisfied. We, therefore, use econometric techniques developed by Conley et al. (2012) to show that

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<sup>3</sup>Not until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 were subjects formally free to choose their own religion.

<sup>4</sup>Rubin (2014) shows that cities that had a printing press at the beginning of the sixteenth century were also more likely to adopt the Protestant faith, and Dittmar (2011) argues that they experienced faster subsequent growth. To ensure that our results are robust to this potential confound we explicitly control for it.

our main estimates are qualitatively robust to sizeable violations of the exclusion restriction. That is, even if rulers' choices in the sixteenth century had an independent impact on the voting behavior of Germans almost four hundred years later, as long as one is willing to rule out that this independent effect exceeds 13 percentage points, one would still conclude that religion exerted a significant influence on Nazi vote shares. To put this into perspective, 13 percentage points corresponds to about half of all NSDAP supporters (among eligible voters) in the November elections of 1932, to about three times the difference in the voting behavior of urban and rural constituencies, or to the estimated impact of moving the entire work force from agriculture into manufacturing.

The third part of the paper argues that the effect of religion operated through the Catholic Church pressuring believers to vote for the Zentrum Party, while the Protestant Church remained politically neutral. Building on formal theories of conformity (e.g., Akerlof 1980 and Bernheim 1994), we develop a simple model of voting decisions in the face of pressure by the Church. Five key pieces of evidence support the predictions of our model: (i) Religious differences in NSDAP vote shares are substantially smaller in areas where the Church's official position was undermined by a priest who openly sympathized with the Nazis. (ii) There are no religious differences in NSDAP vote shares in counties where, before the advent of the Nazis, Catholics did not follow the Church's "recommendation" to vote for the Zentrum. (iii) The effect of religion is larger in rural areas than in cities, where the Church yielded arguably less influence and where the pressure to conform is likely to have been lower. (iv) Perhaps counterintuitively, our model predicts that Catholics and Protestants should have been equally likely to support left-wing parties—despite the Catholic Church's constant warnings about the dangers of Socialism. That is, the Church should have been able to "dissuade" believers from voting for the NSDAP, but not from supporting the Communist Party (KPD). This prediction is also borne out in the data. (v) Lastly, looking at different proxy variables for Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism, we find that religious differences *reversed* after March 1933 when the Catholic bishops gave up their opposition and took a position favorable to Hitler.

By contrast, the data are incompatible with a number of alternative explanations for the effect of religion on Nazi vote shares. For instance, by conditioning on measures of church attendance and other religious activities, we can rule out that religiosity itself is driving our results. Moreover, we find that the effect of religion does not vary with the share of Catholics in a county or municipality, which casts doubt on explanations based on traditional models of peer effects, culture, and social milieus.

Naturally, our paper is closely related to a vast literature on the rise of fascism and the downfall of Germany's first democracy. We partially review these studies in Section 2. More-

over, our analysis contributes to a growing literature on the economics of religion (e.g., Barro and McCleary 2005, 2006; Basten and Betz 2013; Becker and Woessmann 2009; Campante and Yanagizawa-Drott 2013; Iannaccone 1992, 1998; Spenkuch 2011) as well as to an important body of work on the power of elites in shaping the political economy (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2001, 2005; Conley and Temimi 2001; Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Weingast 1997). While much of the latter focuses on elites’ rent seeking and their role in the transition towards democracy, we present evidence on the ability of elites to wield political influence by “steering” the masses, even after universal suffrage has been achieved.

The plan for the rest of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides background information on the rise of the Nazis, while selectively reviewing the existing empirical literature. Section 3 describes the data and presents partial correlations. Our main results appear in Section 4. Section 5 discusses potential mechanisms, and the last section concludes. An Appendix with ancillary results as well as the precise definitions of all variables used throughout the analysis is provided on the authors’ websites.

## 2. Historical Background and Previous Literature

### 2.1. *The Fall of the Weimar Democracy and the Rise of the Nazis*

With Germany’s defeat in World War I came the end of her monarchy. Although the ensuing revolution resulted in the signing of a democratic constitution, the Weimar Republic was off to a bad start (see Table 1 for a list of key events that led to its eventual downfall).<sup>5</sup>

Public outrage over the Treaty of Versailles, the beginnings of a severe post-war inflation as well as several coup attempts and political assassinations all dragged the Republic into turmoil. The primary beneficiaries of the various crises were radical parties on both ends of the political spectrum.

One of them was the National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP). Founded in 1919, the Nazi Party was initially little more than one amongst many in the *völkisch* milieu of Munich. Yet, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, its 55th member and primary agitator, it soon became known as the most radical, anti-Semitic party in Bavaria.

In November 1923, Hitler decided to take the initiative and overthrow the government. Known as the Beer Hall Putsch and inspired by Mussolini’s March on Rome, his “March on Berlin” failed miserably. The NSDAP was subsequently outlawed and Hitler was convicted of treason. The right-leaning court, however, sentenced him to only five years in prison with the possibility of parole after as little as six months.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The description in this section draws on the superb account of Mommsen (1989), among others.

<sup>6</sup>At that time, the justice system was heavily biased. Gumbel (1922), for instance, documents that offenders from the political right received much milder sentences than those from the left.

With Hitler behind bars the Nazi movement became disorganized and fragmented. NSDAP and the German Völkisch Freedom Party (DVFP) even “merged” to file joint lists for the parties’ first two national elections in 1924.

Overshadowed by the previous crises, the May elections of 1924 saw large gains of anti-democratic parties. The communist KPD, for instance, increased its vote share by more than 10% percentage points, whereas the Nazis obtained 6.5% of the popular vote.

Following the end of hyperinflation and aided by the Dawes Plan (which reduced Germany’s reparation payments), economic conditions steadily bettered over the course of 1924. So, when snap elections became necessary in December of the same year, radical parties lost support while their democratic counterparts experienced considerable gains.

Notwithstanding parties’ inability (or unwillingness) to compromise and despite multiple changes to the governing coalition (which never had a secure majority), the economic and political situation continued to improve. Parliament served the full legislative term, and the period between 1924 and 1929 became known as the Republic’s “Golden Era.”

After Hitler’s release from prison and with the ban on the Nazi Party lifted in February 1925, the Nazi movement began to regroup. In a radical change of strategy, Hitler was now determined to ascend to power legally, i.e. by winning elections. Yet, until the fall of 1929 the NSDAP remained insignificant, achieving only 2.6% of the popular vote in 1928.<sup>7</sup>

All of this changed when publishing mogul Alfred Hugenberg and the right-wing German National People’s Party (DNVP) launched a large-scale media campaign against the Young Plan (a treaty that further *reduced* Germany’s reparations payments). While the campaign itself was ultimately unsuccessful, it provided the Nazis with an opportunity to gain national exposure. By the spring of 1930, Hitler and the NSDAP had become household names.

Around the same time, Germany’s ongoing economic and political stabilization came to an abrupt halt. Due to the onset of the Great Depression, American banks withdrew short-term loans on which German companies had been relying during the upturn, industrial production declined by over 40%, and unemployment skyrocketed to a peak of about 6 million (i.e. more than 1 in 4 workers) during the winter of 1932. Unable to effectively deal with the problem of rising unemployment, the Weimar Republic’s last democratically governing cabinet stepped down in March of 1930.

The following September election saw landslide gains for the NSDAP. With a vote share of 18.3%—more than seven times its previous result—the Nazis became the second largest faction in parliament. Even contemporaries were surprised by NSDAP’s sudden success.

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<sup>7</sup>Due to strict proportionality rule with no minimum threshold, the NSDAP was still able to win 12 seats in the *Reichstag*.



Since radical parties had won the majority of seats, Heinrich Brüning, the previously appointed Chancellor, circumvented the legislative prerogative of the *Reichstag* and instead governed through the use of emergency decrees (according to Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution). As would all of his successors.

Most historians now believe that Brüning deliberately pursued deflationary policies to make allied reparation demands look more and more unreasonable and improve Germany's bargaining position.<sup>8</sup> In May 1932, *Reichspräsident* Paul von Hindenburg replaced Brüning with the well-known monarchist Franz von Papen. Even before the *Reichstag* could deliver a vote of no confidence, President von Hindenburg dissolved parliament and ordered new elections.<sup>9</sup>

In light of worsening economic conditions and increasing radicalization of the political climate, the extremist KPD and NSDAP won over half of all votes in July of 1932. For the NSDAP this meant a doubling of its vote share from two years prior.

Notwithstanding Hitler's promise to tolerate the next presidential cabinet in exchange for new elections and a lift of the ban on the SA (the NSDAP's paramilitary unit)—he was even offered a post in the cabinet—the new Reichstag issued a vote of no confidence in its very first session. Consequently, it was dissolved yet again.

The subsequent November elections delivered hope for the embattled democracy. For the first time since 1928, the NSDAP actually lost votes. Although the Nazis were still the largest faction in parliament, contemporary observers questioned Hitler's all-or-nothing strategy and saw the party in decline.

Ironically, just two months later General von Schleicher, Papen's successor as *Reichskanzler*, was forced to step down. Fearing a military coup under von Schleicher's leadership and urged by his group of advisors, President von Hindenburg named Hitler the new Chancellor on January 30, 1933.

With only two other Nazis being part of his cabinet, the old conservative elites believed they could control Hitler.<sup>10</sup> This assessment proved to be fatally wrong. Aided by the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended most civil liberties, and with the help of the police apparatus (which was under the control of Hermann Göring, then Prussian Minister of the Interior) the Nazis started to persecute political enemies within a month after Hitler took office.

Nevertheless, the NDSAP was unable to achieve an absolute majority in the Republic's

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<sup>8</sup>Others, however, disagree. They argue that Brüning had no other choice given the economic situation. See, e.g., Borchardt (1980) and Büttner (1989) for opposing views.

<sup>9</sup>Papen had originally been a member of the Zentrum, but was forced to leave the party when he accepted the chancellorship.

<sup>10</sup>Franz von Papen, who re-joined the cabinet as vice chancellor, even proclaimed: "Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far in the corner that he'll squeak" (quoted in Fest 1973).

last election of March 1933. While many KPD and SPD candidates had been imprisoned or had fled the country, voters could still choose from all major parties and cast their ballots in secret.<sup>11</sup> Together, Communists and Social Democrats received more than 30% of votes. Yet, with 43.9%, the Nazi Party was by far the largest faction in parliament. On March 23, 1933, the newly constituted Reichstag sealed the end of the Republic by passing the Enabling Act.

Although the Nazis were backed by almost half of the electorate, historians often highlight the role of elites in the failure of Germany's first democracy (see, e.g., Büttner 2008; Fest 1973; Kolb 1984; Schulze 1983). Due to the precarious situation during the Republic's founding, the "old elites," i.e. landed nobility (*Junker*), the army's officer corps, industrial tycoons, judges, high-ranking bureaucrats, etc., were generally allowed to remain in their positions of power. This led to a remarkable continuity between the old Empire and the new Republic (Büttner 2008), and cemented pre-existing cleavages (Lepsius 1966; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Mommsen (1989) emphasizes the broad anti-republican consensus within the old elites, and Fest (1973) argues that Hitler would have never been appointed Chancellor had it not been for von Hindenburg's advisors and the support of government officials, army officers, as well as members of the nationalistic bourgeoisie.<sup>12</sup>

However, not every group of elites actively supported the Nazis. Despite a waging internal debate about the perceived merits of National Socialism, the Protestant Church remained officially neutral (Scholder 1977). That is, according to guidelines of its member-churches, priests were to remain politically uninvolved.<sup>13</sup>

The Catholic Church went even further. Alerted by the NSDAP's success in the September elections of 1930, the German bishops took an explicit anti-Nazi stand. 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 (cf. Müller 1963).

In the eyes of the Catholic Church, the NSDAP was not only an ideological opponent, but also a threat to its political influence, which had been secured through the Zentrum Party ever since the end of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* (Fandel 2002; Morsey 1988). According to Deuerlein (1963), nobody of public standing opposed the Nazis more than the Catholic Church and its dignitaries.

There exists, indeed, ample anecdotal evidence to support this assertion. E.g., in the small village of Waldsee the local priest is said to have warned parishioners that "who votes for

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<sup>11</sup>Irregularities in vote counts, etc. are believed to have been minor (see Bracher et al. 1960).

<sup>12</sup>Ferguson and Voth (2008) show that a significant proportion of Germany's largest firms had substantial links to the NSDAP and that they experienced large abnormal returns after Hitler took power.

<sup>13</sup>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 priest was drowned out by the 'Sieg Heil' of the brown formations" (Scholder 1977, p. 182).

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). In fact, many parish priests went above and beyond the orders of their bishops. Kißener (2009), for instance, mentions a Sunday sermon entitled “Heil Christ, not Heil Hitler!” during which the priest chastised parishioners for supporting the NSDAP in the previous election. In short, “in the Catholic milieu [...] supporters of National Socialism paid for their political beliefs with social ostracism” (Fandel 2002, p. 306).

For the Catholic Church such practices were hardly new. Since at least 1921 it had been actively discouraging believers from supporting various leftist groups, such as the communist KPD (Scholder 1977). And even before the founding of the Weimar Republic, the Church had traditionally used its influence to sway Catholics to vote for the Zentrum. Anderson (2000), for instance, notes that during the *Kaiserreich* “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 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, at the very moment of reminding them what “conscience” required of every good Catholic (Anderson 2000, p. 132).

Although the Catholic Church and its dignitaries had been vigilant in resisting the Nazis until the very last election in 1933, their resistance crumbled 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; see also Gruber 2005). 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).

Some historians argue that the German episcopacy reversed its position to clear the way for the concordat between the Holy See and Third Reich, which was reached only four months later (e.g., Bracher 1956; Scholder 1977). Others, such as Becker 1968 or Stickler 2009, deny such a connection. They argue that Hitler’s mere promise to respect Catholics’ freedom of religion and to guarantee the continued existence of Catholic schools sufficed for the Church to back down. Somewhat less controversial is Kershaw’s (1985) assertion that, as an institution, neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church offered any meaningful resistance during the Third Reich.

## 2.2. *Related Literature*

As noted in the introduction, there exists a vast literature examining the correlates of Nazi support (e.g., Brown 1982; Childers 1983; Falter 1991; Hamilton 1982; King et al. 2008; among many others). Although most of the literature is concerned with the effect of class divisions and the worsening economic situation, we are by no means the first to point out the relationship between NSDAP vote shares and religion (see, for instance, von Kuehnelt-Leddhin 1952, or Lipset 1963). Even contemporary observers had been aware of the fact that the Nazis gained more votes in predominantly Protestant regions (see the sources cited in Fandel 2002, or in Childers 1983).<sup>14</sup>

In the seminal account of elections during the Weimar Republic, Falter (1991) calculates that, until 1933, Protestants were about twice as likely to vote for the Nazi Party as Catholics—a difference borne out in various subsamples of the data. Although he argues for a genuine effect of religion, Falter (1991) acknowledges that simple correlations (without standard errors) are insufficient to establish such a claim. In fact, he states that the assumptions required for his estimates to have a causal interpretation are “in many cases unrealistic” (Falter 1991, p. 443).

It may thus not be surprising that King et al. (2008) lament the lack of modern econometric methods that have been brought to bear on the problem. With the exception of Adena et al.’s (2013) analysis of the impact of radio propaganda, and Voigtländer and Voth (2012) and Satyanath et al. (2013), who respectively study the role of historically rooted anti-Semitism and social capital, the existing quantitative evidence on the determinants of Nazi support remains purely correlational.

The resulting uncertainty about the effect of religion is reflected in different explanations for the patterns in Figure 2. Some attribute Catholics’ apparent resistance to a distinctively Catholic milieu with a close-knit network of clubs, unions, and other civic organizations (e.g., Burnham 1972; Falter 1991; Heilbronner 1998; Kuropka 2012; Lepsius 1966). Others emphasize the importance of observational differences between Protestants and Catholics. Brown (1982), for instance, shows that Nazis gained strong support from the Catholic petty bourgeoisie, but not from Catholic peasants. In the most sophisticated study to date, King et al. (2008) suggest that the correlation between religion and Nazi vote shares is entirely spurious. More precisely, King et al. (2008) argue that Protestants and Catholics simply had divergent economic interests, and the relative weakness of the NSDAP in predominantly Catholic areas is attributable to its inability to appeal to farmers.

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<sup>14</sup>This cannot be explained by the NSDAP’s campaign strategy. Childers (1983) reports that the Nazis tried extraordinarily hard to win over Catholics and that they were determined to weaken the Zentrum’s hold on its traditional constituents.

Interestingly, neither of these explanations is in line with what Hitler himself believed. According to Hitler, the NSDAP would only be able to “win over supporters of the Zentrum [...], if the curia abandoned it” (quoted in Scholder 1977, p. 304).

### 3. A First Look at the Data

#### 3.1. *Data Description and Summary Statistics*

In order to shed light on the true role of religion and that of the Catholic Church, we rely 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 *Statistische Reichsamt*, and are, for most election years, available at the county- as well as the municipality-level (see Hänisch 1988 or the Data Appendix to this paper for details). Unfortunately, the *Statistische 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 empirical analysis is conducted at the county-level.<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise noted, we restrict attention to the 982 counties with non-missing information on religious composition and election results in November 1932.<sup>16</sup> Where appropriate we supplement our main analysis with municipality level results for the 1930 and 1933 parliamentary elections. Reassuringly, our results are robust to the choice of aggregation and election year.

Table 2A displays NSDAP vote shares over the course of the Weimar Republic. Note well, the numbers therein do not match the official election results in Figure 1. In order to avoid issues of endogenous turnout all vote shares throughout the remainder of the analysis are calculated as percentage of the entire voting eligible population, whereas those in Figure 1 refer only to valid votes. It is also worth pointing out that in 1924 the NSDAP did not run under its own name, but together with other right-wing parties. Notwithstanding this caveat, the raw data reveal only small initial differences between majoritarian Catholic and predominantly Protestant counties. Between 1928 and 1930, however, these differences amplify until they reach about 13.6 percentage points in 1932. Given an overall NSDAP vote share of 26.4%, it appears that Catholics were much more resistant to the allure of the Nazis than Protestants.

At the same time, the descriptive statistics in Table 2B demonstrate that majoritarian Catholic counties differ from their Protestant counterparts along several important dimen-

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<sup>15</sup>The March elections of 1933 are generally regarded as “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).

<sup>16</sup>We lose three observations due to missing data on their religious composition.

sions.<sup>17</sup> For instance, predominantly Catholic counties are more rural and employ a much larger fraction of the work force in agriculture. Moreover, they are more likely to be located in the south of the Weimar Republic, and further away from sea ports as well as major cities such as Berlin. Thus, any argument linking Nazi vote shares to the religious composition of the electorate (and ultimately the Catholic Church) must, at the very least, be based on an empirical strategy that carefully controls for all observable differences.

### 3.2. *Partial Correlations and Bounds on the Causal Effect of Religion*

To determine whether religion remains correlated with Nazi vote shares, even after controlling for 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  $c$ ,  $\text{Catholic}_c$  measures the share of Catholics,  $X_c$  is a comprehensive vector of controls, and  $\mu_d$  marks an electoral district fixed effect.

For comparison, in 1932 the Weimar Republic was roughly the same size as the current state of California. It was subdivided into almost a thousand counties, which partition its 35 electoral districts. Thus, by including electoral district fixed effects we account nonparametrically for all factors which were approximately constant within these relatively small regions.

Table 3 presents results from estimating equation (1) by weighted least squares, with weights corresponding to counties' population. To allow for arbitrary forms of correlation in the residuals of nearby counties, standard errors are clustered by electoral district. Moving from the left to the right of the table, the set of included controls grows steadily.

The first column of Table 3 shows that Catholicism and electoral support for the NSDAP are strongly negatively correlated—just as one would expect based on Figure 2. Surprisingly, by itself, counties' share of Catholics accounts for slightly more than 40% of the variation in Nazi votes shares.

The next columns add covariates related to various demographic characteristics, economic conditions as proxied by unemployment rates, as well as detailed controls for the composition of the work force. The latter are intended to not only account for the well-known differences in the voting behavior of certain groups, like farmers or factory workers, but also to control

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<sup>17</sup>To show that religiously homogenous counties are fairly common, Appendix Figure A.1 presents a kernel density estimate of the distribution of Catholics across counties.

for potential heterogeneity in the impact of the economic crisis (beyond what is already captured by unemployment rates). Column (6) also controls for geographical differences, such as latitude, longitude, distance to the nearest major city, etc. (see Table 2B for a complete list), and column (7) adds electoral district fixed effects.

Interestingly, voters in areas with a larger Jewish population seem to have been more likely to support the NSDAP. Although the respective point estimates are large in economic terms, they are estimated imprecisely due to the very limited range of the independent variable. As suggested by much anecdotal evidence, factory workers and artisans are estimated to have been 5 to 14 percentage points less likely to vote for the NSDAP than their counterparts in agriculture (the omitted category). But again, large standard errors hamper our ability to draw sharp conclusions.

Despite stark observational differences between predominantly Catholic and Protestant counties, the partial correlation between religion and NSDAP vote shares does *not* decline with the inclusion of additional controls. In fact, the opposite appears to be true.

In our most inclusive specification Catholics are estimated to be about 29 percentage points less likely to vote for the Nazis than Protestants. Not only is the point estimate statistically highly significant, but given an overall NSDAP vote share of 26.42% in November of 1932 (cf. Table 2A) it is economically very large.

Although the estimates in Table 3 control for more potential confounds than any other estimates in the literature, they are purely correlational and do not have a causal interpretation. However, given different assumptions on the severity of omitted variables bias, one can derive bounds on the causal effect of religion.

Building on Murphy and Topel (1990) and Altonji et al. (2005), Oster (2013) shows how to bound the true causal effect based on the sensitivity of the point estimates to adding additional controls coupled with movements in the  $R^2$ . More precisely, let  $W_c$  be the vector of all *unobserved* covariates which explain Nazi vote shares on the county level, and define  $\psi \equiv \frac{\text{Cov}(\text{Catholic}_c, W_c)}{\text{Cov}(\text{Catholic}_c, X_c)}$ , where  $X_c$  and  $W_c$  have been scaled to have variance one.<sup>18</sup> Intuitively,  $\psi$  parameterizes how correlated unobserved covariates are with counties' religious composition, relative to the controls that are included in the regression. Given the point estimates and the  $R^2$  both before and after adding covariates, Oster (2013) provides formulas to calculate the omitted variables bias for any given value of  $\psi$ . Thus, as long as the true degree of correlation is smaller than  $\psi$ , the causal effect of religion must lie between the original estimate and the one corrected for potential omitted variables bias.

Figure 4 depicts the results. The shaded region therein corresponds to the identified set for different values of  $\psi$ . Due to the high  $R^2$  in our original regressions, the bounds on the

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<sup>18</sup>Note that if  $W_c$  was observed, then equation (1) would become  $v_c = \mu_d + \beta \text{Catholic}_c + X_c' \theta + W_c' \omega$ .

true  $\beta$  are fairly tight. In particular, if observables are at least as important for NSDAP vote shares as unobservables, i.e. if  $\psi$  lies between  $-1$  and  $1$ , then we can rule out that omitted variable bias is of first-order importance.

Note that if one were to choose covariates randomly, then one would expect  $\psi$  to equal one, whereas it should lie on the unit interval if the “most important” controls are included first. For the identified set to include zero, one would have to allow for  $\psi < -4.49$ . That is, unobserved factors would have to be systematically “different” *and* more than four times as “important” as those for which we already control. We believe that this is unlikely.

Taking the bounds in Figure 4 at face value, our results suggest that, all else equal, Protestants were *at least* two and a half times more likely to vote for the Nazis than Catholics.<sup>19</sup> Thus, to fully comprehend Adolf Hitler’s rise to power one must understand the role of religion and that of the Catholic Church.

#### 4. Estimating the Causal Effect of Religion

Naturally, this requires more precise estimates of the causal effect of religion. We, therefore, pursue an instrumental variables strategy based on the historical determinants of the geographic distribution of Catholics and Protestants. We then use Bayesian methods developed by Conley et al. (2012) to assess the sensitivity of our conclusions with respect to violations of the exclusion restriction.<sup>20</sup>

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

As explained in the introduction, our empirical approach uses princes’ choices of whether to adopt Protestantism in the aftermath of 1555 as an instrumental variable for the religion of Germans living in the same areas during the Weimar Republic. The comparison of Figures 2 and 3 suggests that both are strongly correlated. Here, we briefly review the historical causes for this pattern.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the German Lands were fragmented into several hundred independent (secular and ecclesiastical) territories and free Imperial Cities.

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<sup>19</sup>See Section 5 for details on how to calculate relative vote propensities.

<sup>20</sup>In Appendix A we present evidence from an alternative instrumental variables strategy. The results rely on the instrument proposed by Becker and Woessmann (2009), i.e. distance to the city of Wittenberg—the origin of the Reformation movement. Since distance to Wittenberg is highly colinear with our other geographical covariates and since it explains very little residual variation in counties religious’ composition after accounting for territorial lords’ choices (meaning that it is a weak instrument), we do not use it in the main part of our analysis. Nevertheless, the results from this alternative instrumental variables approach support our findings.

<sup>21</sup>The following summary borrows heavily from Spenkuch (2011), who first used this instrument to study religious differences in labor market outcomes.



Although formally governed by an emperor, political power within the Holy Roman Empire lay, for the most part, with its territorial lords.

Despite widespread discontent about matters of church organization and abuses of power by the clergy, 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 movement. 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 opportunity to proceed with church reform in their state. As a devout Catholic, Emperor Charles V, however, was determined to defend the (old) Church. Yet, his attempts to undo the Reformation resulted only in the Schmalkaldic War.

Ending more than two decades of religious conflict, 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.<sup>22</sup> 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*).

According to Scribner and Dixon (2003) only about 10% of the population ever showed a lasting interest in the ideas of the Reformation, but as much as 80% adhered to a Protestant faith at the end of the sixteenth century. Therefore, most conversions must have occurred involuntarily. There exists, indeed, ample evidence that, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *ius reformandi* was often strictly enforced.<sup>23</sup> 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 argue that rulers’ choice of religion depended on multiple factors. Most lords

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<sup>22</sup>In contrast to the Lutheran faith (*Confessio Augustana*), neither Calvinism nor Anabaptism was protected under the Peace of Augsburg. Nevertheless, a non-negligible number of territories underwent a Second Reformation, in which Calvinism became the official religion.

<sup>23</sup>For instance, “heretics,” i.e. those who did not adhere to the official state religion, faced the death penalty in the Duchy of Upper Saxony (Lutz 1997).

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). On the one hand, any converted territory had to fear losing the Emperor’s support or drawing hostility from neighboring states. On the other hand, rulers also stood to gain from introducing the Reformation, as it allowed them to assert their independence and to take possession of church property.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

Cantoni (2012) and Rubin (2014) provide otherwise rare empirical evidence on rulers’ choices and the spread of the Reformation. Cantoni (2012) reports 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. Rubin (2014) shows that cities which had a printing press in 1500 were subsequently more likely to adopt Protestantism, presumably because printing facilitated the spread of information.

Although individuals were formally free to choose their own faith after 1648, most territories of the Holy Roman Empire remained religiously uniform until the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* in 1803.<sup>26</sup> This piece of legislation enacted the secularization of ecclesiastical territories and the mediatisation of small secular principalities. That is, ecclesiastical territories, Imperial Cities, and other small entities were annexed by neighboring states, thereby reducing the number of independent territories from over a thousand to forty-eight Imperial Cities and slightly more than thirty religiously mixed states (Nowak 1995). On a local level, however, most areas remained religiously homogenous until the mass migrations associated with Word War II.

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<sup>24</sup>Formally a reformed lord was head of the Protestant Church in his state. Of course, this did not apply to Catholic rulers, who nevertheless often behaved “like popes in their lands” (Dixon 2002, p. 117).

<sup>25</sup>For instance, testing the *reservatum ecclesiasticum*, Archbishop Gebhard Truchseß von Waldburg converted to the Lutheran faith in order to be allowed to marry a Protestant canoness. He thereby started the Cologne War (1582/83).

<sup>26</sup>Ending the Thirty Years’ War, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) also ended princes’ right to determine the religion of their subjects—although the *ius reformandi* remained formally in place. A territory’s official Church was guaranteed the right to publicly celebrate mass etc. (*exercitium publicum religionis*), but individuals were allowed to choose and privately practice another faith (*devotio domestica*). In contrast to the Peace of Augsburg, the Peace of Westphalia did not only protect the Catholic and Lutheran denominations, but also Calvinists. Regarding disputes, the peace treaty stipulated the “normal year” 1624. That is, territories should remain with the side that controlled them in January 1624.

In creating a mapping between counties at the end of the Weimar Republic and the religion of the princes who reigned over the corresponding areas in the aftermath of the Peace of Augsburg, this paper relies on several historical accounts, in particular the regional histories by Schindling and Ziegler (1992a,b, 1993a,b, 1995, 1996), which contain the most detailed available information on the territories of the Holy Roman Empire for the period from 1500 to 1650.

The mapping created with this information is based on the religious situation around 1624—the “normal year” set in the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>27</sup> 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 (Dixon 2002). The primary mapping, therefore, abstracts from differences between reformed denominations, and differentiates only between Protestant and Catholic territories.

Only in a few instances does the area of a county correspond exactly to that of some state at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Whenever Catholic and Protestant princes reigned over different parts of a county’s area, or whenever that 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.”<sup>28</sup> Appendix B provides additional detail regarding the construction of the mapping.

#### 4.2. *First Stage and Reduced Form Results*

Table 4 demonstrates that rulers’ choices are indeed heavily correlated with the religion of Germans living in the same areas over 300 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 when the Nazis took power, *Historically*

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<sup>27</sup>Since territories’ official religions were not constant in the aftermath of the Peace of Augsburg, there exists the possibility that the results depend on the choice of base year. To rule this out, a second mapping based on the situation directly after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 has been created. Both mappings are fairly similar, but the situation in 1624 is a slightly better predictor of the geographic distribution of Protestants and Catholics about 300 years later.

<sup>28</sup>This is the case for 10.1% of counties. Our results are robust to classifying these counties as either Protestant or Catholic.

$Catholic_c$  and  $Historically\ Mixed_c$  are indicator variables for whether  $c$  is classified as “historically Catholic” or “mixed,” and  $X_c$  marks a comprehensive vector of controls, including the factors which Cantoni (2012) and Rubin (2014) have shown to be correlated with the spread of the Reformation movement. As before, we also add electoral district fixed effects,  $\kappa_d$ .

Although the point estimates do decline with the inclusion of additional controls, especially latitude and electoral district fixed effects, they remain economically large and statistically highly significant. Conditioning on the electoral district, we estimate that the share of Catholics is almost 43 percentage points higher in counties governed by a Catholic ruler than in those governed by a Protestant one. Similarly, historically mixed counties have a 22 percentage higher share of Catholics.

Since rulers’ choices introduce variation in the religion of Germans during the Weimar Republic, one would also expect their choices to be correlated with Nazi vote shares if Catholicism were, indeed, to have a causal effect. Table 5 explores this issue by estimating the reduced form relationship:

$$(3) \quad v_c = \pi_d + \rho_0 \text{Historically Catholic}_c + \rho_1 \text{Historically Mixed}_c + X_c' \vartheta + \varsigma_c.$$

According to the reduced form point estimates, the NSDAP received between 11.7 and 16.7 percentage points fewer votes in November of 1932 if the lord who ruled over a county’s area at the end of the sixteenth century chose to remain Catholic. By the same token, historically mixed counties are estimated to have 5.6 to 8.1 percentage points lower Nazi vote shares.

One possible explanation for the findings in Table 5 is that historically Protestant territories differ systematically from historically Catholic ones, above and beyond the factors for which we already control. For instance, the former might have developed a different set of institutions, or developed a culture particularly receptive to the message of the NSDAP. In such a case, the reduced form estimates might be driven by *unobserved* differences.

However, the explanatory power of this argument appears a priori limited. At least since the creation of a unified German Empire in 1871, possibly even since the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* in 1803, did formal institutions converge between traditionally Protestant and Catholic areas. Moreover, Cantoni (2010) reports that there is no evidence for divergence between Protestant and Catholic cities.

Also, to the extent that institutions and culture are common to counties within the same electoral district, one would expect estimates of the reduced form effect of religion to decline considerably with the inclusion of electoral district fixed effects. This is not the case. In fact, estimates that condition on the electoral district are statistically indistinguishable from

those that do not.

### 4.3. *Instrumental Variables Estimates*

The preceding discussion established a relationship between princes' choices in the aftermath of the Peace of Augsburg and the religion of Germans during the Weimar Republic, as well as a correlation between princes' religion and NSDAP vote shares. It also appears that observable county characteristics cannot explain the reduced form results. Taken together, these findings point to a causal effect of religion. In what follows, this effect is examined more rigorously using the religion of a territorial lord as an instrumental variable (IV) for counties' religious composition at the end of the Weimar Republic.

For territories' official religion in the aftermath of 1555 to be a valid instrument for that of Germans living in the corresponding areas more than 300 years later, it must be the case that princes' religion is uncorrelated with *unobserved* factors determining Nazi vote shares. Unfortunately, this assumption is fundamentally untestable. The arguments in Section 4.1, however, suggest that a territory's official religion stands a reasonable chance of satisfying the exogeneity assumption required for a valid instrument, especially after controlling for all variables known to have influenced rulers' choices.

If one accepts this assumption, then instrumental variable estimates are consistent and have a causal interpretation. The effect of Catholicism can then be estimated by two-stage least squares (2SLS), treating counties' religious composition as endogenous and the variables included in  $X_c$  as exogenous. That is, the estimating equation becomes

$$(4) \quad v_c = \mu_d + \beta \widehat{Catholic}_c + X_c' \theta + \varepsilon_c.$$

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

Results from our IV regressions are displayed in Table 6. As was the case for their OLS counterparts, the impact of religion is estimated quite precisely and is economically very large. Moreover, if anything, it grows with the inclusion of additional controls. Taken at face value, the 2SLS estimates suggest that in the last undoubtedly free election Catholics were 27.5 percentage points less likely to vote for the Nazis than Protestants. The results from our IV approach are, therefore, remarkably similar to the partial correlations reported in Table 3.

Of course, for the point estimates in Table 6 to identify the *causal effect* of Catholicism on Nazi vote shares it must be the case that  $\varepsilon_c$  is uncorrelated with  $\widehat{Catholic}_c$ . That is, princes' choice of religion must influence NSDAP vote shares only through the religion of

contemporary Germans. This is a fairly strong assumption, and it is not clear whether it is, in fact, exactly satisfied. We, therefore, use Bayesian methods developed by Conley et al. (2012) to assess the robustness of our results with respect to violations of the exclusion restriction.

Specifically, we consider the following econometric model:

$$(5) \quad v_c = \mu_d + \beta \text{Catholic}_c + X_c' \theta + \gamma_0 \text{Historically Catholic}_c + \gamma_1 \text{Historically Mixed}_c + \varepsilon_c.$$

Here, the vector  $\gamma = [\gamma_0, \gamma_1]$  parameterizes the extent to which the exclusion restriction is violated. If the exclusion restriction does, in fact, hold then  $\gamma_0 = \gamma_1 = 0$ .

Since  $\text{Catholic}_c$  is potentially endogenous,  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  cannot be separately identified. It is, however, possible to identify  $\beta$  and conduct inference conditional on specifying the *support* or the *distribution* of  $\gamma$  (see Conley et al. 2012).

Figure 5 displays the results. The upper panel depicts the estimated effect of Catholicism if one has no prior information on the sign or distribution of  $\gamma$ . As is apparent from the graph, without information on the direction of the direct effect of rulers' choices in the aftermath of 1555, one obtains identical point estimates as in the standard 2SLS setup. The confidence intervals, however, widen. The dotted line, labeled "Union", corresponds to the theoretical 95%-confidence interval when we only impose the restriction that the support of  $\gamma$  is equal to  $[-\delta, \delta] \times [-\delta, \delta]$ . Since Conley et al. (2012) show that the resulting confidence intervals are often too conservative (because they "overweight" highly unlikely cases, leading them to include the true causal effect more than 95% of the time), we also explore assumptions which rely on more prior information to produce ex ante correct coverage.

The dashed line depicts confidence intervals under the assumption that  $\gamma$  is distributed uniformly on the interval  $[-\delta, \delta] \times [-\delta, \delta]$ . That is,  $\delta$  still denotes the maximal allowable violation of the exclusion restriction, but the econometrician believes all scenarios to be equally likely. No matter how standard errors are ultimately calculated, as long as one is willing to rule out direct effects larger than 11–13 percentage points, one would still reject the null hypothesis of no causal effect of religion.

In the lower panel of Figure 5 we explore the more "damning" case of prior information that leads one to believe that rulers' choices themselves had a negative impact on NSDAP vote shares. More specifically, we impose the assumption that each element of  $\gamma$  is distributed uniformly on  $[-\delta, 0]$ , and plot the resulting estimate of  $\beta$  as well as the 90%- and 95%-confidence intervals. While the size of the point estimates declines as we allow for potentially larger violations of the exclusion restriction, they do remain economically meaningful for all values of  $\delta$  that we consider. Moreover, the figure shows that one would not reject the null

of no causal effect if one were only willing to rule out direct effects larger than about 13 percentage points.

To put this into perspective, 13 percentage points corresponds to about one half of all NSDAP supporters (among eligible voters) in the November elections of 1932, or (taking the point estimates in Table 3 at face value) to the estimated impact of moving almost the entire work force from agriculture into manufacturing, or to about three times the difference between urban and rural counties. Whatever the true direct impact of princes' choices in the sixteenth century on NSDAP vote shares may have been, we suspect that it was smaller than that.

Remarkably, the point estimate corresponding to the case of  $\delta = .13$  still implies that Protestants were almost twice as likely to vote for the NSDAP as Catholics. Thus, 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.

#### 4.4. *Additional Sensitivity and Robustness Checks*

In the remainder of this section we conduct ancillary sensitivity and robustness checks in order to demonstrate that our results do not depend on the choice of election, level of aggregation, or the inclusion of particular regions of the Weimar Republic.

Table 7 contains the first set of results. For each specification and each sample restriction we provide OLS point estimates based on equation (1) as well as 2SLS estimates based on our IV approach in equation (4). The top row contains the baseline estimates from Tables 3 and 6. As the numbers in the remaining rows demonstrate, our results are quite robust to the choice of regions included in the sample, the weighting scheme, whether we calculate vote shares as a fraction of all eligible voters or only relative to valid votes cast, whether we include even more detailed controls regarding the composition of the labor force and that of the unemployed, and to controlling for Voigtländer and Voth's (2012) proxy for historically rooted anti-Semitism, as well as the (endogenous) distribution of preferences over parties in 1920. We also show that the estimated effect remains essentially unchanged when we use the religious situation directly after the Peace of Augsburg as an instrument (as opposed to that at the eve of the Thirty Years' War). Moreover, our results are qualitatively and quantitatively similar if we replace the left-hand side variable with NSDAP vote shares in the (free) election of July 1932 or with those in the (only partially free) election of March 1933. Only when relying on Nazi votes shares in 1930 do we obtain significantly smaller point estimates. Note, however, that only 14.8% of eligible voters chose the NSDAP in 1930. Thus, the estimates remain economically very large.

Lastly, Table 8 shows that the results do 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 (upper panel) and 1930 (lower panel) instead—noting that only the latter was fully free. 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. That is, the rightmost column uses only variation across villages within the same county for identification.

To be able to pursue our instrumental variables strategy while using county fixed effects we have created an additional mapping that differentiates as much as possible between the religion of lords who ruled over municipalities within the same counties. Since counties in the Weimar Republic are, on average, fairly small—less than 190 square-miles or about the area of a square with 13.8 mile sides—and because there are fewer cases of princes with *different* religions controlling villages within the same county, this last specification is fairly demanding on the data (as evidenced by the low first stage F-statistic). Nevertheless, the results in Table 8 allow us to rule out that neither local idiosyncrasies nor differences in economic conditions between Protestant and Catholic regions are driving our conclusions.

## 5. Conformity and Alternative Explanations

The findings above suggest that Catholicism exerted a causal effect on NSDAP vote shares. They are silent, however, on *why* Catholics were so much more resistant to the allure of the Nazis than their Protestant counterparts.

In order to shed light on the causes of religious differences in Nazi support, we first provide evidence on which parties Catholics voted for instead. The results in Table 9 are based on our IV approach, i.e. equation (4), with the vote shares of other major parties serving as the dependent variable. With the resulting point estimates in hand, we can calculate vote shares by religion.

To illustrate the mechanics of the exercise, let  $v_p$  denote the national vote share of party  $p$ , while letting  $v_p^P$ ,  $v_p^C$ ,  $v_p^O$  be the respective counterparts among Protestants, Catholics, and “others.” Since vote shares have been calculated as fraction of all eligible voters, the following identity must always hold

$$(6) \quad v_p = s_P v_p^P + s_C v_p^C + (1 - s_P - s_C) v_p^O,$$

where  $s_P$  and  $s_C$  are the population shares of Protestants and Catholics, respectively. Note,  $v_p$ ,  $s_P$  and  $s_C$  are given in the raw data, and  $v_p^C = v_p^P + \hat{\beta}_{2SLS}$ . Thus, if  $v_p^O$  were known, vote shares of Catholics and Protestants would be exactly identified. As we do not have causal estimates of  $v_p^O$ , we report two related statistics. First, we report estimates for  $v_p^P$  and  $v_p^C$  assuming that  $v_p^O = v_p$ , i.e. that “others” voted in the same way as the national average.



Second, we provide bounds on  $v_p^P$  and  $v_p^C$  by letting  $v_p^O$  vary between 0 and 1. Given that the population share of “others” is only about 4%, these bounds are fairly tight. Even more important for our purposes, while the levels of  $v_p^P$  and  $v_p^C$  do vary with  $v_p^O$ , their *difference* will not.<sup>29</sup>

In line with much anecdotal evidence, our estimates imply that the electorate of the Zentrum was composed almost entirely of Catholics. Furthermore, until the very end of the Weimar Republic, the fraction of Catholics voting for the Zentrum remained at over 40%, down by some 10% from its peak in 1920. Compared to Catholics, Protestants were initially much more likely to vote for the SPD, DDP, DVP as well as the right-wing DNVP. But with the exception of the SPD, support for these parties dwindled dramatically after the onset of the World Economic Crisis and the ensuing radicalization of the electorate.

Interestingly, there are *no* religious differences in the far-left of the political spectrum—despite the Catholic Church’s persistent warnings about the dangers of Socialism. That is, Catholics and Protestants are estimated to have supported the communist KPD with equal probability.

With respect to the far-right, however, our results indicate meaningful differences between Protestants and Catholics as early as 1924, when Hitler was still imprisoned and the *völkisch* movement had scattered across different parties. Although the share of Nazi voters grew rapidly among both groups, Protestants were always at least two and a half—often three or four—times as likely to vote for the Nazis as their Catholic counterparts.<sup>30</sup>

The patterns in Table 9 give rise to the following three questions: (i) Why were Catholics so much more likely to vote for the Zentrum than for any other party? (ii) Why did Catholics remain relatively loyal to the Zentrum, while Protestants’ abandoned their traditional parties in much greater numbers and flocked toward the Nazis? (iii) Why were there important religious differences in Nazi vote shares—even very early on—but no differences in support for the Communists?

In this last part of the paper we argue that the influence of the Catholic Church and its dignitaries provides the most parsimonious answer to all of these questions. In support of this assertion, we present additional empirical evidence.

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<sup>29</sup>Strictly speaking, this holds only at interior solutions, i.e. when  $v_c^P$  and  $v_c^C$  lie within the unit interval. Due to the linearity assumptions underlying the 2SLS estimates, implied vote shares are sometimes slightly smaller than 0. In such cases we report  $\max\{v, 0\}$ .

<sup>30</sup>As noted by Falter (1991), religious differences in Nazi vote shares decline in March of 1933. As these elections were not fully free, we are hesitant to interpret too much into the narrowing of the gap.

### 5.1. *Conformity and the Influence of the Church*

To structure the discussion we develop a simple model of voting decisions in the face of pressure by the Church. Building on formal theories of conformity (e.g., Akerlof 1980 and Bernheim 1994), we assume that there exists a social norm among Catholics (i.e. what it means to a “good Catholic”) that is dictated by the prescriptions of the Church and its dignitaries. By contrast, Protestants act solely based on their own preferences—consistent with the Protestant Church not taking an official stand.

More specifically, let  $P = \{A, B, C, D, E, Z\}$  denote the set of political parties, with their positions on the political spectrum given by the respective lower case letters. All voters care about parties’ positions relative to their own continuously distributed bliss points  $t$ , i.e. their type. Catholics and Protestants share the same distribution of types, but the former also worry about adhering to the prescriptions set forth by the Church. That is, Protestants derive utility  $g(x - t)$  from choosing party  $X$ , while that of Catholics is given by

$$(7) \quad g(x - t) - \lambda 1[X \neq Z]$$

The function  $g(\cdot)$  is continuously differentiable, strictly concave, and symmetric around its maximum at 0. The key assumption is that Catholics suffer a penalty  $\lambda > 0$  from supporting a party other than  $Z$ , the Zentrum.

Bernheim (1994) provides a model of conformity in which such norms arise endogenously because individuals care about how they are perceived by others. Here, we assume that the Church is able to dictate the norm, i.e. it is exogenously given, but note that similar conclusions would follow from more a general setup. Since the Zentrum was perceived as the political arm of the Catholic Church and targeted its messages towards Catholic voters, we also assume that Protestants do not consider voting for it—consistent with the evidence in Table 9.<sup>31</sup>

When it comes to the remaining parties, Protestants choose whichever one is positioned closest to their personal bliss point. Catholics, however, must tradeoff political congruence with social stigma or “punishment” by the Church. Thus, as long as  $\lambda$  is strictly positive, some Catholics will vote for the Zentrum despite the fact that another party is politically closer to their own ideal point. That is, the set of types who will find it optimal to vote

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<sup>31</sup>It is straightforward to micro-found this assumption, while retaining the qualitative predictions of the model. For instance, with parties located sufficiently close to the Zentrum on either side of the political spectrum, very few Protestants would vote for  $Z$ , while Catholics would continue to prefer the Zentrum. Alternatively, Protestants might suffer a penalty,  $\tau$ , from indirectly supporting the goals of the Catholic Church. That is, their utility function could be written as  $g(x - t) - \tau 1[X = Z]$ . If  $\tau$  is large enough, no Protestant votes for the Zentrum. Since it is not the goal of this section to explain the lack of Protestant support for the Zentrum, we abstract from these possibilities.

for the Zentrum is a strict superset of those who would do so in the absence of pressure by the Church. To see this, consider a voter who is equidistant from parties  $D$  and  $Z$ , i.e.  $|d - t| = |z - t|$ . Since  $\lambda > 0$ , such a voter will end up supporting  $Z$ . Continuity and strict concavity of  $g(\cdot)$  then imply that the set of types who vote for  $Z$  is strictly increasing in  $\lambda$ . Thus, if the social norm set forth by the Church is sufficiently important relative to agents' own preferences, then the model above is able to explain why Catholics overwhelmingly favored the Zentrum.

More importantly, the model is able to rationalize why there were always religious differences in support of right-wing parties, but not the communist KPD. Consider the upper panels of Figure 6, which depict the model's predictions for the case of  $g = -(x - t)^2$ ,  $x, t \in [0, 1]$ , and  $\lambda = .09$ . Although there are no religious differences in the distribution of types, Catholics are initially less likely to vote for  $E$ , the party on the far-right; but they are equally likely to vote for party  $A$ , which is located at the opposite extreme of the spectrum.<sup>32</sup> The key to this asymmetry is that the Zentrum was—despite its name—located to the right of the political middle (see, e.g., Mommsen 1989, or Anderson 2000). Thus, for intermediate levels of  $\lambda$ , some “right-wing types” will adhere to the norm and support the Zentrum, but the influence of the Church won't be enough to force “left-wing types” (who are further away from  $Z$ ) to conform. These types will vote for whichever party is closest to them, regardless of whether they are Catholic or Protestant.

Clearly, the exact locations of the cutoff points depend on parties' positions as well as the specifics of the parameterization, but it is straightforward to verify that this prediction continues to go through as long as  $\lambda$  is large but not too large relative to  $g(\cdot)$ , and as long as the Zentrum is located to the right of the actual center.

As shown in the lower panels of Figure 6, our conformity theory is also able to rationalize why Protestants flocked toward the Nazis (and to a lesser extent the Communists), while Catholics remained relatively loyal to the Zentrum. Following much anecdotal evidence, we model the World Economic Crisis and the ensuing radicalization of the electorate as bifurcation of voters' preferences relative to the positions of parties.<sup>33</sup> This produces an increase of extremist parties' vote shares amongst Protestants *and* Catholics, but the continued pressure of the Church limits the latter.

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<sup>32</sup>Note that for large enough values of  $\lambda$ , Catholics will not vote for any party located close to the Zentrum, i.e.  $C$  and  $D$ . To explain the strictly positive vote shares of the DVP and DNVP, even among Catholics, it suffices to augment individuals' utility functions with an idiosyncratic, party specific random shock.

<sup>33</sup>To achieve an increase in the vote share of extremist parties one could also hold the distribution of preferences fixed while letting parties' positions move closer together. Since parties' positions are only defined relative to the distribution of types, both assumptions are isomorphic. The historical record, however, suggests that voters radicalized much more than parties, most of which moved somewhat to the right (see, e.g., Childers 1983).

Thus, for intermediate values of  $\lambda$ , our model predicts a greater increase in NSDAP vote shares among Protestants than among Catholics, but no religious differences in the growth of the left-wing KPD—despite the Church’s strong anti-communist stand. The model’s predictions are, therefore, in line with the results in Table 9.

Another a priori plausible rationalization of the findings above might be that Catholics and Protestants differed in the distribution of preferences and that the Zentrum party was somehow better than other parties at catering to their core constituencies. While simple, such an explanation has trouble rationalizing some of the results we present next.

In Table 10 we test our conformity theory by presenting empirical evidence on the model’s comparative statics. That is, we split our data according to different proxies for  $\lambda$ , the parameter that governs the influence of the Church, and estimate religious differences in NSDAP vote shares for each of the samples. If our theory is correct, we expect to see smaller differences in settings in which the Church and its dignitaries yielded less influence over Catholics.

For instance, one might think that the word of the Church carries more weight in rural villages where the local priest knows all of his parishioners personally (and is able to monitor their political activities) than in urban, more anonymous settings. Consistent with the predictions of our theory, we estimate that in the November election of 1932 the religious difference in NSDAP vote shares was about 10–14 percentage smaller in cities than in rural environments.

One might also expect that the Church’s official political position was less credible and, therefore, less influential when it was directly contradicted by a local priest who openly sympathized with the Nazis. We test this prediction using data on Catholic priests who are known to have collaborated with the Nazis.

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. We digitize this information and say that a given village had a “brown priest” if one of the priests named in Spicer (2008) resided within a 10 kilometer radius. Using municipality level election results for 1933, we find that the religious *difference* in NSDAP vote shares were at least 10 percentage points smaller in villages where the local priest openly sympathized with the Nazis.<sup>34</sup> Since the data are unlikely to contain every single priest who spoke out in favor of the NSDAP, our estimates are likely to *understate* the true discrepancy.

Note that the preceding results cannot be readily explained by differences in the distrib-

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<sup>34</sup>We obtain qualitatively similar results when using alternative radii, or when we focus on the 1930 election instead.

ution of types across cities and rural villages, or across municipalities with and without a “brown priest.” In the absence of pressure by the Catholic Church, shifts in the distribution of preferences should have a similar effect on NSDAP vote shares among Protestants and Catholics. Our results, however, show that the *difference* between the two varies with proxies for the influence of the Church.

The final piece of evidence comes from the *Reichstag* elections in 1920, when the NSDAP still had only a few hundred members and was little more than a niche party in the Bavarian capital of Munich. Following the practices of statisticians during the German Empire (e.g., Stolle 1893, among others), we calculate for each county the fraction of Catholics voting for the Zentrum as the total number of Zentrum votes divided by the number of voting eligible Catholics. We then divide our sample into quartiles.<sup>35</sup> Applying the model above to the November elections in 1932 one would expect to see no differences between Protestants and Catholics in areas in which the latter paid initially little attention to the positions of the Church, i.e. in the lowest quartile. By contrast, there should be very large differences wherever Catholics did conform, i.e. in the upper quartiles. These predictions conform exactly to the findings in the bottom half of Table 10. Although point estimates for the “nonconformist” group of counties are not very precise, we can nevertheless rule out equality of coefficients at the 1%-confidence level. The predictions of our theory are, therefore, consistent with these additional results.

Of course, the last piece of evidence can be equally well explained by the Zentrum being more adept at retaining its initial followers than other parties. However, any theory focused on the actions of the Zentrum (as opposed to those of the Catholic Church and its dignitaries) would not only have to explain why the Zentrum was more successful at preventing defection to the NSDAP than to the left-wing KPD, but it also runs into problems when it comes to rationalizing why religious differences in Nazi support were larger in rural villages than in urban environments, and why the political leanings of the local priest should have had any effect on parishioners’ votes.

## 5.2. *Testing Alternative Explanations*

*Peer Effects, Culture, and the Catholic Milieu* Perhaps the most common explanation put forth by scholars arguing for a causal effect of religion is that Catholics lived in a culturally distinct environment, the Catholic milieu, which made them less susceptible to the messages of political extremists (see, e.g., Burnham 1972; Falter 1991; Kuroopka 2012; Lepsius 1966).

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<sup>35</sup>The share of Catholics varies widely within these subsamples. For instance, Catholics make up between .4 and 99.8 percent of the population in the lowest quartiles, while their share ranges from .3 to 99.5 percent in the highest one.

While it was undoubtedly true that life in predominantly Catholic regions was very different from that in majoritarian Protestant ones, we question this explanation for three reasons.

First, given that the Catholic milieu is usually described as anti-Nazi *and* anti-Communist, it cannot rationalize why there were no religious differences in support for the communist KPD, while there were large differences on the opposite end of the political spectrum.

Second, if social milieus were responsible for Catholics’ relative immunity to the Nazis, then the point estimates in Table 8 should decline markedly with the inclusion of county fixed effects. After all, cultural differences were almost certainly smaller within than across counties (which on average were no larger than a 14 by 14 mile square). Yet, our point estimates remain quite stable.

One way to rectify this finding with an explanation based on different milieus would be to argue that there are large cultural disparities even within counties. For instance, as long as there is some critical mass, Catholics might be able to socialize mainly with other Catholics, and it could be those “peer effects” that create a micro-milieu which shields them from the allure of the Nazis. In order to subject the milieu theory to a more rigorous test, we allow for nonlinearities in the effect of religion on NSDAP vote shares by estimating semi-parametric versions of our baseline model in equation (1). More specifically, we estimate the following econometric model:

$$(8) \quad v_c = \mu_d + f(\text{Catholic}_c) + X'_c\theta + \varepsilon_c.$$

By construction, the impact of religion, i.e. the analogue to  $\beta$  in equation (1), is now given by the *slope* of  $f(\cdot)$ , which we only restrict to be continuous. If social milieus or “peer effects” really mattered for Catholics’ voting decisions, then compared to “mixed” social environments the gap between Protestants and Catholics should be much wider when the latter constitute the clear majority. That is, the relationship between Nazi vote shares and a constituencies’ religious composition should be nonlinear.

Figure 7 shows that this is not the case. The upper two panels are based on county level data for the elections in November 1932 (left) and those in March 1933 (right). The lower panels use municipality level data for 1933 instead, with the one on the right excluding all villages and towns with more than two thousand inhabitants. Although estimates of  $f(\cdot)$  are reasonably precise, one cannot reject the null hypothesis of a linear relationship in any of the four plots. There, therefore, is no evidence to conclude that religious differences in Nazi vote shares varied according to the social milieu.<sup>36</sup>

Viewed through the lense of a Berheim-type conformity model, it appears that the impor-

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<sup>36</sup>OLS estimates that allow for  $\beta$  to vary with the religious composition of the electorate support this assertion. That is, it is generally not possible to reject the null hypothesis of a constant effect.

tance of the “norm”, i.e.  $\lambda$ , does not vary with the religious composition of the population. This finding is incompatible with an explanation emphasizing social milieu, but it does not contradict our theory of elite influence—at least if one believes that the Catholic Church had ways to enforce its proscriptions even in “mixed” and predominantly Protestant areas.

Our third reason for dismissing explanations that hinge on social milieu is based on the results of Satyanath et al. (2013). Contrary to the claims of Heilbrunner (1998) and others who emphasize the importance of close-knit social clubs and similar civic entities in immunizing Catholics against the allure of the Nazis, Satyanath et al. (2013) show that the NSDAP received *higher* votes shares in cities with more social capital, i.e. more of these organizations.

*Luther, the Kulturkampf, and Obedience to Worldly Authority* Some early scholars, e.g. von Kuehnelt-Leddin (1952), speculate that Hitler had greater appeal to Protestants because the Protestant Church had been traditionally very close to German rulers (as in the epithet *Thron und Altar*). After all, in an attempt to make the Reformation more palatable to princes, Martin Luther had taught obedience to secular rule—even if it was unjust—whereas the Catholic Church was highly dismissive of worldly powers. Others have argued that Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* with its persecutions of Church officials sensitized Catholics to the dangers of authoritarian regimes, and that it made them wary of the Hitler movement very early on (e.g., Cremer 1999). Both hypotheses are testable.

If Catholics’ experiences during the *Kulturkampf* had any impact on NSDAP vote shares, then the effect should be larger in Prussia, where the *Kulturkampf* was considerably more intense than in the remainder of the German Empire (Anderson 2000; Gross 2004). Similarly, if Luther’s teachings made Protestants more susceptible to the allure of the Nazis, then one would expect to see smaller religious differences in areas that are rooted in the Reformed tradition of John Calvin, whose treatment of worldly authority differed sharply from that of Luther (see, e.g., Höpfl 1991).

But again, Table 11 shows that neither of these predictions are borne out in the data. If anything, religious differences in NSDAP vote shares are greater in historically Calvinist than Lutheran areas, and the point estimates for Prussia and the remainder of Weimar Germany are statistically indistinguishable. Theories based on Catholics’ wariness of secular authority receive, therefore, no support.

*Religiosity* A priori one of the most natural explanations might have been that Catholics were, on average, more pious, and that religiosity per se reduces the appeal of the “pagan” Nazis. In order to test this explanation (despite its difficulty in explaining the absence of religious differences in support for the anti-religious KPD) we have gathered additional data

on Catholics' reception of the Easter Communion, church attendance throughout the year, the number of mixed marriages, christenings, etc. (see Amtliche Zentralstelle für kirchliche Statistik des katholischen Deutschlands 1924, 1931). We factor analyze these data to extract a measure of religiosity, and divide our sample into terciles.<sup>37</sup> However, contrary to the predictions of this theory, we do not observe smaller differences between Protestant and Catholics when the latter are less religious.

*Religious Differences in Human Capital* — Becker and Woessmann (2009) contend that Protestantism had a causal effect on literacy rates in nineteenth century Prussia and that compared to Catholics, Protestants in contemporary Germany still obtain about .8 additional years of education. Note that this argument does not necessarily invalidate our claim of a causal effect of religion. It merely points to a different mechanism, i.e. the effect of religion on NSDAP vote shares might operate through education as opposed to the influence of the Church.

Although we do not possess direct measures of educational attainment in the Weimar Republic, we would expect that our detailed occupational covariates in Table 7 (where we control for the occupational composition of the work force *by sector*) account for at least some, if not most, of the potential mean difference between Protestants and Catholics. Moreover, we see no compelling theoretical reason for why the educated should have been more susceptible to the allure of the Nazis. If anything, the historical record as well as the results in Tables 3 and 6 suggest that relatively more educated white collar workers were *less* likely to vote for the NSDAP than their less educated counterparts in agriculture. Lastly, without assigning a role to the Catholic Church and its dignitaries, an explanation based on religious differences in human capital acquisition cannot account for the fact that religious differences in Nazi vote shares depend on the political leanings of the local priest.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the effect of religion operated through the Catholic Church leaning on believers to vote for the Zentrum Party, while the Protestant Church remained politically neutral. None of the alternative explanations we consider are supported by the data.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Social scientists have long been interested in the role of elites in democratic transitions and breakdowns. In this paper we study the role of the Catholic Church during the fall of the Weimar Republic and Adolf Hitler's ensuing rise to power. Contrary to most of Germany's traditional elites the Catholic Church remained supportive of the new democracy—especially

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<sup>37</sup>Reassuringly, our measure correlates positively with church attendance, and negatively with the fraction of Easter communions relative to the number of communions distributed during the entire year (a common proxy for *Taufscheinkatholiken*, i.e. superficial Catholics). See Appendix B for details.



the Zentrum Party—and took an explicit anti-Nazi position until March 1933.

To obtain the first causal estimates we exploit plausibly exogenous variation in the geographic distribution of Catholics and Protestants due to a peace treaty in the sixteenth century. Even after allowing for sizeable violations of the exclusion restriction, our results indicate that Catholics were significantly *less* likely to vote for the NSDAP than Protestants. Critically, religious differences in NSDAP vote shares are smaller where, prior to the rise of the Nazis, parishioners were less likely to follow the Church’s “recommendation” to vote for the Zentrum, and where a local priest contradicted the Church’s official position by publicly supporting the NSDAP. We argue that these as well as several other findings are most naturally rationalized by a model in which the Catholic Church leaned on believers to vote for the Zentrum party, whereas the Protestant Church remained politically neutral. Although the Catholic Church could not prevent the rise of the Nazis, our results suggest that its ability to “steer” the masses yielded it considerable influence in Germany’s first democracy.

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In March 1933, the German bishops reversed course and took a position favorable to Hitler. Did ordinary Catholics follow their lead? Drawing on the data of Voigtländer and Voth (2012), Table 12 presents some suggestive evidence based on several proxy variables for anti-Semitism and Nazi ideology before and during the Third Reich.<sup>38</sup> While predominantly Catholic cities had, if anything, fewer pogroms during the 1920s, after the Church leadership abandoned its opposition to the Nazi government Catholics and Protestants were somewhat *more* likely to write letters to the editor of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*, and cities with larger Catholic populations saw *more* deportations and *more* attacks on synagogues during the *Reichskristallnacht*.

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<sup>38</sup>When using Voigtländer and Voth’s (2012) data, we rely on their set of covariates and their extended sample. Results controlling for additional observable characteristics, even prefecture fixed effects, are qualitatively similar, but less precise.

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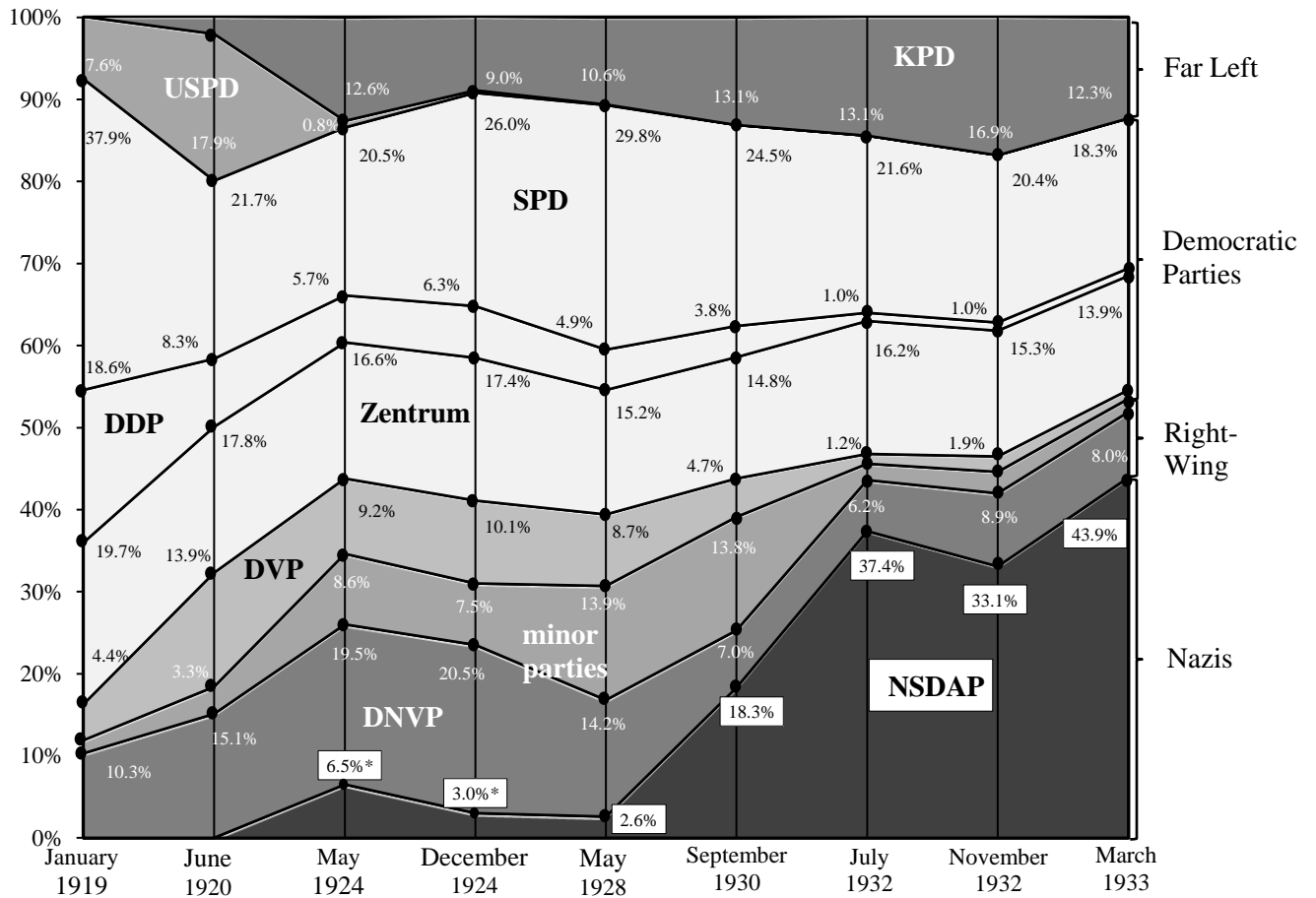
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Figure 1: Election Results in Weimar Germany, January 1919 – March 1933

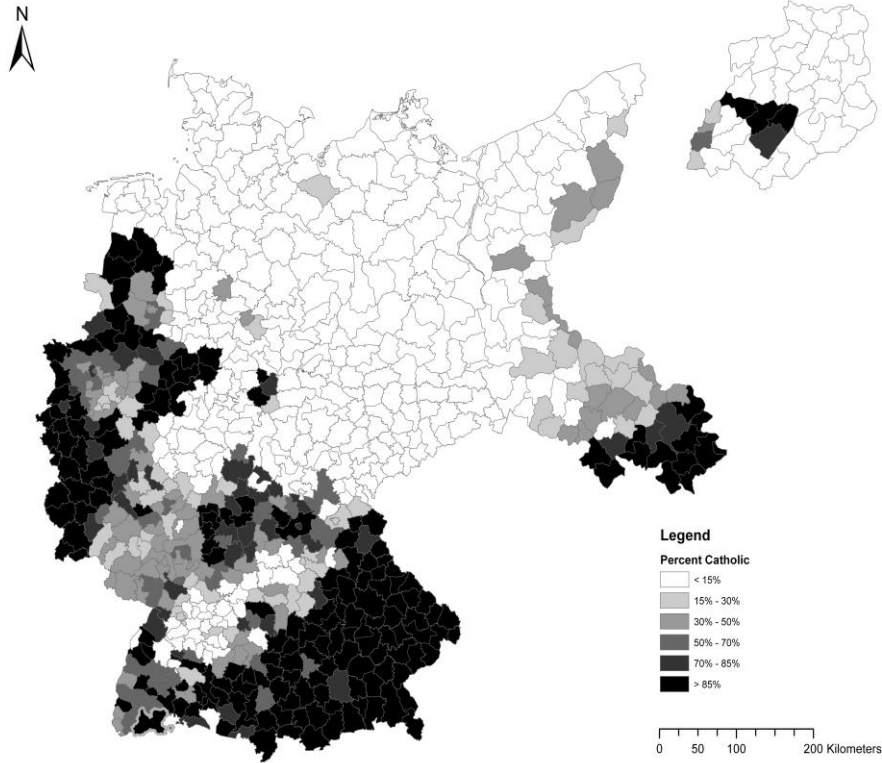


Notes: Figure depicts vote shares of major parties in each election to the Reichstag (1920–1933) and Nationalversammlung (1919). Asterisks mark years in which the NSDAP was officially outlawed. In these years the Nazis formed an electoral alliance with other parties in the *völkisch* bloc, running as NSFP in May 1924, and as NSFB in December 1924. Results for the Zentrum include the BVP.

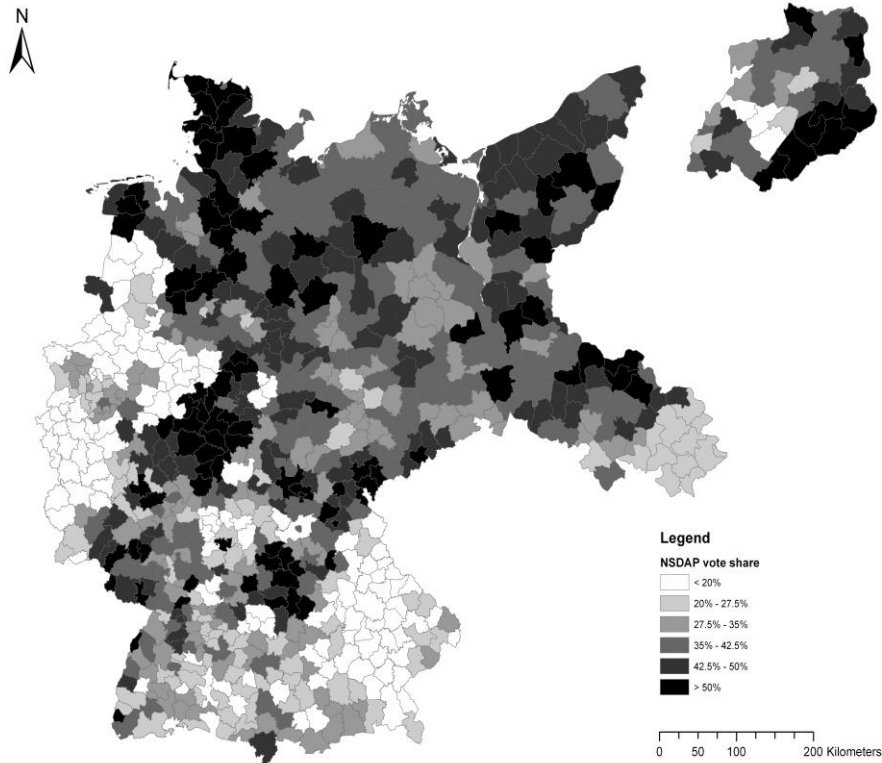
Sources: Based on Falter (1991).

Figure 2: Religion and Nazi Vote Shares

**A. Geographic Distribution of Protestants and Catholics**



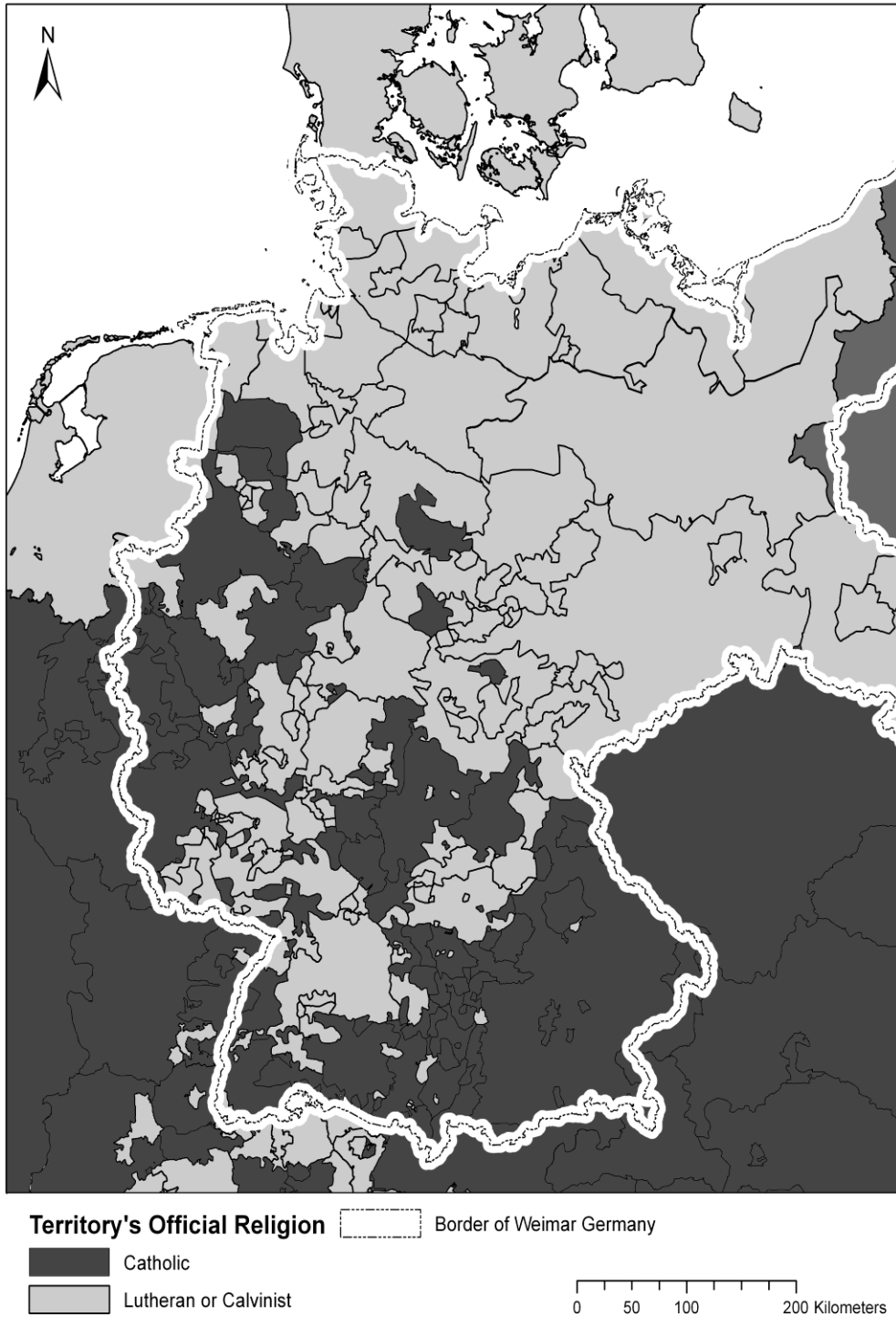
**B. Geographic Distribution of the Nazi Vote, November 1932**



Sources: Based on von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1952)

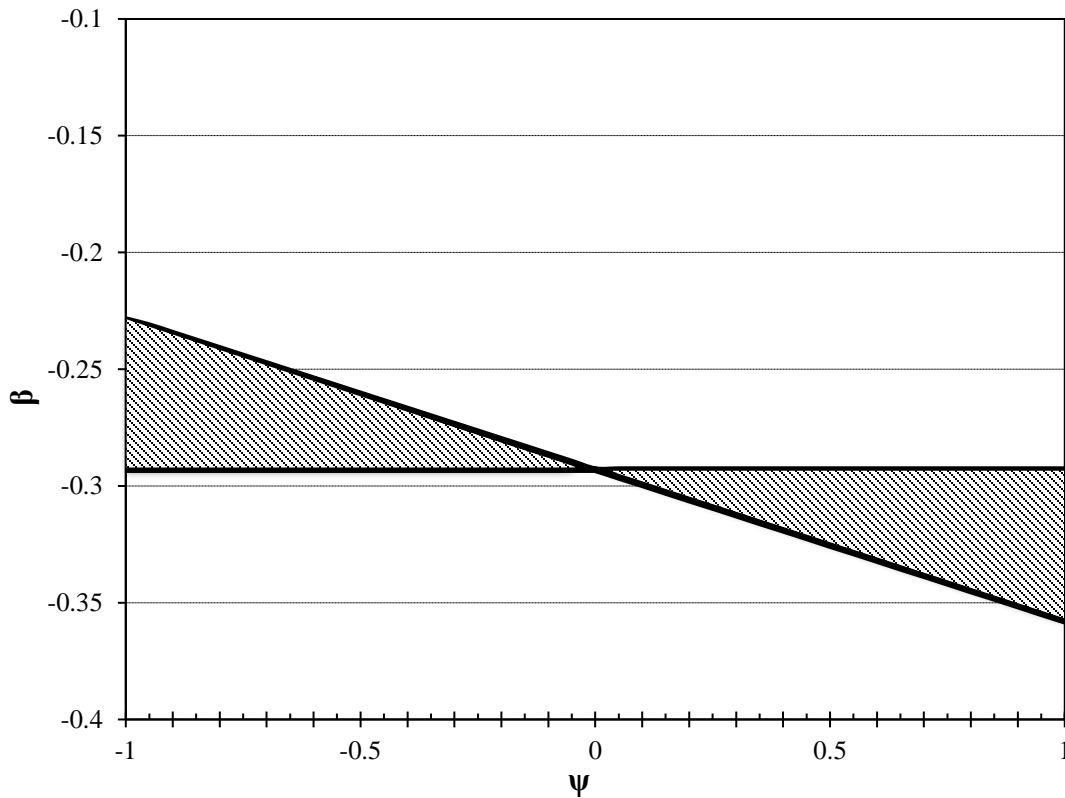


Figure 3: Religion in the Holy Roman Empire Before the Thirty Years' War



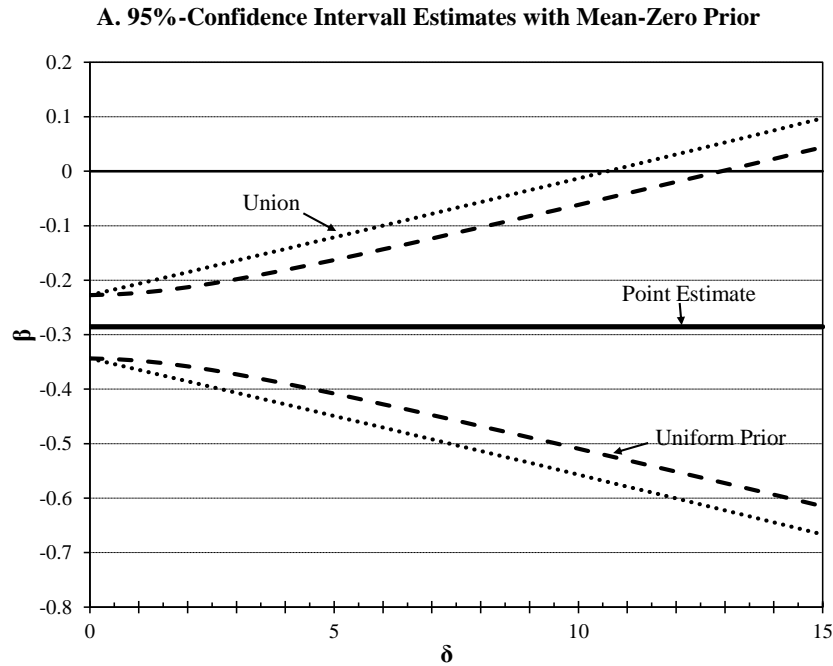
*Sources:* Based on Kunz (1996) and the information in Schindling and Ziegler (1992a,b, 1993a,b, 1995, 1996). See also Spenkuch (2011).

Figure 4: Assessing the Potential Impact of Omitted Variables Bias

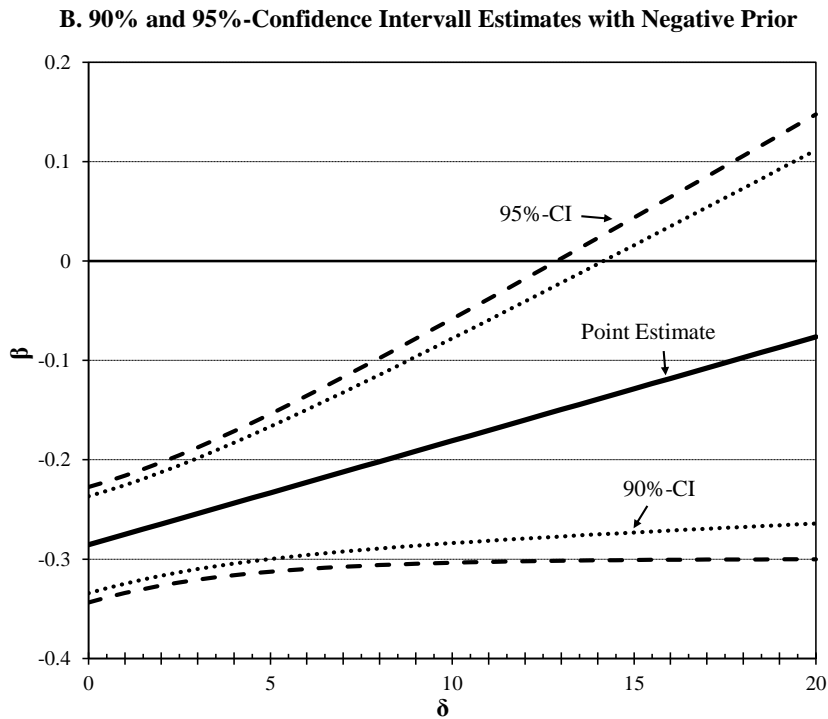


*Notes:* Figure depicts the identified set for the causal effect of religion on NSDAP vote shares in the November election of 1932, given different assumptions about  $\psi$ , the coefficient of proportionality in Oster (2013). Intuitively,  $\psi$  bounds how correlated unobserved covariates may be with the independent variable of interest, relative to those included in the regression, i.e.  $X$  in equation (1). The shaded region, therefore, includes all values of  $\beta$  that are consistent with a coefficient of proportionality between 0 and  $\psi$ . The bounds are derived for a maximal  $R^2$  of 1. See the description in the main text or Oster (2013) for additional detail.

Figure 5: Inference allowing for Violations of the Exclusion Restriction



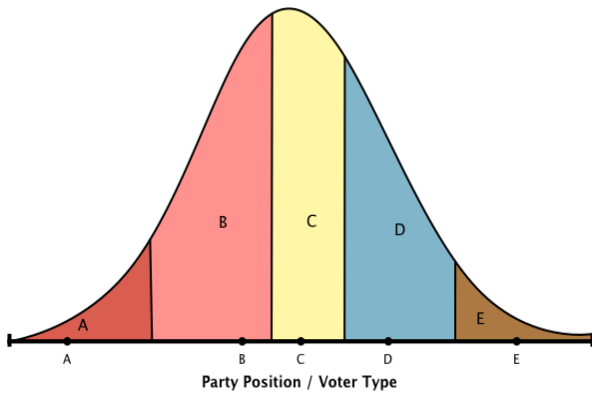
*Notes:* Figure depicts point estimates and 95%-confidence intervals for the effect of Catholicism on NSDAP vote shares in the November elections of 1932. The intervals labeled "Union" impose only the prior information that the support of  $\gamma$  is  $[-\delta, \delta] \times [-\delta, \delta]$ . Intervals labeled "Uniform Prior" are based on the assumption that each element of  $\gamma$  is distributed  $U(-\delta, \delta)$ . The solid line shows the respective point estimate. See the main text as well as Conley et al. (2012) for details on the estimation procedure.



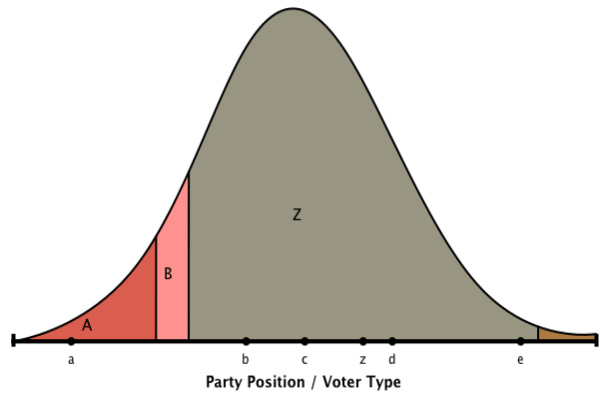
*Notes:* Figure depicts point estimates as well as 90% (dotted line) and 95% (dashed line) confidence intervals for the effect of Catholicism on NSDAP vote shares in the November elections of 1932. Estimates are based on the assumption that each element of  $\gamma$  is distributed  $U(-\delta, 0)$ . See the main text as well as Conley et al. (2012) for details on the estimation procedure.

Figure 6: Predictions of a Non-Stochastic Conformity Model

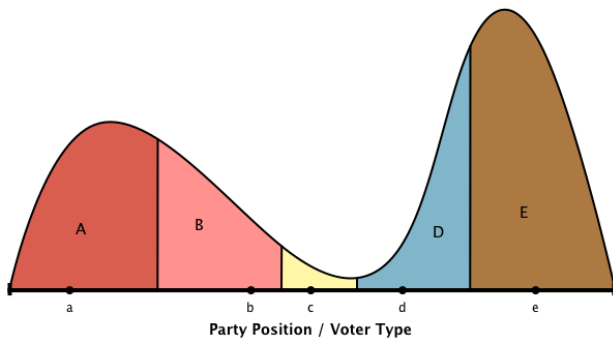
A. Protestants, 1924



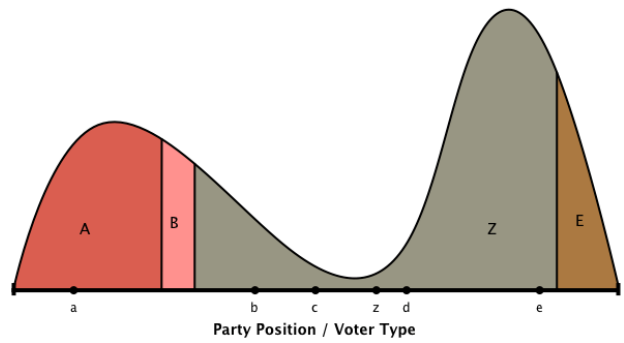
B. Catholics, 1924



C. Protestants, 1932

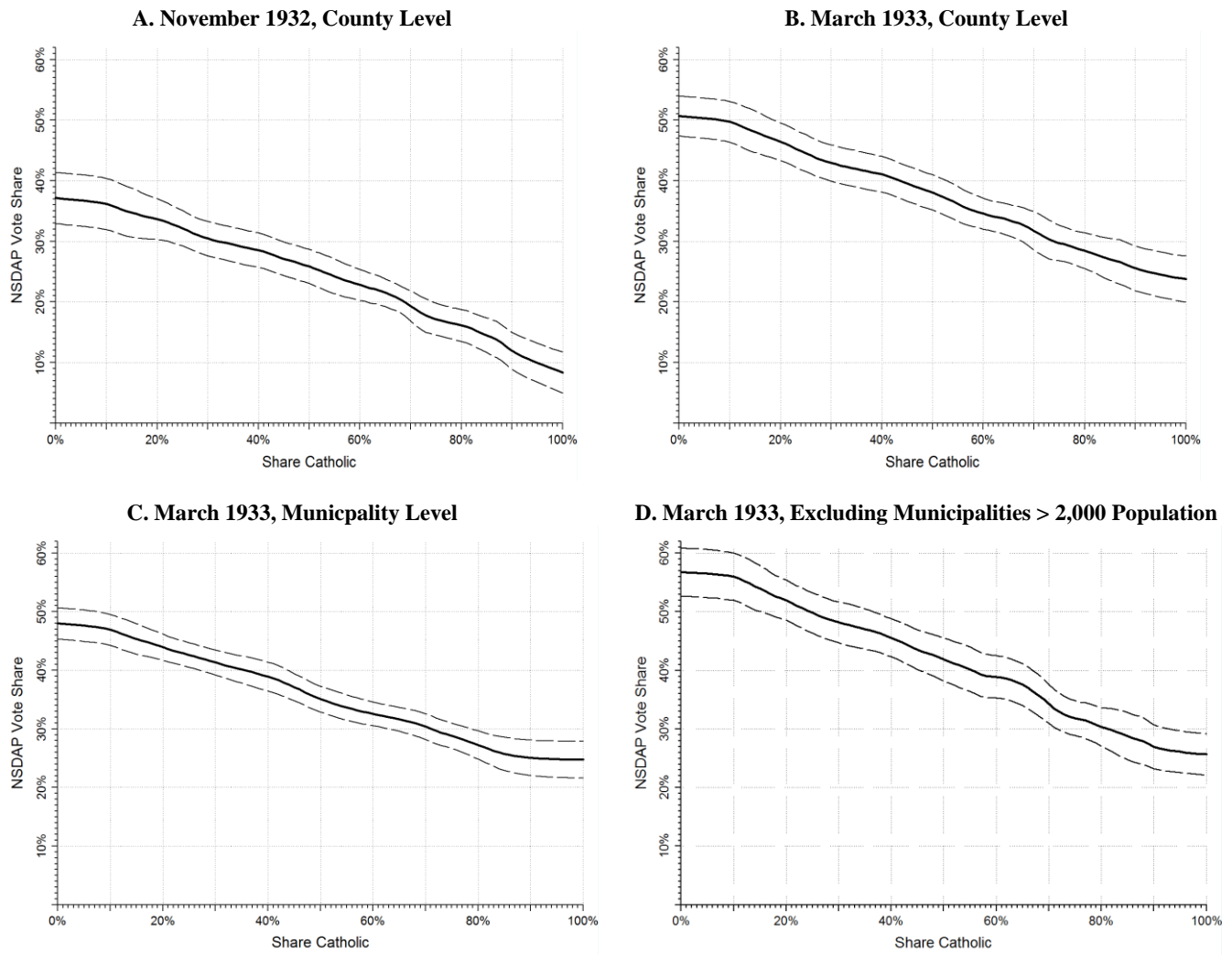


D. Catholics, 1932



Notes: Graphs depict the predictions of the conformity model in Section V for the following parameterization:  $g=-(x-t)^2$ ,  $x, t \in [0, 1]$ , and  $\lambda=.09$ . Parties positions are assumed to equal  $a=.1$ ,  $b=.4$ ,  $c=.5$ ,  $d=.65$ ,  $e=.87$ , and  $z=.6$ .

Figure 7: Semiparametric Estimates of the Relationship between Religion and Nazi Vote Shares



Notes: Figures show semi-parametric estimates of the relationship between NSDAP vote shares and voters' religion, i.e.  $f(\cdot)$  in equation (8), as well as the associated asymptotic 95%-confidence intervals. The upper two panels are based on county level data, whereas the one on the bottom left relies on municipality level data instead. The panel on the bottom right uses only data on geographic units which include no municipalities with more than 2,000 inhabitants. See the Data Appendix for a detailed description of the data.  $f(\cdot)$  is estimated according to the differencing method in Yatchew (1998). Standard errors account for clustering at the electoral district and have been calculated using the block bootstrap with 1,000 iterations.

Table 1: Key Events in the Fall of the Weimar Republic

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<i>Years of Crisis:</i>		
1918	November	Revolution & Proclamation of the German Republic
1919	January	Spartacus Uprising; Elections to the National Assembly
	June	Treaty of Versailles
	August	Constitution of Weimar signed into law
1920	March / April	Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch; Communist uprisings
	June	Elections to the first Reichstag
1921 – 1922		Political assassinations of M. Erzberger and W. Rathenau, among others
1923	January	Allied Rhineland Occupation
	November	Beer Hall Putsch; Introduction of Rentenmark to end hyperinflation
<i>Golden Era:</i>		
1924	August	Dawes Plan
1925	April	ultra-conservative P. v. Hindenburg elected Reichspräsident
	October	Treaty of Locarno
1926	September	Germany admitted to League of Nations
<i>Decline and Downfall:</i>		
1929	October	Stock Market Crash & Beginning of Global Economic Crisis
	December	Young Plan & Referendum on 'Law Against the Enslavement of the German People'
1930	March	H. Brüning appointed Chancellor, first 'presidential cabinet' governs by emergency decree
	September	Parliamentary elections: radical parties experience massive gains
1932	April	P. v. Hindenburg reelected as Reichspräsident; A. Hitler gets 36.8% of votes
	June / July	F. v. Papen appointed new Chancellor; Nazis gain further ground in parliamentary elections
	November	NSDAP experiences first set back in parliamentary elections
	December	General v. Schleicher appointed new Chancellor
1933	January	A. Hitler appointed new Chancellor
	February	Reichstag Fire; Weimar Constitution suspended indefinitely
	March	NSDAP achieves 43.9% of popular vote in parliamentary elections; passage of Enabling Act

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*Sources:* Based in part on the description in Mommsen (1989).

Table 2A: NSDAP Vote Shares by Religion, 1924–1933

Variable	Full Sample	Religion of Majority	
		Catholic	Protestant
<i>NSDAP Vote Share (in %):</i>			
May 1924*	5.181 (4.765)	3.837 (4.935)	5.663 (4.611)
December 1924*	2.384 (2.528)	1.426 (1.943)	2.727 (2.624)
May 1928	2.025 (2.242)	1.803 (2.165)	2.106 (2.265)
September 1930	14.80 (6.04)	10.40 (4.66)	16.46 (5.66)
July 1932	30.99 (11.07)	19.66 (6.37)	35.28 (9.31)
November 1932	26.42 (9.99)	16.65 (5.93)	30.06 (8.66)
March 1933	38.65 (10.00)	30.74 (6.87)	41.62 (9.36)

*Notes:* Entries are population weighted means and standard deviations of county level NSDAP vote shares (calculated as percentage of all eligible voters) for those counties with non-missing information on religious composition. Asterisks (\*) mark years in which the NSDAP was officially outlawed. In these years the Nazis formed an electoral alliance with other parties in the *völkisch* bloc, running as NSFP in May 1924, and as NSFB in December 1924. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.

Table 2B: Summary Statistics

Variable	Full Sample	Religion of Majority		Source
		Catholic	Protestant	
<i>Demographics:</i>				
Percent Catholic	31.28 (33.40)	81.21 (14.60)	12.65 (13.21)	1925 Census
Percent Protestant	64.12 (32.03)	16.74 (13.32)	81.79 (13.87)	1925 Census
Percent Jewish	.97 (1.60)	.69 (.68)	1.07 (1.82)	1925 Census
Percent Nonreligious	3.64 (3.47)	1.36 (1.65)	4.49 (3.58)	1925 Census
Percent Female	51.29 (1.19)	51.26 (1.18)	51.30 (1.20)	1933 Census
Urban County	.424 (.494)	.348 (.477)	.452 (.498)	Official County Classification
Population (in 1,000)	179.0 (220.5)	167.0 (215.9)	183.6 (222.2)	1925 Census
<i>Employment (in %):</i>				
Female Labor Force Participation Rate	37.28 (9.30)	37.96 (11.39)	36.99 (8.24)	1933 Census
Unemployment Rate	18.87 (9.24)	16.80 (9.16)	19.68 (9.14)	1933 Census
<i>Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):</i>				
Agriculture	29.14 (26.71)	35.44 (27.56)	26.68 (25.98)	1933 Census
Manufacturing and Artisanry	35.22 (13.73)	33.02 (13.66)	36.08 (13.67)	1933 Census
Trade and Commerce	21.06 (12.18)	17.82 (10.87)	22.32 (12.43)	1933 Census
Services	10.17 (6.26)	9.39 (5.83)	10.48 (6.40)	1933 Census
Domestic Labor	4.41 (2.32)	4.32 (2.28)	4.45 (2.34)	1933 Census
<i>Occupational Composition (in %):</i>				
Helping Family Members	17.46 (13.86)	22.72 (15.61)	15.41 (12.53)	1933 Census
White Collar Workers	13.40 (8.54)	11.59 (8.05)	14.11 (8.62)	1933 Census
Civil Servants	6.16 (3.94)	5.53 (3.79)	6.41 (3.98)	1933 Census
Blue Collar Workers	39.25 (9.66)	35.63 (10.48)	40.67 (8.93)	1933 Census
Domestic Servants	4.26 (2.21)	4.17 (2.20)	4.30 (2.21)	1933 Census
Self-Employed	19.46 (4.17)	20.36 (5.11)	19.11 (3.68)	1933 Census
<i>Composition of Unemployed (in %):</i>				
White Collar Workers	13.62 (7.37)	11.74 (6.47)	14.35 (7.57)	1933 Census
Blue Collar Workers	83.40 (7.75)	85.26 (6.83)	82.68 (7.97)	1933 Census
Domestic Servants	2.98 (1.43)	3.00 (1.31)	2.97 (1.35)	1933 Census
<i>Geography:</i>				
Latitude (in degrees North)	51.24 (1.64)	50.22 (1.55)	51.62 (1.50)	Own Calculations
Longitude (in degrees East)	11.00 (3.27)	9.67 (3.48)	11.50 (3.07)	Own Calculations
Distance to Berlin (in km)	323.2 (161.5)	460.1 (79.4)	272.2 (154.5)	Own Calculations
Distance to Major City (in km)	90.94 (85.60)	86.14 (70.78)	92.74 (90.49)	Own Calculations
Distance to Border (in km)	73.94 (52.56)	50.90 (40.40)	82.54 (53.99)	Own Calculations
Distance to Major Port (in km)	308.8 (169.0)	394.1 (177.8)	277.0 (154.0)	Own Calculations
Distance to Major River (in km)	36.69 (57.75)	31.03 (37.69)	38.79 (63.53)	Own Calculations
Distance to Ore or Coal Deposits (in km)	102.1 (99.3)	91.8 (84.3)	106.0 (104.2)	Own Calculations
Number of Counties	982	331	651	

*Notes:* Entries are population weighted means and standard deviations of county level data. The sample consists of counties with non-missing information on religious composition and election results in November 1932. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.



Table 3: Religion and Nazi Vote Shares in the November Election of 1932

Independent Variable	NSDAP Vote Share						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Percent Catholic	-.190 (.019)	-.243 (.017)	-.243 (.015)	-.250 (.017)	-.255 (.020)	-.280 (.028)	-.293 (.025)
Demographics:							
Percent Jewish		.125 (.367)	.206 (.414)	.195 (.430)	.157 (.409)	.531 (.461)	.145 (.284)
Percent Nonreligious		-.978 (.139)	-.971 (.152)	-.913 (.155)	-.875 (.152)	-.774 (.155)	-.666 (.121)
Percent Female		.912 (.524)	.599 (.491)	1.304 (.559)	1.280 (.530)	1.783 (.557)	.585 (.476)
Urban County		-2.166 (1.225)	-1.589 (1.020)	.094 (1.224)	-.206 (1.197)	-.785 (1.345)	.312 (1.114)
Log Population		-1.217 (.427)	-1.274 (.391)	-.945 (.370)	-.429 (.452)	-.636 (.454)	-.433 (.398)
Employment:							
Female Labor Force Participation Rate			.131 (.073)	.059 (.109)	.021 (.163)	.001 (.107)	.044 (.067)
Unemployment Rate			.091 (.104)	.247 (.143)	.277 (.163)	.214 (.127)	-.070 (.074)
Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):							
Manufacturing and Artisanry				-.136 (.084)	-.095 (.127)	-.113 (.104)	-.048 (.066)
Trade and Commerce				-.218 (.083)	-.283 (.133)	-.385 (.141)	-.102 (.132)
Services				.032 (.077)	-.391 (.136)	-.458 (.119)	-.146 (.107)
Domestic Labor				-.133 (.249)	-.412 (2.153)	-.812 (1.647)	-1.851 (1.557)
Occupational Composition (in %):							
White Collar Workers					-.020 (.201)	.087 (.204)	-.102 (.162)
Civil Servants					.682 (.244)	.901 (.259)	.432 (.191)
Blue Collar Workers					-.101 (.149)	-.092 (.121)	-.121 (.103)
Domestic Servants					.474 (2.317)	.587 (1.875)	1.724 (1.657)
Self-Employed					.109 (.326)	.096 (.300)	-.060 (.202)
Constant	32.365 (1.311)	5.735 (23.900)	15.64 (23.933)	-15.671 (24.990)	-18.133 (24.413)	88.923 (96.606)	
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
R-Squared	.405	.609	.616	.633	.647	.664	.815
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. 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. 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 4: First Stage Regressions

Independent Variable	Percent Catholic						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>County's Religion in 1624:</b>							
Catholic	70.807 (2.912)	65.568 (3.284)	65.501 (3.233)	64.895 (3.168)	61.266 (3.504)	49.555 (2.999)	42.513 (3.707)
Mixed	39.715 (5.176)	37.966 (5.032)	37.671 (5.289)	35.982 (5.639)	32.911 (5.664)	25.820 (3.824)	21.932 (3.377)
<b>Demographics:</b>							
Percent Jewish		.744 (.831)	.659 (.796)	.647 (.769)	.410 (.497)	.445 (.418)	.460 (.358)
Percent Nonreligious		-2.084 (.557)	-2.345 (.609)	-2.170 (.500)	-2.161 (.493)	-1.451 (.448)	-1.044 (.476)
Percent Female		.080 (1.253)	-.333 (1.210)	1.085 (1.268)	1.378 (1.132)	.187 (.959)	.022 (.890)
Urban County		4.344 (4.120)	3.364 (4.036)	8.754 (6.298)	7.232 (5.940)	6.561 (3.038)	4.993 (3.320)
Log Population		1.700 (1.462)	.878 (1.240)	2.236 (1.530)	2.161 (1.425)	.882 (1.103)	1.011 (.882)
<b>Employment:</b>							
Female Labor Force Participation Rate			.128 (.183)	.001 (.227)	-.160 (.261)	-.393 (.216)	-.207 (.149)
Unemployment Rate			.364 (.240)	.641 (.241)	.655 (.240)	.494 (.200)	.411 (.180)
<b>Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):</b>							
Manufacturing and Artisanry				-.194 (.125)	.130 (.153)	-.358 (.154)	-.247 (.117)
Trade and Commerce				-.633 (.264)	-.580 (.274)	-.467 (.210)	-.439 (.220)
Services				-.033 (.243)	.009 (.293)	.050 (.331)	.241 (.419)
Domestic Labor				.215 (.765)	9.728 (5.574)	6.523 (3.752)	1.923 (2.694)
<b>Occupational Composition (in %):</b>							
White Collar Workers					-.130 (.494)	.314 (.333)	.205 (.424)
Civil Servants					-.824 (.543)	-1.047 (.533)	-1.084 (.614)
Blue Collar Workers					-1.136 (.327)	-.758 (.267)	-.665 (.266)
Domestic Servants					-10.709 (5.723)	-8.254 (4.291)	-3.075 (3.025)
Self-Employed					-1.648 (.653)	-1.988 (.591)	-3.075 (3.025)
Constant	12.499 (2.001)	-5.249 (60.707)	15.264 (58.544)	-56.652 (56.752)	11.131 (56.496)	635.78 (166.20)	
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
R-Squared	.751	.774	.776	.784	.799	.858	.891
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982	982

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating equation (2) by weighted least squares.

The dependent variable is the share of Catholics (in percent) among a county's population.

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. 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 5: Reduced Form Results

Independent Variable	NSDAP Vote Share						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
County's Religion in 1624:							
Catholic	-13.540 (1.390)	-16.602 (1.184)	-16.620 (1.216)	-16.667 (1.246)	-15.842 (1.514)	-13.249 (1.690)	-11.739 (1.552)
Mixed	-7.805 (1.483)	-8.105 (1.834)	-7.760 (1.872)	-7.565 (1.987)	-7.174 (1.950)	-6.260 (1.520)	-5.653 (1.144)
Demographics:							
Percent Jewish		-.032 (.261)	.067 (.308)	.055 (.325)	.083 (.411)	.383 (.441)	-.005 (.301)
Percent Nonreligious		-.498 (.146)	-.424 (.181)	-.382 (.187)	-.329 (.188)	-.371 (.203)	-.333 (.186)
Percent Female		.944 (.643)	.732 (.603)	1.044 (.628)	.941 (.623)	1.646 (.634)	.500 (.577)
Urban County		-3.313 (1.581)	-2.407 (1.429)	-2.331 (1.903)	-2.245 (2.022)	-2.662 (1.514)	-1.327 (1.683)
Log Population		-1.658 (.554)	-1.491 (.475)	-1.562 (.510)	-1.043 (.610)	-.830 (.5270)	-.875 (.482)
Employment:							
Female Labor Force Participation Rate			.109 (.068)	.070 (.089)	.075 (.099)	.120 (.119)	.098 (.082)
Unemployment Rate			-.003 (.123)	.081 (.154)	.106 (.166)	.043 (.107)	-.195 (.097)
Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):							
Manufacturing and Artisanry				-.088 (.089)	-.131 (.122)	-.011 (.098)	.023 (.068)
Trade and Commerce				-.046 (.091)	-.116 (.131)	-.196 (.138)	.036 (.148)
Services				.060 (.085)	-.374 (.167)	-.437 (.150)	-.188 (.148)
Domestic Labor				-.215 (.281)	-2.810 (2.264)	-2.858 (1.966)	-2.237 (1.784)
Occupational Composition (in %):							
White Collar Workers					.001 (.242)	-.055 (.212)	-.164 (.210)
Civil Servants					.890 (.267)	1.153 (.249)	.684 (.241)
Blue Collar Workers					.192 (.184)	.107 (.140)	.068 (.127)
Domestic Servants					3.098 (2.565)	3.136 (2.200)	2.447 (1.946)
Self-Employed					.515 (.407)	.611 (.336)	.490 (.294)
Constant	30.031 (1.168)	4.776 (30.199)	9.056 (29.878)	-2.009 (28.759)	-21.378 (29.590)	-117.29 (120.52)	
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
R-Squared	.309	.475	.483	.490	.504	.555	.711
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982	982

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating equation (3) by weighted least squares. The dependent variable is a county's NSDAP vote share in the November elections of 1932.

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. 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 6: 2SLS Estimates of the Effect of Religion on Nazi Vote Shares in the November Election of 1932

Independent Variable	NSDAP Vote Share						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Percent Catholic	-.192 (.020)	-.248 (.016)	-.248 (.015)	-.252 (.017)	-.255 (.020)	-.265 (.027)	-.275 (.027)
Demographics:							
Percent Jewish		.119 (.362)	.199 (.407)	.193 (.422)	.156 (.400)	.495 (.429)	.120 (.267)
Percent Nonreligious		-1.008 (.144)	-1.001 (.157)	-.926 (.159)	-.879 (.153)	-.749 (.156)	-.622 (.112)
Percent Female		.912 (.513)	.597 (.481)	1.309 (.548)	1.282 (.520)	1.701 (.531)	.512 (.456)
Urban County		-2.112 (1.198)	-1.544 (.997)	.139 (1.197)	-.193 (1.199)	-.863 (1.277)	.074 (1.109)
Log Population		-1.190 (.417)	-1.254 (.379)	-7.482 (4.206)	-.424 (.441)	-.579 (.397)	-.598 (.336)
Employment:							
Female Labor Force Participation Rate			.131 (.072)	.059 (.107)	.020 (.114)	.012 (.107)	.039 (.060)
Unemployment Rate			.093 (.102)	.248 (.140)	.277 (.159)	.175 (.102)	-.080 (.070)
Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):							
Manufacturing and Artisanry				-.136 (.082)	-.094 (.126)	-.107 (.099)	-.044 (.063)
Trade and Commerce				-.221 (.080)	-.283 (.130)	-.328 (.126)	-.085 (.122)
Services				.032 (.076)	-.390 (.136)	-.433 (.110)	-.126 (.103)
Domestic Labor				-.135 (.245)	-.400 (2.137)	-1.144 (1.623)	-1.709 (1.581)
Occupational Composition (in %):							
White Collar Workers					-.021 (.199)	.035 (.183)	-.112 (.152)
Civil Servants					.680 (.244)	.883 (.237)	-.112 (.152)
Blue Collar Workers					-.103 (.149)	-.093 (.117)	.391 (.179)
Domestic Servants					.459 (2.303)	.968 (1.851)	1.601 (1.698)
Self-Employed					.107 (.316)	.092 (.270)	-.029 (.203)
Constant	32.415 (1.344)	5.648 (23.393)	15.646 (23.450)	-15.958 (24.494)	-18.118 (23.780)	49.431 (102.73)	
Geographical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
First Stage F-Statistic	313.8	201.1	209.1	213.5	165.1	142.24	71.9
Overidentification Test [p-value]	.861	.181	.146	.156	.245	.523	.464
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982	982

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating equation (4) by weighted two-stage least squares. The dependent variable is a county's NSDAP vote share in the November elections of 1932, and the share of Catholics is considered endogenous. 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. 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 7: Additional Sensitivity Analysis and Robustness Checks

Specification / Sample	OLS	IV
Baseline	-.293 (.025)	-.275 (.027)
As Percentage of Valid Votes	-.361 (.024)	-.338 (.028)
<i>Sample:</i>		
Unweighted	-.291 (.033)	-.281 (.032)
Excluding Prussia	-.302 (.039)	-.294 (.037)
Excluding Bavaria	-.282 (.026)	-.261 (.028)
Above Average Share of Catholics	-.327 (.027)	-.339 (.059)
Below Average Share of Catholics	-.256 (.066)	-.414 (.141)
<i>Additional Controls:</i>		
Additional Labor Force Controls	-.286 (.026)	-.268 (.028)
Composition of Unemployed	-.291 (.025)	-.277 (.027)
Major Parties' Vote Shares in 1920	-.261 (.023)	-.223 (.035)
Proxy for Historical Anti-Semitism	-.295 (.025)	-.278 (.027)
<i>Instrument:</i>		
Based on Religious Situation in 155 <sup>t</sup>	--	-.274 (.026)
<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
NSDAP Vote Share July 1930	-.145 (.019)	-.133 (.022)
NSDAP Vote Share July 1932	-.335 (.027)	-.318 (.029)
NSDAP Vote Share 1933	-.293 (.019)	-.279 (.023)
$\Delta$ NSDAP Vote Share November 1932 – May 1928	-.267 (.022)	-.253 (.023)

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating the empirical models in equations (1) and (4) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. The respective sample restriction, set of additional controls, alternative instrument, or dependent variable is shown in the column on the left. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. To ensure comparability with the baseline results in Table 3 and 6 all results also control for the covariates used in the most inclusive specifications in those tables. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.

Table 8: Comparison of County and Municipality Level Results

<i>A. Results for 1933</i>						
	NSDAP Vote Share 1933					
	OLS	OLS	OLS	2SLS	2SLS	2SLS
Percent Catholic	-.294 (.020)	-.292 (.019)	-.309 (.019)	-.279 (.023)	-.276 (.022)	-.239 (.052)
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	--	--	--	71.75	42.77	4.55
R-Squared	.821	.764	.919	--	--	--
Number of Observations	981	3,502	3,502	981	3,502	3,502
<i>B. Results for 1930</i>						
	NSDAP Vote Share 1930					
	OLS	OLS	OLS	2SLS	2SLS	2SLS
Percent Catholic	-.145 (.019)	-.144 (.018)	-.140 (.023)	-.133 (.022)	-.139 (.022)	-.157 (.048)
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	--	--	--	64.83	44.75	5.05
R-Squared	.633	.545	.853	--	--	--
Number of Observations	977	3,577	3,577	977	3,577	3,577

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating the empirical models in equations (1) and (4) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. The dependent variable in the upper panel is the NSDAP's vote share in the elections of March 1933. The lower panel uses that in September of 1930 instead. Within each set of regressions the leftmost specification is based on county-level data, whereas the middle and rightmost one rely on municipality-level data instead. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. To ensure comparability with the baseline results in Table 3 and 6 all results control for the covariates used in the most inclusive specifications in those tables. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.

Table 9: Major Parties' Vote Shares, by Religion

Party	1920		May 1924		December 1924		1928		1930		July 1932		November 1932		1933	
	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Protestants
<i>Far Left:</i>	.015	.017	.085	.096	.063	.070	.077	.079	.113	.108	.124	.120	.137	.134	.109	.109
KPD	[.000, .016]	[.000, .017]	[.042, .090]	[.052, .100]	[.018, .066]	[.025, .074]	[.032, .081]	[.035, .083]	[.070, .118]	[.065, .113]	[.082, .130]	[.078, .126]	[.095, .144]	[.092, .140]	[.066, .114]	[.066, .114]
<i>Democratic Parties:</i>																
SPD	.108	.199	.077	.197	.122	.244	.136	.267	.109	.242	.103	.218	.096	.196	.091	.195
	[.068, .116]	[.159, .207]	[.036, .085]	[.157, .205]	[.083, .131]	[.205, .253]	[.098, .146]	[.229, .278]	[.070, .118]	[.204, .252]	[.064, .112]	[.118, .226]	[.055, .104]	[.156, .204]	[.050, .099]	[.155, .203]
DDP	.015	.090	.018	.057	.024	.064	.020	.046	.014	.040	.006	.010	.005	.009	.005	.009
	[.000, .019]	[.045, .093]	[.000, .020]	[.011, .060]	[.000, .026]	[.018, .066]	[.000, .022]	[.000, .049]	[.000, .015]	[.000, .042]	[.000, .006]	[.000, .010]	[.000, .005]	[.000, .009]	[.000, .005]	[.000, .009]
Zentrum / BVP	.545	.000	.456	.000	.474	.000	.402	.000	.453	.000	.463	.000	.425	.000	.427	.000
	[.504, .553]	[.000, .000]	[.414, .463]	[.000, .000]	[.433, .481]	[.000, .000]	[.359, .407]	[.000, .000]	[.410, .458]	[.000, .000]	[.421, .469]	[.000, .000]	[.382, .431]	[.000, .000]	[.384, .433]	[.000, .000]
DVP	.045	.137	.043	.080	.048	.092	.039	.077	.027	.042	.005	.012	.007	.019	.005	.012
	[.002, .051]	[.094, .142]	[.000, .046]	[.035, .083]	[.003, .052]	[.048, .096]	[.032, .042]	[.032, .081]	[.000, .028]	[.000, .043]	[.000, .006]	[.000, .013]	[.000, .008]	[.000, .019]	[.000, .005]	[.000, .013]
<i>Right-Wing:</i>																
DNVP	.000	.196	.000	.228	.000	.243	.000	.159	.019	.075	.012	.067	.018	.090	.025†	.092†
	[.000, .000]	[.153, .202]	[.000, .002]	[.187, .235]	[.000, .000]	[.203, .251]	[.000, .003]	[.116, .165]	[.000, .022]	[.030, .078]	[.000, .014]	[.021, .070]	[.000, .022]	[.045, .094]	[.000, .029]	[.047, .096]
<i>Far Right:</i>																
NSDAP	--	--	.016*	.070*	.003*	.034*	.005	.028	.058	.191	.095	.413	.079	.354	.199	.478
			[.000, .018]	[.024, .072]	[.000, .004]	[.000, .035]	[.000, .006]	[.000, .029]	[.017, .065]	[.150, .198]	[.061, .110]	[.379, .428]	[.044, .092]	[.319, .367]	[.170, .218]	[.448, .496]

Notes: Tables show estimated vote shares among Catholics and Protestants for each major party in every parliamentary election during the Weimar Republic. Values in brackets are theoretical bounds. The discussion in Section 5 describes the derivation of these numbers. Vote shares do generally not add up to unity, as they are calculated as fraction of all eligible voters. Asterisks (\*) mark years in which the NSDAP was officially outlawed. In these years the Nazis formed an electoral alliance with other parties in the völkisch bloc, running as NSFP in May 1924, and as NSFB in December 1924. Daggers (†) mark years in which the DNVP campaigned together with the Stahlhelm and Landbund as Kampffront Schwarz-Weiß-Rot. Results for the Zentrum include the BVP.

Table 10: Religious Differences in NSDAP Vote Shares by Social Environment

Restriction / Sample			Chow Test for Equality of OLS Coefficients
	OLS	IV	<i>p</i> -value
Baseline	-.293 (.025)	-.275 (.027)	
<i>By Attitude of Catholic Priest:</i>			
Villages with "Brown Priest"	-.203 (.023)	-.149 (.040)	.014
Villages without "Brown Priest"	-.299 (.020)	-.291 (.023)	
<i>By Structure of Environment:</i>			
Urban County	-.205 (.025)	-.161 (.024)	.005
Rural County	-.309 (.027)	-.304 (.032)	
<i>By Fraction of Catholics Voting for the Zentrum Party in 1920:</i>			
Lowest Quartile	-.198 (.054)	-.170 (.054)	.008
Second Quartile	-.261 (.028)	-.244 (.026)	
Third Quartile	-.333 (.050)	-.362 (.045)	
Highest Quartile	-.320 (.024)	-.339 (.034)	

*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating the empirical models in equations (1) and (4) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. The respective sample description is shown in the column on the left. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. To ensure comparability with the baseline results in Tables 3 and 6 the set of covariates remains as in the most inclusive specifications in those tables. The column on the very right displays *p*-values from a Chow test for equality of the coefficients estimated by least squares, i.e. those in the column labeled "OLS". See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of each variable.



Table 11: Testing Alternative Explanations for the Effect of Religion on Nazi Vote Shares

Restriction / Sample	OLS	IV	Chow Test for Equality
			of OLS Coefficients <i>p</i> -value
Baseline	-.293 (.025)	-.275 (.027)	
<i>By Region:</i>			
Prussia	-.283 (.018)	-.241 (.018)	.595
Remainder of Germany	-.302 (.039)	-.294 (.037)	
Catholic Heartland	-.300 (.024)	-.235 (.028)	.784
Catholic Diaspora	-.288 (.039)	-.282 (.032)	
<i>By Historical Religion of Area (c. 1624):</i>			
Catholic	-.264 (.070)	--	
Lutheran	-.272 (.034)	--	.017
Calvinist	-.397 (.055)	--	

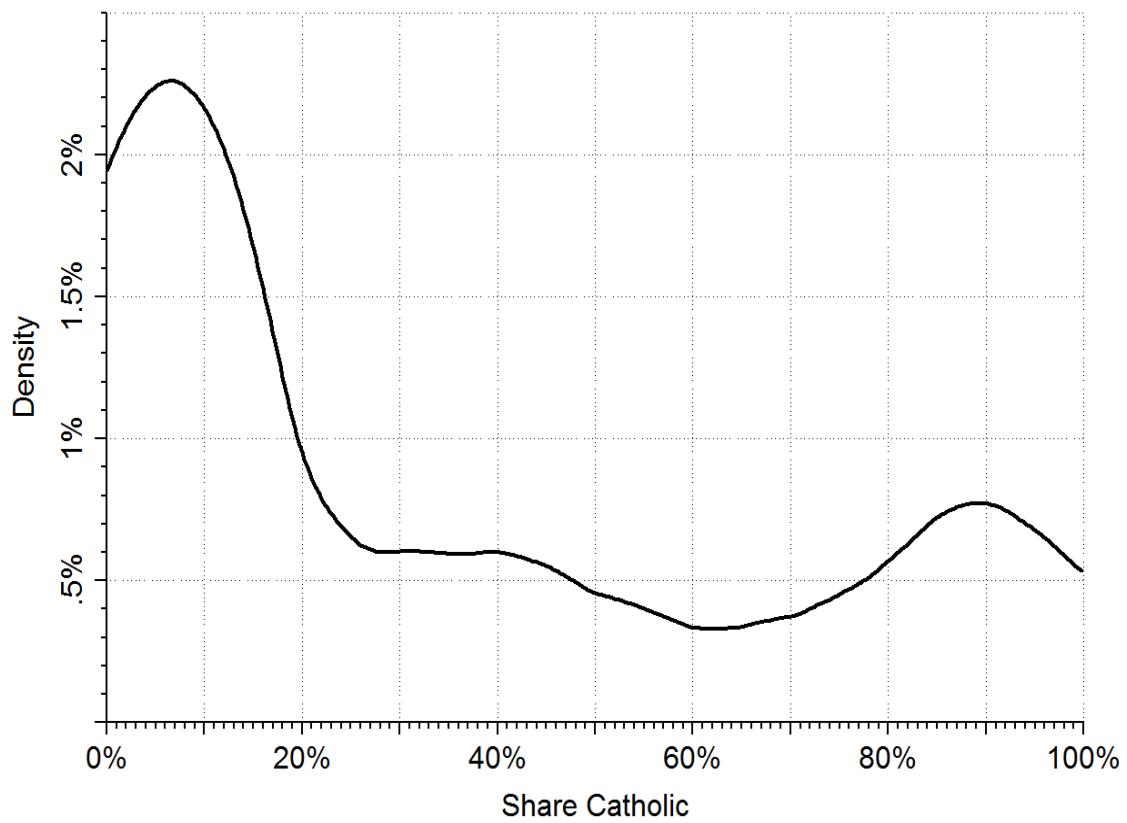
*Notes:* Entries are coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic from estimating the empirical models in equations (1) and (4) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. The respective sample description is shown in the column on the left. Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors are clustered by electoral district and reported in parentheses. To ensure comparability with the baseline results in Tables 3 and 6 the set of covariates remains as in the most inclusive specifications in those tables. The column on the very right displays p-values from a Chow test for equality of the coefficients estimated by least squares, i.e. those in the column labeled "OLS". We define "Catholic Heartland" as the regions of Rhineland, Westphalia, Baden, as well as South-East Bavaria, and "Catholic Diaspora" as the remainder of Germany. See the Data Appendix for the precise definition and source of all remaining variables.

Table 12: Religious Differences in Proxies for Anti-Semitism and Nazi-Ideology, Before and After March 1933

Outcomes	OLS	IV	Sample Mean and Standard Deviation	Number of Observations
<i>Before March 1933:</i>				
Pogrom in the 1920s (× 100)	-.013 (.013)	-.010 (.017)	2.67 (16.13)	1,199
<i>After March 1933:</i>				
Attack on Synagogues During <i>Reichskristallnacht</i> , 1938 (× 100)	.136 (.040)	.173 (.056)	81.40 (38.93)	989
Letters to <i>Der Stürmer</i> , 1935–1938 (per 10,000 residents)	.007 (.004)	.011 (.007)	1.88 (5.02)	1,222
Deportations, 1933–1945 (as percentage of Jewish population)	.205 (.062)	.149 (.073)	34.21 (52.29)	930

*Notes:* Columns labeled OLS and IV display coefficients and standard errors on Percent Catholic. The respective dependent variable is shown in the column on the left. Outcomes come from the city-level data set constructed by Voigtländer and Voth (2012). We employ 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 2SLS estimates is always territorial lords' religion, as described in Section 4.1. For a detailed description of the data used in this table see Voigtländer and Voth (2012), or the Data Appendix to this paper.

Figure A.1: Distribution of Catholics Across Counties



*Notes:* Figure depicts a population weighted kernel density estimate of the distribution of Catholics across counties. Estimates use an Epanechnikov kernel with a bandwidth of 7.5.

Table A.1: Alternative Instrumental Variable Estimates

Independent Variable	Percent Catholic			NSDAP Vote Share, November 1932				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Percent Catholic				-.227 (.066)	-.393 (.133)	-.261 (.099)	-.293 (.024)	-.291 (.024)
Distance to Wittenberg (in km)	.085 (.034)	.169 (.061)	.072 (.039)					
County's Religion in 1624:								
Catholic			42.610 (3.485)					
Mixed			21.577 (3.522)					
Demographics:								
Percent Jewish	-1.665 (1.359)	-.017 (.579)	.369 (.333)	.220 (.433)	.076 (.205)	.063 (.233)	.067 (.225)	.066 (.226)
Percent Nonreligious	-4.372 (1.216)	-1.778 (.681)	-1.081 (.458)	-.712 (.448)	-.809 (.290)	-.578 (.221)	-.634 (.112)	-.632 (.112)
Percent Female	3.173 (1.983)	.468 (1.367)	-.069 (.828)	1.184 (.538)	.634 (.485)	.550 (.478)	.570 (.470)	.569 (.470)
Urban County	16.652 (5.006)	2.112 (3.741)	3.961 (3.288)	-.813 (1.904)	.407 (1.181)	.002 (1.106)	.100 (1.003)	.097 (1.004)
Log Population	5.322 (1.860)	-1.679 (.969)	-.356 (.997)	-.651 (.562)	-.572 (.448)	-.361 (.417)	-.413 (.377)	-.410 (.378)
Employment:								
Female Labor Force Participation Rate	-.393 (.512)	-.370 (.233)	-.197 (.159)	.043 (.127)	-.001 (.094)	.049 (.072)	.037 (.061)	.037 (.061)
Unemployment Rate	.527 (.399)	.231 (.225)	.468 (.170)	.266 (.174)	-.076 (.071)	-.103 (.072)	-.097 (.067)	-.097 (.067)
Sectoral Composition of Workforce (in %):								
Manufacturing and Artisanry	.864 (.387)	-.101 (.169)	-.276 (.122)	-.122 (.113)	-.055 (.070)	-.037 (.065)	-.041 (.059)	-.041 (.059)
Trade and Commerce	-.019 (.427)	.052 (.285)	-.357 (.191)	-.273 (.125)	-.098 (.122)	-.102 (.126)	-.101 (.124)	-.101 (.124)
Services	1.784 (.700)	1.357 (.657)	.393 (.414)	-.448 (.194)	.001 (.206)	-.176 (.135)	-.133 (.105)	-.135 (.104)
Domestic Labor	27.230 (10.108)	1.342 (2.863)	.217 (2.700)	-1.029 (3.168)	-2.007 (1.413)	-2.230 (1.342)	-2.176 (1.356)	-2.178 (1.356)
Occupational Composition (in %):								
White Collar Workers	-1.882 (.767)	-.415 (.667)	.075 (.416)	.029 (.243)	-.122 (.163)	-.061 (.146)	-.076 (.147)	-.076 (.147)
Civil Servants	-3.876 (1.126)	-2.715 (.685)	-1.235 (.582)	.818 (.401)	.139 (.381)	.492 (.299)	.406 (.183)	.407 (.182)
Blue Collar Workers	-2.578 (.693)	-1.439 (.405)	-.717 (.582)	-.010 (.258)	-.255 (.185)	-.069 (.137)	-.114 (.100)	-.112 (.099)
Domestic Servants	-30.919 (10.646)	-3.885 (3.268)	-1.158 (3.032)	1.188 (3.555)	1.669 (1.590)	2.239 (1.450)	2.101 (1.454)	2.106 (1.453)
Self-Employed	-3.469 (1.144)	-3.072 (.879)	-1.993 (.623)	.225 (.472)	-.335 (.386)	.077 (.328)	-.023 (.194)	-.019 (.194)
Constant	-22.295 (101.553)			-18.847 (25.084)				
Geographical Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Electoral District Fixed Effects	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instruments:								
Distance to Wittenberg	--	--	--	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Distance to Wittenberg Squared	--	--	--	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Distance to Wittenberg Cubed	--	--	--	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Historically Catholic	--	--	--	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Historically Mixed	--	--	--	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
First Stage F-Statistic	--	--	--	6.27	7.78	4.14	59.86	46.49
Overidentification Test [p-value]	--	--	--	--	--	.316	.434	.494
Number of Observations	982	982	982	982	982	982	982	982

Notes: Entries are coefficients and standard errors from estimating equations (2) and (4) by weighted least squares and weighted two-stage least squares, respectively. The dependent variable in columns (1)–(3) is a county's share of Catholics, and that in columns (4)–(8) is a county's NSDAP vote share in the November elections of 1932. 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. 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.