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Physical Memories of the Past and Support for the Far-Right: Evidence from Inter-War Denmark

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Abstract

A growing literature concerns the role of symbolic politics, including how political parties benefit electorally from politicizing the past, a strategy which should be more effective in localities with physical memories of the past. We test this argument by studying the effect of the local concentration of pre-Christian monuments on electoral support for the Danish Nazi Party – a far-right party who relied heavily on the symbols of Denmark’s pre-Christian past in its propaganda – in Danish parliamentary elections 1935-1943. In contrast to the proposed theoretical argument, we find no evidence that Danish localities with a greater concentration of pre-Christian monuments saw greater electoral support for the Danish Nazi Party. These findings hint at the limits of symbolic politics for electoral support for the far-right and suggest that investigating the scope conditions for the political effects of physical memories of the past may be a fruitful avenue for future research.

JEL Codes: D72, N44

Keywords: Symbolic politics, Collective memory, Far-right voting

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1 Introduction

Does the presence of physical historical symbols help political parties who utilize them in their propaganda? While long acknowledged as being important by historians and anthropologists, political scientists have only recently starting engaging with the political role that physical manifestations and memorials of the past – including monuments and archaeological sites – can play for present-day politics.

Studying the removal of Lenin monuments in Ukraine, Rozenas and Vlasenko (2022) find that the removal of such monuments during the time of the Euromaidan protests increased the local support for political parties sympathetic to Ukraine’s Soviet past. A similar backlash effect is found by Villamil and Balcells (2021) who find that the removal of Francoist street names in Spain is associated with an increase in the vote share of the far-right Vox party. An alternative to a “backlash” effect is found by Rahnama (0) who find that the removal of Confederate symbols decreased racial resentment in the US.

In a recent paper, Ochsner and Roesel (2024) find that Austrian municipalities which suffered Turkish incursions during the 16th and 17th century had higher vote share for the Austrian Freedom Party after this party starting an anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim campaign invoking the historical Turkish sieges of Vienna. They further argue that historical memorials and monuments were playing important roles in keeping the historical memories alive. A similar argument about the role of monuments and memorials is found in the article by Fouka and Voth (2023) who studies the effect of German World War II massacres in Greece on German car sales (as a proxy for anti-German attitudes) during the 2009 Greek debt crisis. Common among many of these studies is the idea that political parties can (strategically) invoke the past and that this can create an electoral benefit for these parties in areas where the past is more (physically) present and salient.¹

Another study of particular interest for this article is Becker and Voth (2023) who find that German localities closer to old pagan worship sites had higher votes shares for the German Nazi Party (the NSDAP) in the 1930s.² While De Juan, Haass, Koos, Riaz, and Tichelbacker (2024) find that local WW1 memorials increased the effect of war fatalities on vote share for the German Nazi Part in the interwar period.

Many of these works can be considered part of the larger growing research agenda in political science and economics on historical legacies and persistence (Cirone & Pepinsky, 2022)

¹See also Aaskoven (2022), Charnysh (2015) and Lemoli and Gennaro (2024).

²However, their specific theoretical mechanisms are different from those that we propose in this article.

In this article, we specifically study whether the density of physical manifestations of the past creates an electoral benefit for parties who invoke this past in their political agitation. We use the case of Denmark during the 1930s and early 1940s, where the far-right Danish Nazi party (DNSAP) actively used the symbolism of Denmark’s pre-Christian past in their propaganda. Using detailed voting-station-level electoral data and geo-coded archaeological site data, we test whether the party received more votes in areas with a greater density of pre-Christian manifestations of the past in the landscape such as burial mounds and rune stones. However, in discordance with the theoretical arguments, we do not find that the Danish Nazi Party received a greater vote share in areas with a greater density of these physical manifestation of the (pre-Christian) past. We discuss various reasons for the lack of effect and discuss implications for the wider study of symbolic politics and historical legacies.

The rest of the article has the following structure: We first discuss the theoretical arguments underlining why some political parties could benefit electorally from the presence of physical historical symbols. Then, we provide background for our specific case. We then describe our data and empirical strategy before showing our results. The final sections contains a discussion of our results and its relationship to the wider literature.

2 Theory: The Electoral Effects of Physical Historical Symbols

We argue that a political party using/invoking physical historical symbols such as memorials, statues and famous (types of) archaeological sites in their agitation – including using them in electronic and print material as well as mentioning them in speeches and/or other types of verbal communication – can achieve an electoral benefit of doing so: If these symbols are generally considered positive and important symbols by at least a segment of voters, then these voters may view the party in more favorable terms and be more likely to vote for this party. Either since the use of these symbols communicates that the party is aligned with preferences of the voters and may thus further their interest when in power and/or that they share the identity orientation of the voters giving the voters and intrinsic benefit of affirming their identity by voting for the party.³ E.g., a political party using a known statue of a famous member of an ethnic minority or social class/occupational group in a political poster may convey a signal to members of this minority/social class/occupational group that the party is concerned with the interests of this group and/or shares or at least acknowledges the identity of this group.⁴

³Thus affecting both the “B” and “D” term in the classic “calculus of voting” equation (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968)

⁴See Haas and Lindstam (2024) for the role of invoking history on the political mobilization of minorities.

However, invoking such symbols should be more effective in localities where these symbols are more physically present. Either since they may be more recognizable by the local inhabitants compared to localities where they are less common/non-existing, and/or since these symbols may be viewed more intrinsic positively and/or important in areas where they are more common since they become part of a localized identity and sense of belonging and/or form part of the local collective memory (Fouka & Voth, 2023, 853-854). Consequently, we expect *a political party using specific historical symbols in its agitation should experience a greater vote share in localities where there is a greater physical manifestation of these historical symbols.*

However, the arguments above – as well as those in the previous literature on symbolic politics – build explicitly or implicitly on some assumptions, which are relevant for the “scope” conditions of an electoral effect of a local presence of historical symbols invoked by one or more political party. Key among those is that only one party or group of parties uses and has ‘issue-ownership’ (Stefaan Walgrave & Lefevere, 2015) over the relevant historical symbols.⁵ If the historical symbol(s) in question is associated with a greater number of political parties/movements and/or a single party cannot credibly claim association with these symbols, then this party may receive no net electoral benefit of invoking such historical symbols. Additionally, for an electoral net benefit to occur for a party invoking a specific historical symbol, this symbol needs to be attract more voters than it deters. If the symbol is viewed negatively among (at least parts) of the party’s current voters, then using this historical symbol may lead to voter losses instead.⁶

⁵A similar argument can be found for the scope conditions of the “backlash” effect of the removal and change of historical symbols discussed in Rozenas and Vlasenko (2022)

⁶This may have implications for which kind of parties we should expect to invoke potential polarizing historical symbols, i.e. larger “catch-all” parties should rely less on historical symbols which may be polarizing, whereas smaller parties with “less to lose” may be more inclined to employ potential polarizing or controversial historical symbols.

3 Background: The Danish Nazi Party and Denmark's Pre-Christian Past

As our test case if the effect of the use of symbolic politics in areas where the symbols are more physically present, we use the case of the inter-war Danish Nazi party and pre-Christian monuments and (visible) archaeological sites in Denmark. The Danish Nazi Party⁷ (DNSAP) was founded by a small number of Danish far-right activists in 1930 and initially led by the former Danish cavalry captain and former boy scout (!) leader Cay Lembcke.⁸ The party itself began as an almost total imitation of its German counterpart, up to the point that the party's first manifesto was an almost literal translation of the NSDAP's 25-point Program only with 'German' being replaced by 'Danish' (Lauridsen, 2002, 133-144)!⁹ Throughout the 1930s, the party ran in Danish parliamentary elections, but only received a fairly low vote share and limited representation in the Danish parliament (Lauridsen, 2002, 29).¹⁰

During the German occupation of Denmark 1940-1945, the party acted as a vehicle for collaboration with the German occupation forces – especially with regards to recruitment of Danes into the Waffen SS – and received some funding from the German occupation authorities. However, unlike in other parts of German-occupied Europe, it was never tasked with actual running government affairs (Lauridsen, 2002), which was – for most of the occupation – done by the mainstream Danish political and administrative institutions (Aaskoven, 2022, 288-289). After a disappointing electoral results in the 1943 parliamentary election, the party renounced its formal relations with the German occupying authorities and began to disintegrate (Lauridsen, 2002).

⁷In Danish *Dansk National-Socialistisk Arbejderparti*.

⁸However, the party was soon taken over by the South-Danish provincial doctor Frits Clausen, who led the party through most of its existence (Lauridsen, 2002, 87-101).

⁹Even the party's abbreviated name itself was for all due purposes an anagram of its German counterpart's.

¹⁰During the 1930s and 1940s Denmark also had a number of other smaller rivaling Nazi parties, but the DNSAP remained the main representative of the national-socialist movement in Denmark (Christensen, 2022).

3.1 The DNSAP's use of the Danish pre-Christian Past

Throughout its existence, the DNSAP struggled to come up with a coherent policy program and develop its own identity (Lauridsen, 2002, 145-182). Being a (far-right) Danish nationalist party while at the same time being a more or less direct imitation of a German party was a paradox that the party never really overcame (Lauridsen, 2002, 55-61). However, one way in which the party attempted to present itself as a “pure” Danish party was through a heavy use of symbols of the Danish pre-Christian past in its visual and written propaganda. Pre-historic and pre-Christian monuments and archaeological sites – often associated (real or imagined) with the heroic “viking age” – such as burial mounds and rune stones featured prominently in the party’s propaganda.¹¹ The party made replicas of famous Danish archaeological artifacts including a number of bronze blowing horns¹² which was used at party gatherings and ceremonies.¹³ Especially the “viking age” and the supposed virtues associated with this era became an important part of the party’s presentation of itself both internally and externally and the Danish Waffen SS soldiers were presented as the “true heirs” to the vikings. Additionally, names of fallen Danish Waffen SS soldiers were written on rune stones in the party’s written propaganda and a memorial for these designed to look like an ancient burial mound (Lauridsen, 2002, 60-81). Examples of the use of pre-Christian symbols in DNSAP propaganda – from its yearly Christmas magazine¹⁴ – can be seen in Figure 1.

The party clearly attempted to use the Danish pre-historic and pre-Christian past in its propaganda. The question is of course whether this approach was more successful – in terms of attracting voters – in areas where physical manifestations of the pre-historic and pre-Christian was more common.

¹¹It was the party’s luck that one very famous Danish rune stone actually bears a swastika (Lauridsen, 2002, 61).

¹²Of the so-called ‘lur’ type.

¹³Heinrich Himmler even received four of these horns as a gift from the party in late 1940 (Lauridsen, 2002, 67)!

¹⁴Called ‘Jul i Norden’ literally ‘Yule in the North’.

Figure 1: Examples of pre-Christian symbols in DNSAP propaganda ('Yule in the North')



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Notes: Pictures found on the webpage dutchmilitaria.com

4 Data and Empirical Strategy

To test whether the presence of pre-historic and pre-Christian physical manifestations of the past affected the Danish Nazi Party’s vote share, we use a panel of 1435 voting stations¹⁵ in the 1935, 1939 and 1943 Danish lower house parliamentary elections. The data includes the number of votes for each party as well as the population count and number of voters in at voting station. The dataset also contains the number of votes for all parties running in these, including the Danish Nazi Party (DNSAP). We are thus able to calculate vote share for the Danish Nazi Party for all voting stations in all elections. In a later auxiliary analysis, we also calculate and analyze vote shares for the other parties running in these elections. The election publications published by the Danish Statistical Agency serve as the source for this data.

For each of the voting stations, we compute the local density of our main explanatory variable: Visible pre-Christian archaeological sites. We get the location of archaeological sites from The Danish Registry of Archaeological Sites ‘Fund og Fortidsminder’. This contains data on all archaeological sites reported by Danish museums and the National Agency of Culture and Palaces. Each site has a short description, a dating, and a coordinate. We use the subset of archaeological sites related to pre-Christian (before the year 1000) culture which would also be visible in the landscape. They include various types of burial mounds as well as rune stones and some other types of archaeological sites. A full list of these can be found in the appendix.

To convert the geographical point-data of archaeological sites to a measure at the level of the voting station, we use the approach of Bentzen, Boberg-Fazlic, Sharp, Skovsgaard, and Vedel (2026), and compute the potential influence with a kernel estimator known as ‘Market Potential’ (Harris, 1954), which sums inverse distances to the relevant archaeological sites. We limit this to only include sites within 25 km. This measure increases whenever *ceteris paribus* a site is closer to a voting station and whenever the number of archaeological sites increases. Intuitively, this measures all the sites in the relevant area around a voting station but less so, if it is far away. It is computed for each voting station, x , as:

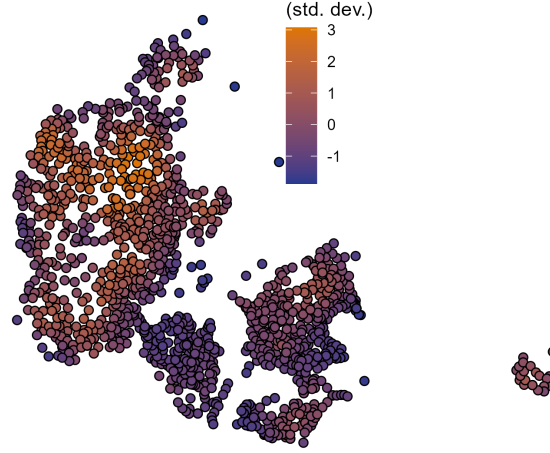
$$Arch_x = \sum_{\forall a} \mathbb{1}[d_{a,x} < 25 \text{ km}](d_{a,x} + 1)^{-1}. \quad (1)$$

Here a is the location of an archaeological site and x is the location of a voting station, $d_{a,x}$ is the great circle distance between a and x and $\mathbb{1}[\cdot]$ is an indicator function which limits the relevant sites to be only those within 25 km. Figure 2a shows the geographical distribution of the potential influence of pre-Christian monuments measured in this way and Figure 2b shows the corresponding Nazi vote shares.

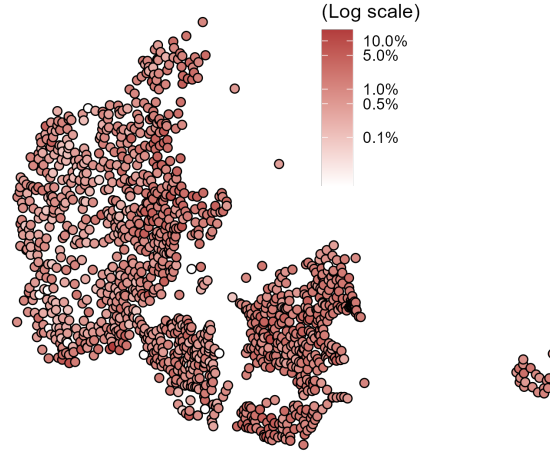
¹⁵Each voting station usually corresponds to either an urban district or a rural municipality.

Figure 2: Maps of the spread of pre-Christian memories and support for the Nazi party

(a) Geographical spread of pre-Christian archaeological sites



(b) Geographical spread of Danish Nazi Party



Notes: Each dot is a voting station. In the first panel the color represents the local density of 107,976 archaeological sites as defined in equation 1. In the second panel the color represents the the vote share for the Danish Nazi Party (DNSAP). The map excludes Northern Schleswig.

We also supplement our data with parish-level demographic data from 1901 from Link Lives (Mathiesen, Robinson, Thomsen, & Revuelta-Eugercios, 2022) and Vedel (2024). From this source we get demographic data for consistent parishes. We do this by finding the closest parish centroid to any of the voting stations. Since we only get data for consistent parishes we can only use controls from this procedure for 1237 of 1341 voting stations. So, this part of the analysis excludes the area of Northern Schleswig, which was part of Imperial Germany until 1920. We choose 1901 for practical and theoretical purposes. For practical purposes since it is the most recent year with available detailed parish-level statistics of the form we need in this project. For theoretical purposes, since we do not want to control for anything potentially endogenous, and 1901 is recent enough that we can feasibly pick up any relevant population densities, but far enough back that endogeneity in the form of reverse causality is a rather limited issue. Table 1 shows summary statistics for the main variables used in the analysis.

Table 1: Summary statistics for main variables

	n	n unique	mean	sd	min	Q25	median	Q75	max
Nazi Vote Share	3981	2809	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.18
Nazi Votes	3981	232	23.86	84.15	0.00	2.00	6.00	15.00	1923.00
Arch (std)	3981	1291	0.00	1.01	-1.89	-0.82	-0.18	0.59	3.08
Voting station	3981	1335							
County	3981	21							
Number of votes	3981	1598	1515.89	3985.75	11.00	394.00	595.00	921.00	67135.00
Dist. to Market Town	3981	1292	9.95	6.31	0.02	5.37	9.19	13.72	54.92
Potential influence of coin findings	3981	1292	12.48	11.76	0.09	3.80	7.92	18.20	81.53

Notes: Summary statistics for the main variables used in the empirical analysis. We also use 74 parish levels variables in a most extensively controlled specification. These account for the share of different soil types, different occupational categories (HISCO major groups) and number of people in different age groups across gender. Summary statistics of these are not included, but the data is publicly available in the projects online repository.

A recent literature highlights the problem of power in empirical analysis (Hollenbach & Egerod, 2024). This problem becomes especially pertinent in our case, where (as will be shown), the central finding is a null-finding. In this case we want to have some certainty that our method has the statistical power to pick up an effect if there were any. Essentially, we want to err on the side of a false positive rather than a false negative. This also has implications for the empirical equation we want to estimate, since we do not want to accidentally control away any effect. We therefore opt for the simplest and most lenient of specifications and gradually adding complexity (at the risk of controlling away a potential effect).¹⁶

The general form of the specification we estimate is:

$$Nazi\ vote\ share_{it} = Arch_i\beta_1 + \mathbf{z}'_{it}\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \varepsilon_{it}. \quad (2)$$

Here β_1 is our parameter of interest: the association between $Arch_i$ - pre-Christian monuments in voting station i - and the vote share for the Danish Nazi Party. As the vote share of the Danish Nazi Party and the density of pre-Christian monuments may be endogenously related to various demographic and geographical factors,¹⁷ we add a set of fixed effects and controls, $\mathbf{z}'_{it}$, with parameters $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$.¹⁸ For the baseline lenient case, we include only an intercept, but in further specifications we include (election) year and year-by-county fixed effects,¹⁹ a second-degree polynomial of longitude and latitude, as well as extensive controls. The controls include the log number of voters at each voting station (to account for size effects and as a proxy for population density), log distance to the closest market town, and non-visible archaeological findings in the form of coin findings. We also include a number of parish-level controls. Finally, we control for interactions between election year and soil types from Pedersen, Hermansen, Nathan, and Tougaard (2011/2019), election year and the 1901 occupational structure (Dahl, Johansen, & Vedel, 2024a)²⁰ as well as election year and demographic measures in 1901.²¹

5 Results

Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the relationship between the potential influence of pre-Christian monuments and the vote share for DNSAP. Both variables are residualized by year and year-by-county fixed effects. The scatterplot does not exhibit a discernible pattern, and the fitted OLS regression line is nearly flat, indicating a weak or nonexistent relationship.

¹⁶In Appendix B we also include a simple estimate of statistical power, which shows that our setup would detect an effect large enough to draw one extra mandate in the parliament at the conventional 80 pct level.

¹⁷E.g., pre-Christian monument density may be lower in urban areas and urbanization may in itself affect Danish Nazi Party vote share.

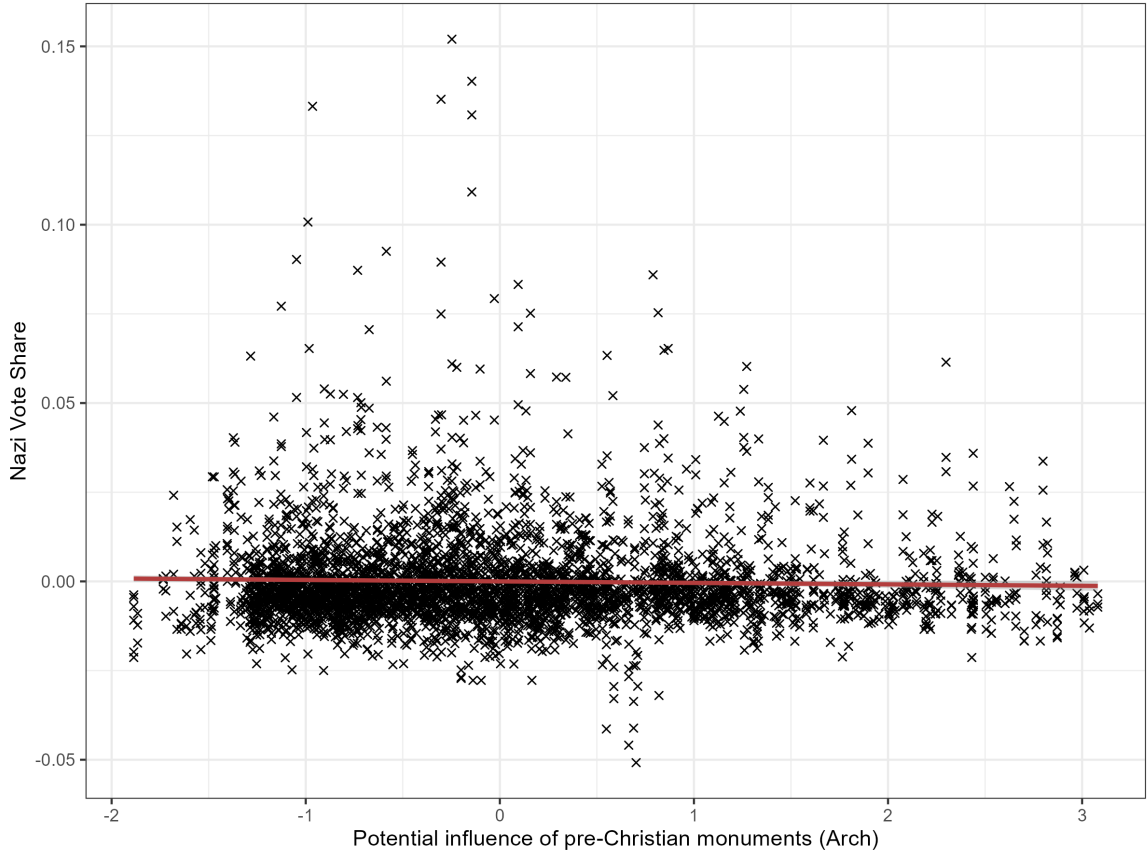
¹⁸See Pepinsky, Goodman, and Ziller (2024) and Homola, Pereira, and Tavits (2024) for a discussion about the role of fixed effects and control variables in historical legacy studies.

¹⁹There are 21 counties in total.

²⁰The HISCO codes for the Danish census data (which we use) is available at Dahl, Johansen, and Vedel (2024b)

²¹For the occupational structure, we include the count of the first-digit-level HISCO codes (Leeuwen, Maas, & Miles, 2002). For demographic controls, we include the number of men and women in the age groups 0-1, 1-5, 5-15, 15-25, 25-35, 35-45, 55-65 and 65-125.

Figure 3: Nazi vote shares and pre-Christian monuments



Notes: Scatterplot of the potential influence of pre-Christian monuments and Nazi vote shares. Both are residualised by year and year $\times$ county fixed effects. The red line is the OLS best fit.

Table 2 presents the main regression results. The dependent variable is the vote share for DNSAP, and the key independent variable is the local density of pre-Christian monuments. Across all specifications, including those with various controls and fixed effects, the coefficient for the density of pre-Christian monuments remains small and statistically insignificant. Column 1 is the most lenient specification, which includes no controls. Column 2 adds year fixed effects and year by county fixed effects. Column 3 further includes geographical controls, such as longitude and latitude polynomials, capturing spatial variations. Column 4 incorporates the log of the number of voters at each voting station, accounting for the size effect. Column 5 adds the log of the distance to the nearest market town and the potential influence of coin findings, reflecting urbanization and historical archaeological activity. Column 6 includes an extensive set of controls: soil types, occupational structure in 1901, and demographic structure in 1901, each interacted with year fixed effects to control for any parish-level time-varying factors.

Generally, we estimate a robust null-effect using our preferred Conley standard errors, which are suitable for the geographical setting. The effects in the most lenient specifications are statistically significant based on the more classical clustered standard errors. However, the sign is the opposite of what the symbolic politics-hypothesis suggests. Moreover, this effect size (optimistically, 0.1 percentage points) is not meaningful for any electoral outcome. The overall robustness of these results, across multiple specifications and controls, underscores the lack of a substantial relationship between pre-Christian monument density and DNSAP vote share, suggesting that local historical symbols did not meaningfully contribute to gathering support for DNSAP.

One thing is whether it had an aggregate effect. Another thing is whether we can find evidence of a relative one. It might not be that pre-Christian monuments did not cause any final meaningful effect, but we might still be able to pick up symbolic politics as a mechanism in higher relative number of voters for the Nazi party. To do this we run the same regressions but based on $\log(Nazi + 1)$ as the outcome instead.²² The results can be found in Table A2 in the appendix, which also includes average partial effects estimates, which suggest that one standard deviation in *Arch* could potentially account for up to 6 voters *lost* for the Danish Nazi Party in the most lenient specification. We also include an estimate in with the levels (not log-transformed) number of voters (Table A3), which implies an alternative assumption on the linearity of *Arch* on voters. However, the qualitative result is the same: A null effect or optimistically a negative effect. Taken together we interpret all of these results as a lack of evidence for the symbolic politics hypothesis in this case.

²²We also tried the alternatives suggested by Chen and Roth (2023). Generally, there are no qualitative changes in effect size and direction except for a small positive effect on the *extensive margin* (whether there were any Danish Nazi Party voters at all at a voting station) in specifications 4 and 5.

Table 2: Votes for the Danish Nazi party and pre-Christian visible monuments

Dependent Variable:	Nazi vote share					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
Arch	-0.0013 (0.0003)*** [0.0010]	-0.0010 (0.0005)** [0.0008]	-0.0008 (0.0005) [0.0008]	-0.0008 (0.0005) [0.0008]	-0.0008 (0.0005) [0.0008]	-0.000045 (0.0006) [0.0014]
<i>Controls</i>						
Year FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year $\times$ county FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Long/lat pol. (2nd deg.)			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
log(Number of voters)				Yes	Yes	Yes
log(Dist. to Market Town)					Yes	Yes
Potential influence of coin findings					Yes	Yes
Soil types $\times$ Year						Yes
Occ. structure 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Demography 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Observations	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,675
Voting stations	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,232

Notes: Estimates of the effect of local density of pre-Christian visible monuments on the share of votes for the Danish Nazi Party. Column 1 shows the simple linear regression result. Column 2 adds year and year by county fixed effects. Column 3 adds geographical controls (long/lat pol.). Column 4 adds a control for the size of the voting station. Column 5 a further control for urbanization as the distance to the closest market town, and a control for archaeological findings in general, in the form of coin findings. Column 6 adds plausibly exogenous parish-level controls. Standard-errors in parentheses clustered at the voting station level. Conley errors at 50km cutoff in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.10$.

5.1 Pre-Christian monuments and vote shares of other parties

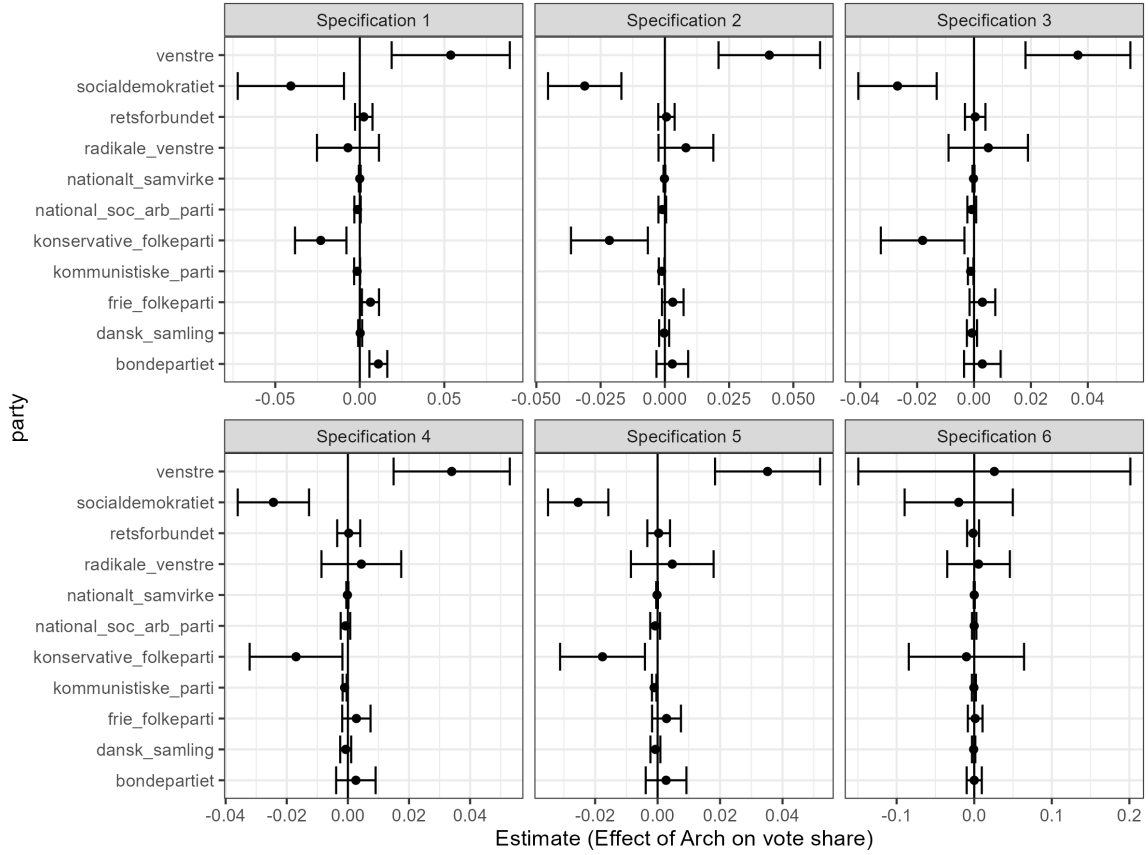
In discordance with our theoretical expectations, the far-right Danish Nazi Party (DNSAP) did not seem to have gotten a greater vote share in areas with more pre-Christian monuments, despite the party's active use of these symbols in their propaganda. However, it is worth to remember that our hypothesis requires two potential mechanisms to work in tandem:

1. *Symbolic politics needs to be a feasible means to rally voters support*
2. *The Danish Nazi party needs to be able to exclusively claim these symbols*

Consequently, if other Danish political parties were also able to use or were associated with the pre-Christian symbols and monuments utilized by the Danish Nazi Party, it is not surprising that this party did not benefit from its use of symbolic politics in areas where these symbols were more common. The question naturally arises whether other parties were more electorally successful in areas with a greater concentration of pre-Christian monuments. To do so, we run the same set of regressions as in Table 2 but replacing the DNSAP vote share with the vote share for each of the other parties that ran in these elections. The result is affirmative for the first part of the mechanism. It was seemingly possible to rally voters based on symbols. However, the party which seemed to have gotten a greater vote share in areas with more pre-Christian monuments was the the party "Venstre", a center-right rural-based party, which had been one of the major parties in Danish politics since the late 19th century. Apart from its pro-rural platform, the party had traditionally also espoused nationalist sentiments. So apparently, a greater concentration of rural-nationalist symbols, such as burial mounds, seemed to have increased the local vote share of this party. Interestingly, the two main Danish parties with a primarily urban constituency, the Conservative People's Party (Konservative Folkeparti) and especially the Social-Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet) seem to receive a lower vote share in areas with a greater concentration of these symbols. However, it is worth to notice that all these effects generally goes to zero with the more extensive number of controls in specification 6.

Symbolic politics may thus have played a role in Danish inter-war politics, but mainly for the mainstream rather than the fringe parties. This is consistent with historical accounts suggesting that the far-right was not the only (political) movement utilizing pre-historic and pre-Christian symbols – which received a lot of mainstream interest during the German occupation of Denmark Lauridsen (2002, 68-69) – and may have copied this approach rather than pioneered it. See for an example the poster in Figure 5 below from 1920 advocating the the unification of (Northern) Schleswig with Denmark in 1920. Historical accounts suggest that the use of pre-historic and pre-Christian monuments, symbols and literature as symbols in Danish nationalism went back to at least the Danish national revival in the 19th century (Adriansen, 2006).

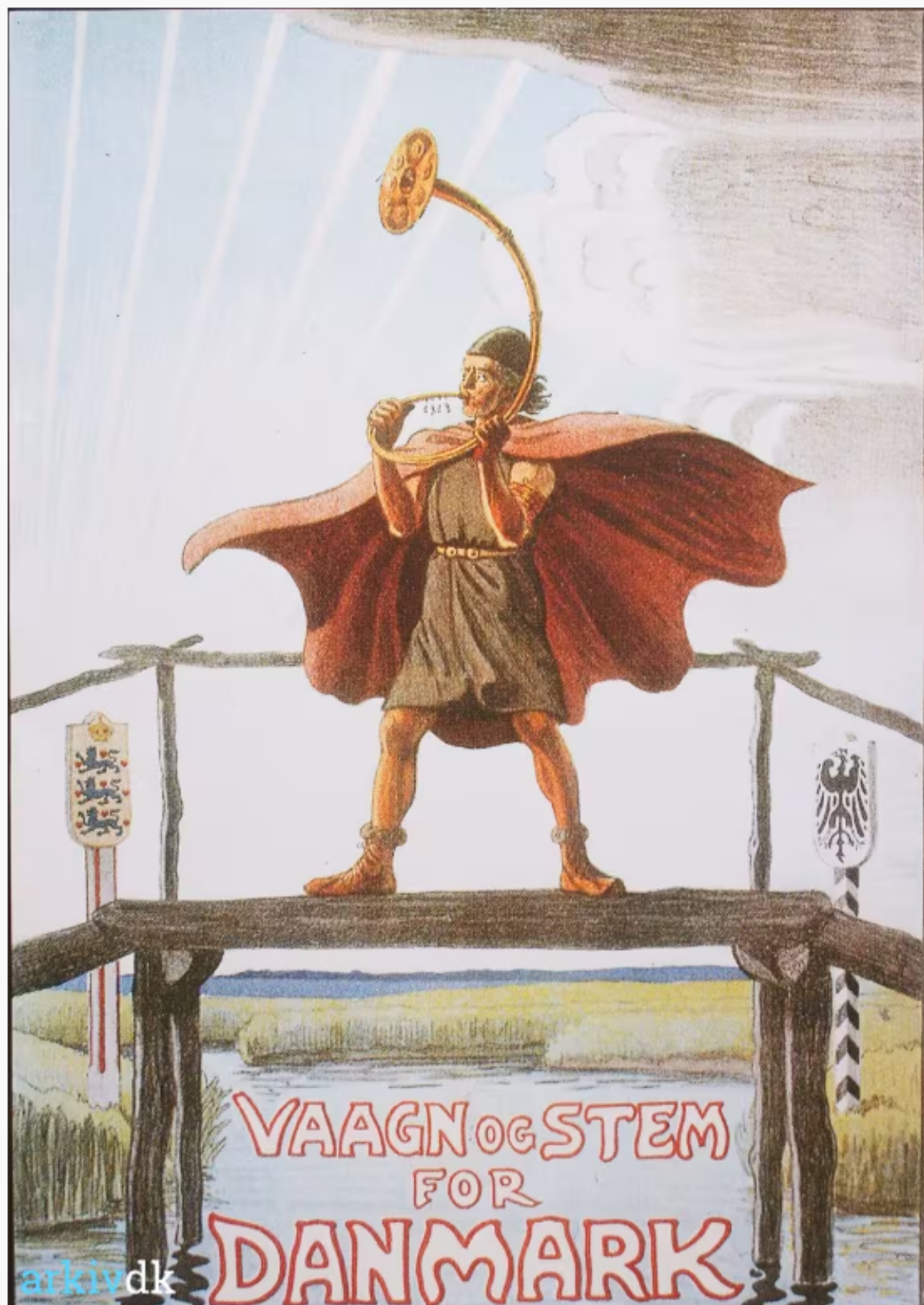
Figure 4: All parties



Notes: This figure shows the parameter estimate of the influence of pre-Christian monuments on each of the parties that ran for election. Each facet represents the corresponding specifications in Table 2.

This leaves the second part of the mechanism as the most feasible explanation for why we do not find an effect of the concentration of pre-Christian monuments on the vote share of the Danish Nazi Party: There seemed to have been an electoral effect of the concentration of pre-Christian monuments – and thus a role for symbol-based politics in Denmark – but this was not something that the Danish Nazi Party were capable of utilizing to their benefit as another party on the (center)-right apparently were even more associated with these symbols. This is further evidenced by the fact, that the Venstre party used the pre-historic “lur” instrument in one of its 1947 electoral poster together with a “mock” rune style font in a style widely used by the Danish Nazi Party previously, see Figure 6.

Figure 5: 1920 Nationalist poster



DNSAP 
**LANDSSTÆVNE
 I KOLDING**
17 & 18 JUNI 1939

VENSTRE
 blæser til Samling!

Hvem
 vinder Valget
 Se Side 7

(b) Venstre electoral poster 1947

17

6 Discussion

Can the far-right benefit electorally from invoking physical manifestations of the past in localities, where these physical symbols are present? In this article, we have explored this question by exploring the effect of the density of pre-Christian monuments and archaeological sites on electoral support for the Danish Nazi Party, a far-right party, which heavily utilized Danish pre-Christian and pre-historic symbols such as rune stones and burial mounds in their agitation.

However, contrary to the expectations, using geocoded data from Danish lower house elections 1935-1943, we do not find that the Danish Nazi party received a greater vote share in localities with a greater concentration of pre-Christian and pre-historic monuments and archaeological sites. If anything, the (mainstream) rural-based center-right party Venstre may have benefited electorally from a greater local concentration of pre-Christian and pre-historic monuments.

Why do we observe these findings? As previously mentioned and plausible related to the our theoretical discussion about the “scope conditions” of the electoral effects of invoking symbolic politics²³ is that the pre-Christian and pre-historic symbols utilized by the Danish Nazi party in their propaganda were general Danish nationalist symbols and had been used as such by many other both previous and contemporary political and cultural actors (Adriansen, 2006). Consequently, the Danish Nazi party could not “monopolize” or gain electorally by invoking such symbols in areas where they were more physically present. Instead more mainstream nationalist political actors – most notable the center-right rural party Venstre – seemed to have benefited from the local concentration of such national symbols in the landscape.

This interpretation may have wider implication for more modern instances of symbolic politics. If symbols – including national symbols – are seen as associated with a wider variety of political and social actors, specific political parties – including those on the far-right – may have more difficulties gaining electorally by invoking such symbols including in areas where these symbols hold greater salience. On the other hand, if mainstream political actors are not utilizing such historical symbols and monuments, parties on the far-right may gain electorally from using these in their agitation, especially in areas where these monuments and other physical symbols are more common. Future research could engage with this issue using both observational and even experimental data from other countries.

Additionally, the null findings of this article – despite plausible theoretical arguments – suggest that the nascent literature on symbolic politics and legacies of the past perhaps should be more open to publish to null findings, and that more more attention should be paid to the scope conditions of the theoretical arguments made in this literature.

²³See again Rozenas and Vlasenko (2022)

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Appendix:

Physical Memories of the Past and Support for the Far-Right:
Evidence from Inter-War Denmark

A Types of archaeological sites used

Table A1: Site types

Site name	n	Site name (in English)
Rundhoej	91453	Round burial mound
Dysse eller jaettestue	5753	Dolmen or passage grave
Langhoej	3547	Long burial mound
Gravroese	2372	Grave mound
Dysse	1274	Dolmen
Stenlaegning/Stensamling	848	Stone setting/stone collection
Bautasten	815	Burial stone
Stenlaegning/stensamling	567	Stone setting/stone collection
Hoejsagn	456	Barrow
Helleristning/billedsten	357	Rock carving/pictograph
Runesten	196	Runestone
Stenraekke	166	Stone row
Skibssaetning	98	Ship setting
Jaettestue	53	Passage grave
Jaettestue med bikammer	18	Passage grave with side chamber
Dansehoej	3	Dance mound

Notes: Site types used in the definition of 'Arch' in Equation 1. The 'Finding interpretation (transl)' column contains translations of the Danish archaeological site types. These translations were provided by ChatGPT.

B Statistical Power

To assess whether our null results could simply reflect low statistical power, we run a simple power analysis based on the baseline specification in Table 2, column (6). Using the estimated standard error on *Arch* and a normal approximation, we compute the minimum detectable effect (MDE) for a two-sided test with $\alpha = 0.05$ and target power of 80 percent. We treat both cluster-robust and Conley (50 km) standard errors as alternative variance estimators and assume that the standard error scales approximately with $1/\sqrt{n}$ around the observed design. As a benchmark for substantive relevance, we define a “minimum meaningful effect” (MME) as the change in vote share needed to obtain one additional parliamentary seat, i.e. $1/149 \approx 0.0067$ (0.671 percentage points). Figure A1 plots the implied MDE as a function of the number of observations and marks the actual sample size of roughly 3,700 station–election observations. Even under the conservative Conley errors, the implied MDE at this sample size lies well below the MME benchmark, indicating that the design would have detected effects large enough to translate into at least one extra seat. The combination of precisely estimated coefficients close to zero and relatively low MDE therefore suggests that any true effect of local pre-Christian monuments on DNSAP vote share, if present at all, is substantively very small.

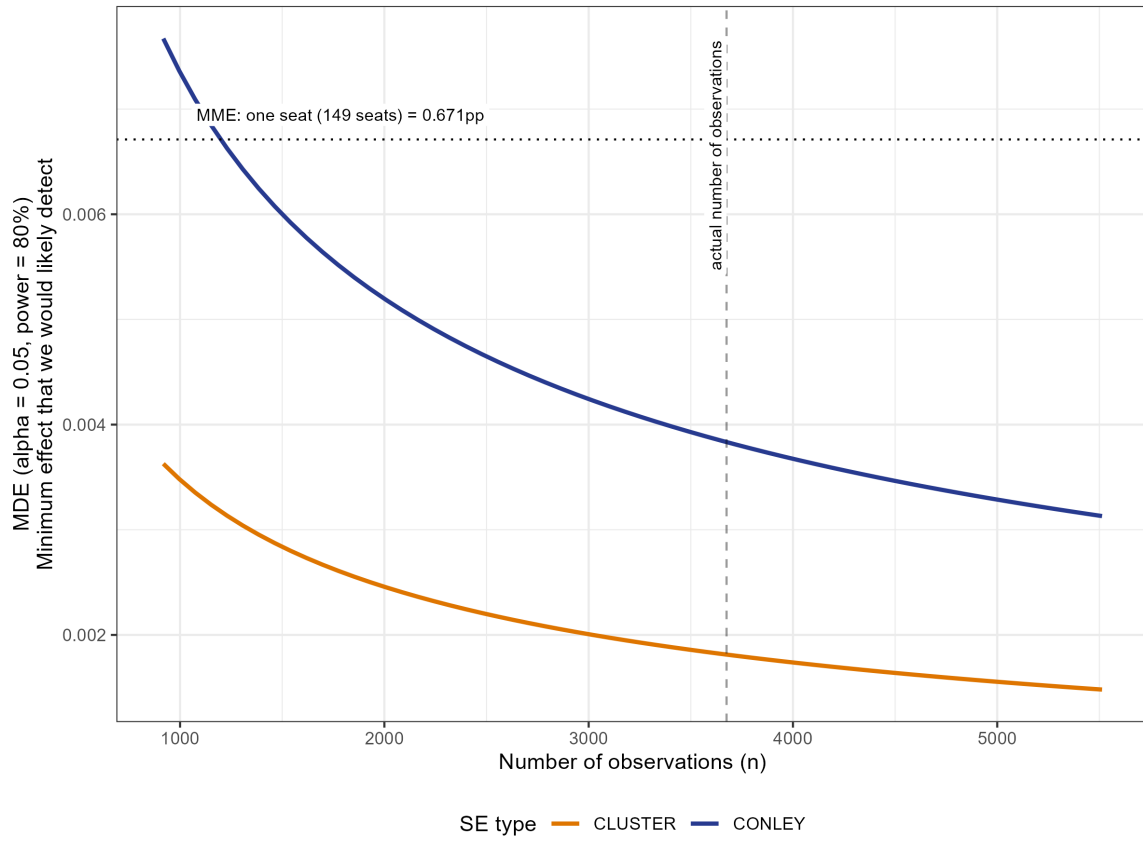


Figure A1: Minimum detectable effect (MDE) as a function of the number of observations n . The solid lines show MDEs based on cluster-robust and Conley (50 km) standard errors. The dotted horizontal line marks the minimum meaningful effect (MME), defined as the vote-share change corresponding to one additional parliamentary seat ($1/149 \approx 0.0067$), and the vertical dashed line indicates the actual number of station-election observations in the baseline regression.

C Additional results

Table A2: Relative effects: $\log(\text{Nazi votes} + 1)$

Dependent Variable:	$\log(\text{Nazi votes} + 1)$					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Arch	-0.2476*** (0.0321)	-0.1088*** (0.0419)	-0.0666 (0.0434)	-0.0357 (0.0275)	-0.0369 (0.0274)	-0.0049 (0.0598)
Average Partial Effect	-5.908	-2.596	-1.589	-0.8513	-0.8807	-0.1179
<i>Controls</i>						
Year FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year $\times$ county FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Long/lat pol. (2nd deg.)			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$\log(\text{Number of voters})$				Yes	Yes	Yes
$\log(\text{Dist. to Market Town})$					Yes	Yes
Potential influence of coin findings					Yes	Yes
Soil types $\times$ Year						Yes
Occ. structure 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Demography 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Observations	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,675
Voting stations	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,232

Clustered (voting station) standard errors in parenthesis

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table A3: Levels: Nazi votes

Dependent Variable:	Nazi votes					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Arch	-13.24*** (1.955)	-5.212*** (1.217)	-4.146*** (1.371)	-3.003*** (1.082)	-3.037*** (1.078)	-0.3107 (2.709)
<i>Controls</i>						
Year FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year $\times$ county FE		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Long/lat pol. (2nd deg.)			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
log(Number of voters)				Yes	Yes	Yes
log(Dist. to Market Town)					Yes	Yes
Potential influence of coin findings					Yes	Yes
Soil types $\times$ Year						Yes
Occ. structure 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Demography 1901 $\times$ Year						Yes
Observations	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,675
Voting stations	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,335	1,232

Clustered (voting station) standard errors in parenthesis

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

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