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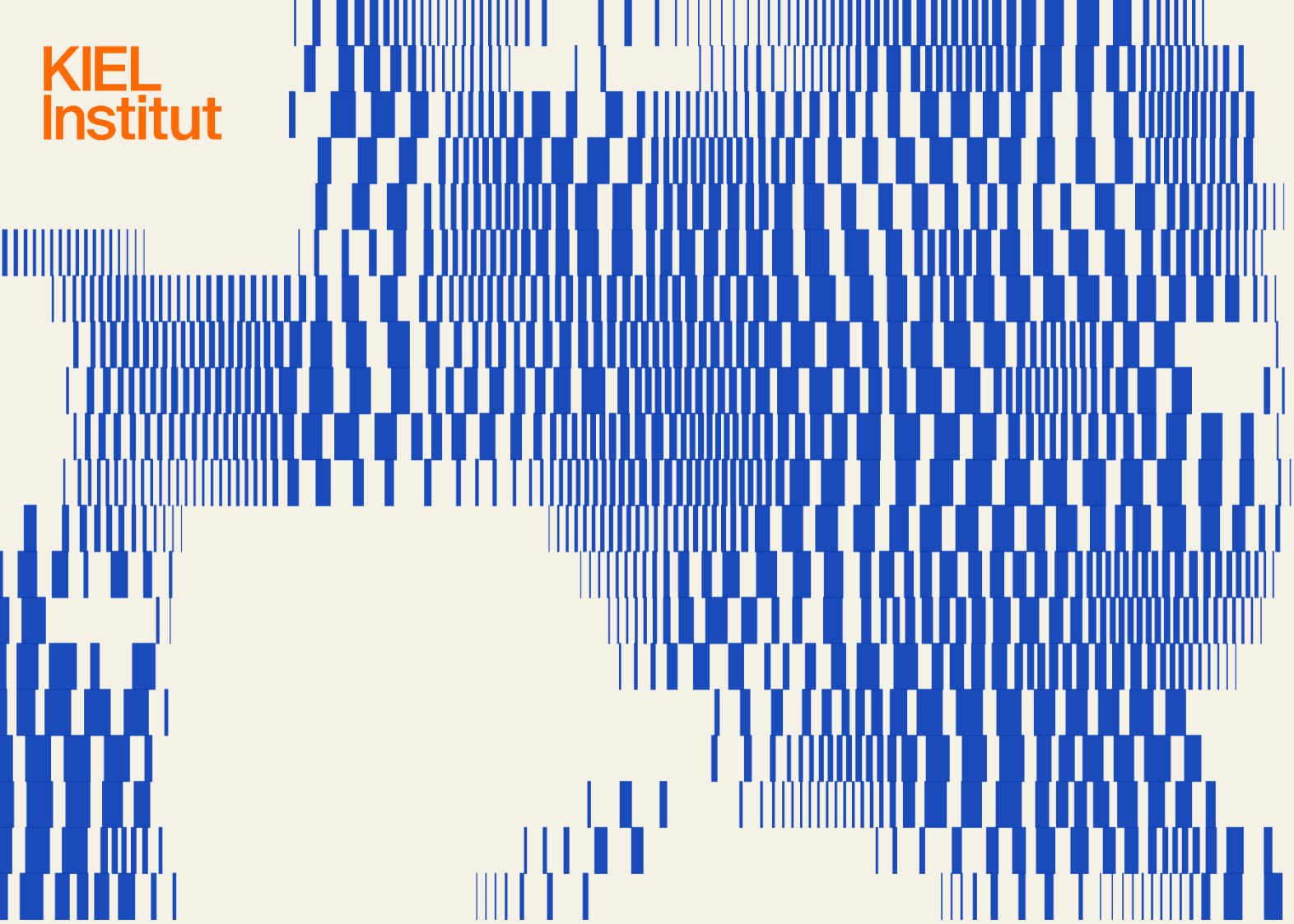

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From Weimar to West Germany: Confessional Cleavages, Party Fragmentation, and Far-Right Voting

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Abstract

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How do social cleavages shape party-system fragmentation, and how does this relationship change when parties organize across instead of along these cleavages? We examine the Catholic–Protestant divide in Germany from Weimar to the postwar period, exploiting the confessional mosaic of Baden and Württemberg. Using data from over 3,000 parishes, we show that fragmentation in Weimar Germany followed a hump-shaped relationship with the local Catholic share, peaking in religiously mixed parishes where a cohesive Catholic bloc coexisted with a fragmented Protestant center-right. During the Great Depression, the Nazi Party consolidated the fragmented Protestant vote. After 1945, the cross-confessional CDU weakened the link between religious cleavages and fragmentation. Yet Catholic areas remained less susceptible to far-right voting, a persistence that survey evidence attributes to church influence rather than policy preferences. Overall, our findings show that the effect of social cleavages on political fragmentation hinges on how parties and organizations mobilize them.

Keywords: Cleavage Politics, Party Fragmentation, Religion, Far-Right Voting, Historical Political Economy, Germany
JELs: N14, D72

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1 Introduction

Consider two neighboring parishes in southwest Germany at the end of the Weimar Republic: the Catholic parish of Dielheim and the Protestant parish of Tairnbach were separated by only a few kilometers and a confessional boundary dating back to the Reformation. In the last free election of the republic in November 1932, Dielheim delivered 75% of its vote to the Catholic *Zentrum* (Center Party). By contrast, Tairnbach had no equivalent party to anchor its Protestant center-right electorate. After years of fragmented bourgeois voting, 87% of Tairnbach's voters flocked to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP). Thirty years later, the landscape had fundamentally changed: the cross-confessional *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (CDU) commanded the greatest share of the vote in both parishes, though it remained stronger in Catholic Dielheim.

This paper asks whether this local contrast reflects a broader pattern across southwestern Germany and to what extent confessional fragmentation in voting persisted after 1945. It thus speaks to a central question in comparative politics and the study of party systems: how do social cleavages shape party-system fragmentation, and how does this effect depend on whether parties mobilize voters within or across these cleavages?

In the cleavage tradition of Lipset & Rokkan (1967), social divisions become politically consequential through their organizational expression (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). Religion is a classic case: confessional life embeds voters in dense associational milieus (Lepsius, 1966) and exposes them to political influence by the clergy (Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018). While there is much evidence showing that NSDAP support was considerably weaker in Catholic areas (e.g. Falter, 2020), existing work focuses on who voted for Hitler and mostly stops in 1933. It therefore leaves open how confession shaped party-system fragmentation more broadly and whether the confessional structuring of electoral competition persisted into the postwar era.

We address these questions using the dense confessional mosaic of Baden and Württemberg. We first quantify how religious cleavages affected political fragmentation and the Nazi vote across parishes in the Weimar Republic, and assess to what extent the CDU's emergence as a

cross-confessional party weakened the link between religion, political fragmentation, and support for the far right after the war. We then use survey evidence to distinguish competing explanations for the confessional gap in voting behavior that remained after 1945. In doing so, we provide new parish-level evidence on how the religious cleavage shaped party-system fragmentation—not only far-right voting—during both the collapse of Weimar and the consolidation of the postwar party system.

Denominational divisions created an asymmetric party landscape on the center-right in the Weimar Republic. Catholics formed a cohesive bloc around the Zentrum, sustained by a strong voting norm rooted in a distinct Catholic milieu and the organizational power of the Church (e.g. Burnham, 1972; Falter, 2020). Protestants, by contrast, lacked any equivalent organizing force on the center-right. Their vote was dispersed across the liberal *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP), the national-liberal *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP), the conservative-nationalist *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP), and a shifting array of smaller bourgeois parties.

This asymmetry implied, as we show in a simple voting model and confirm in our data, that fragmentation followed an inverted U-shape in the local share of Catholics. It was highest where a significant Catholic minority coexisted with a Protestant majority, as in the German Reich as a whole. The cleavages between Catholics and Protestants thus decisively contributed to the fragmentation of Weimar's political system, which arguably made lasting coalitions difficult and undermined the stability of the system (Falter, 2013; Weir & Greenberg, 2022). When voter preferences radicalized under the weight of the Great Depression, the fragmented Protestant vote also provided fertile ground for Nazi mobilization. Catholic voters, in contrast, were largely immunized against the NSDAP through their voting norm for the Catholic Zentrum (Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018; Falter, 2020).

The founding of the CDU as a cross-confessional *Volkspartei* (catch-all party) after World War II offered a potential solution to this problem. A central motivation was to overcome the denominational fragmentation on the center-right by uniting Catholic and Protestant voters under one party (e.g. Rudzio, 2019; Beckmann, 2022). Whether and to what extent the CDU

succeeded in breaking the pattern we document for Weimar, and what explains the persistence of confessional differences when the far-right *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) rose in the late 1960s, are central empirical questions of this paper.

To address these questions and trace the evolution of party fragmentation from the Weimar Republic to West Germany, we assemble new data from over 3,000 parishes in Baden and Württemberg from 1928 to 1969. Parishes are the smallest administrative units in Germany. Existing research on Weimar electoral politics and the rise of the Nazi party has relied primarily on county-level data (e.g. Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018; De Juan et al., 2024)[1] or data from larger cities (e.g. Galofré-Vilà et al., 2021; Doerr et al., 2022). Our parish-level dataset increases the number of observations by roughly a factor of thirty relative to county-level data for southwestern Germany. This level of granularity enables fine-grained comparisons between neighboring parishes that differ in their majority confession, providing new leverage for identifying the relationship between religious composition, party fragmentation, and far-right voting.

Our empirical analysis exploits the confessional patchwork that the Peace of Augsburg (1555) imprinted on southwestern Germany. The region was fragmented into hundreds of small territories during the Middle Ages. These territories adopted the religion of their ruler under the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. This produced sharp Catholic–Protestant boundaries between adjacent localities that persisted into the 20th century. We leverage this historical variation by comparing each parish to its neighboring parishes, thereby holding constant local geography and other neighborhood characteristics while isolating the effect of differences in religious composition.

We find that, in line with our predictions, political fragmentation in the Weimar period exhibited an inverted U-shaped relationship with the Catholic population share. Moreover, the Catholic population share alone explains more than half of the parish-level variation in the NSDAP vote in November 1932, with Nazi support markedly lower in more Catholic parishes. In the postwar period, the fragmentation hump gradually weakens. Fragmentation declined most in confessionally mixed and Protestant parishes, as the CDU increasingly attracted Protestant

[1] Falter & Hänisch (1990a) compiled the election database underlying many of these studies. The database also offers parish-level data, but only for parishes with 2,000 or more inhabitants. Election returns for all parishes, including smaller rural localities, do not exist for Weimar Germany as a whole.

voters. Nevertheless, Catholics continued to vote disproportionately for the CDU throughout the period, while Protestant areas remained more susceptible to the far-right NPD in the late 1960s.

To disentangle the mechanism behind the shrinking but persistent confessional gap in voting, we turn to individual-level survey evidence from the 1968 Baden-Württemberg state election. Protestants and Catholics held virtually identical views on the political questions most associated with NPD support—nationalism, anti-elitism, and resentment of Allied influence. The key difference lay instead in church attachment and the church's perceived political stance. The Catholic Church sent a clear anti-NPD, pro-CDU signal; the Protestant Church's positioning was perceived as more ambiguous. Among devout respondents, NPD support was low in both confessions. The aggregate confessional gap thus reflects both the clarity of the Catholic Church's signal and Catholics' stronger church attachment. Overall, our findings locate the religious cleavage primarily in its organizational dimension (Bartolini & Mair, 1990): confessional identities shaped electoral competition through their mobilization by parties and churches, not simply through differences in political attitudes.

Related literature. Our paper contributes to four strands of research on religious cleavages, party-system fragmentation, and far-right voting. A first literature studies how social divisions structure party systems in Western Europe (see Ford & Jennings, 2020, for a recent review). The classic account by Lipset & Rokkan (1967) identified religious cleavage as one of the most important social divisions shaping the formation and fragmentation of European party systems. Although secularization weakened religious voting across much of Europe, religious identities and church attachment continue to shape party choices (e.g. Elff, 2007; Goldberg, 2020; Gomez, 2022), including in Germany (Elff & Rossteutscher, 2011). We build on this literature by asking how the religious cleavage between Catholics and Protestants shaped not only individual party choice, but also local party-system fragmentation from Weimar to West Germany.[2]

A second literature studies the effect of religion on the electoral success of the NSDAP. The

[2]The empirical literature on the determinants of party-system fragmentation has focused primarily on ethnic cleavages (e.g. Ordeshook & Shvetsova, 1994; Mozaffar et al., 2003; Lublin, 2017), with little attention to religious cleavages (Raymond, 2016).

confessional divide is the strongest predictor of Nazi voting: Catholic areas were less receptive to the NSDAP than Protestant areas, even after accounting for economic distress, social structure, war casualties, and media exposure (King et al., 2008; Adena et al., 2015; Falter, 2020; Galofré-Vilà et al., 2021; Koenig, 2023; De Juan et al., 2024). Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018) provide the most direct quantitative evidence, showing that Catholic voters were insulated from the NSDAP because Catholic priests discouraged Nazi support. Moreover, Becker & Voth (2023) demonstrate that deep-rooted Christian religiosity, more prevalent in Catholic areas, made individuals less susceptible to Nazi propaganda. We revisit the evidence on religion and Nazi voting with parish-level data. This allows us to compare neighboring Catholic and Protestant localities and to connect the confessional gap in voting behavior to the fragmentation of the center-right.

Third, our paper contributes to the study of Christian democracy and the stabilization of the postwar party system. The CDU presented itself as a cross-confessional *Volkspartei*, uniting former Zentrum Catholics with Protestant conservatives and liberals instead of recreating the confessional party system of the Weimar Republic (Kalyvas, 1996; Mitchell, 2012; Rudzio, 2019; Beckmann, 2022). This cross-confessional strategy was designed to overcome the fragmentation of the center-right in the Weimar era. We provide quantitative evidence on whether it succeeded. Specifically, we demonstrate that the relationship between religious composition and political fragmentation weakened over time as the CDU increasingly attracted Protestant voters, thereby reducing electoral divisions along confessional lines.

Finally, we contribute to research on confessional differences in far-right voting. When the NPD rose in the late 1960s, it attracted disproportionate support in Protestant areas (Klingemann, 1971), echoing the Weimar pattern. More recent studies likewise document confessional divides in support for the far right in Germany (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Haffert, 2022). The sources of these differences, however, remain contested. They may reflect underlying political preferences, the influence of religious milieus (Haffert, 2022), or church leaders' efforts to steer voters toward some parties and away from others (Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018). Using individual-level survey

data, we show that the confessional gap in NPD voting was driven primarily by the perceived clarity of church signals rather than differences in underlying preferences. Moreover, strong church attachment reduced NPD support, mirroring contemporary evidence for Western Europe (e.g. Immerzeel et al., 2013; Marcinkiewicz & Dassonneville, 2022).

2 Conceptual Framework

We adapt the logic of Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018) to illustrate our hypotheses on the impact of confessional composition on political fragmentation and far-right voting. We first explore local[3] voting patterns in the Weimar Republic, then turn to postwar West Germany.

Weimar Republic

Suppose that voters in the Weimar Republic could choose between the following six parties, ordered from left to right on the political spectrum: *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), DDP, Zentrum (Z), DNVP, and NSDAP. The five non-Nazi parties are often grouped into three blocs, the left/Marxist (KPD, SPD), the Catholic (Z), and the Protestant bourgeois (DDP, DNVP) camps (Burnham, 1972; Shively, 1972).

A voter i of denomination $r \in \{c, p\}$ votes for the party X that maximizes her utility U_i^r, which depends (negatively) on the deviation of the party's ideological position from her own position t_i. Catholics derive additional utility from voting Z, reflecting a positive political voting norm grounded in a distinct Catholic culture and milieu (e.g. Burnham, 1972; Falter, 2020) or the directives of the clergy (Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018). Protestants, on the other hand, lose utility by voting for Z as the party of Catholics. Utility can thus be expressed as

$$U_i^r(X) = \begin{cases} -(X - t_i)^2 + \lambda^r & \text{for } X = Z, \\ -(X - t_i)^2 & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

where $\lambda^c > 0$ and $\lambda^p < 0$ reflect the utility gain or loss from voting Zentrum as a Catholic or Protestant, respectively. We assume that Catholics and Protestants have the same distribution

[3]Of course, the fragmentation of the Weimar parliament ultimately depends on Germany-wide vote shares. However, in Germany's proportional voting system, national-level vote shares are the sum of local votes, so local voting patterns are the building blocks of national vote shares (and fragmentation).

of preferences. This assumption deliberately rules out preference differences as the primitive source of confessional voting gaps: any difference in party choice arises from the voting norm, not from Catholics and Protestants occupying different ideological positions.[4]

We can integrate over voter preferences to calculate party vote shares for an all-Catholic electorate and an all-Protestant electorate. We use these vote shares to calculate the effective number of electoral parties N^r as a standard measure of political fragmentation (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979):

$$N^r = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(p_i^r)^2} \quad \text{for} \quad r \in \{c, p\}\,, \tag{2}$$

where n is the number of parties and p_i^r is the vote share of party i among voters of denomination r. If we are willing to assume that the voting behavior of Protestants and Catholics does not depend on their local share of the population, we can also calculate the fragmentation index for denominationally mixed parishes:

$$N(share_c) = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(share_c \cdot p_i^c + share_p \cdot p_i^p)^2}, \tag{3}$$

where $share_c$ and $share_p$ are the shares of Catholics and Protestants in the local population (we set $share_p = 1 - share_c$ for simplicity).

1928 election. We first consider the framework's predictions for a moderate electorate, as in the 1928 Reichstag election. Panel (a) of Figure 1 shows the utility-maximizing party choice for voters of different ideological types, separately for Catholic and Protestant voters.[5] Because of the positive political voting norm, Catholic center-right voters vote Zentrum. The Protestant center-right vote, on the other hand, is split between the more liberal DDP and the conservative DNVP. The Zentrum also draws votes from Catholic voters positioned on the moderate left and far right who, without the positive voting norm, would have voted SPD or NSDAP.

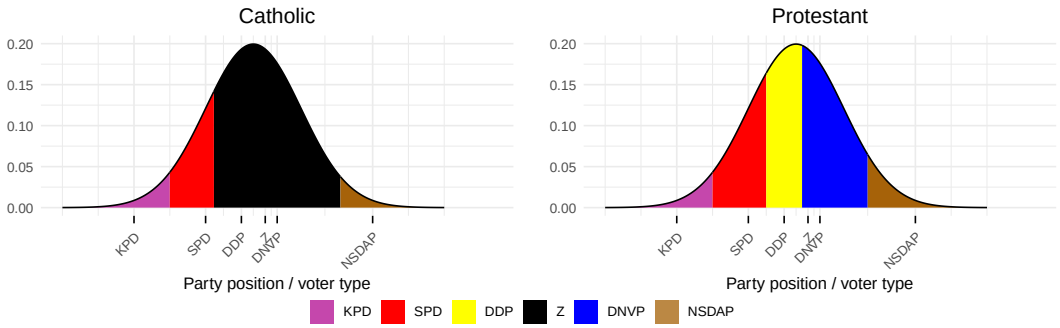
Figure 2 shows the key novel aspect of our analysis, the predicted fragmentation by local denominational composition; the red line refers to the 1928 election. The effective number of

[4]The individual-level evidence we present for 1968 is consistent with this assumption in the postwar period, showing similar nationalist and anti-establishment views across confessions (see Section 6).

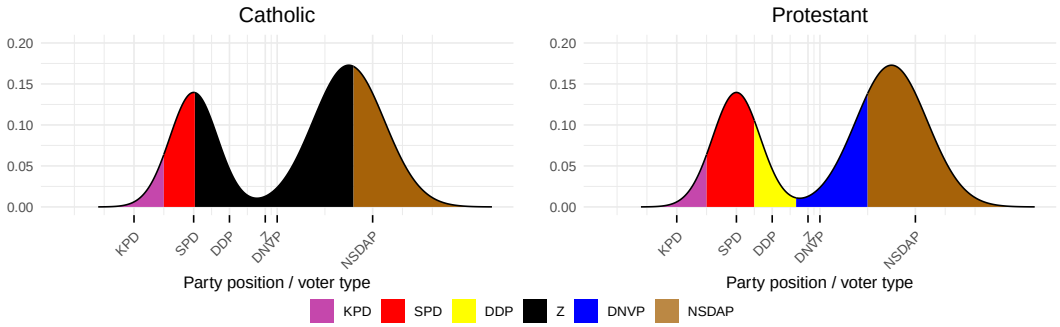
[5]The figure is for an electorate that is moderately center-right, as is likely in our mostly rural parishes.

Figure 1: Confessional voting in the Weimar Republic: Predictions

(a) 1928: Moderate electorate



(b) 1932: Radicalized electorate



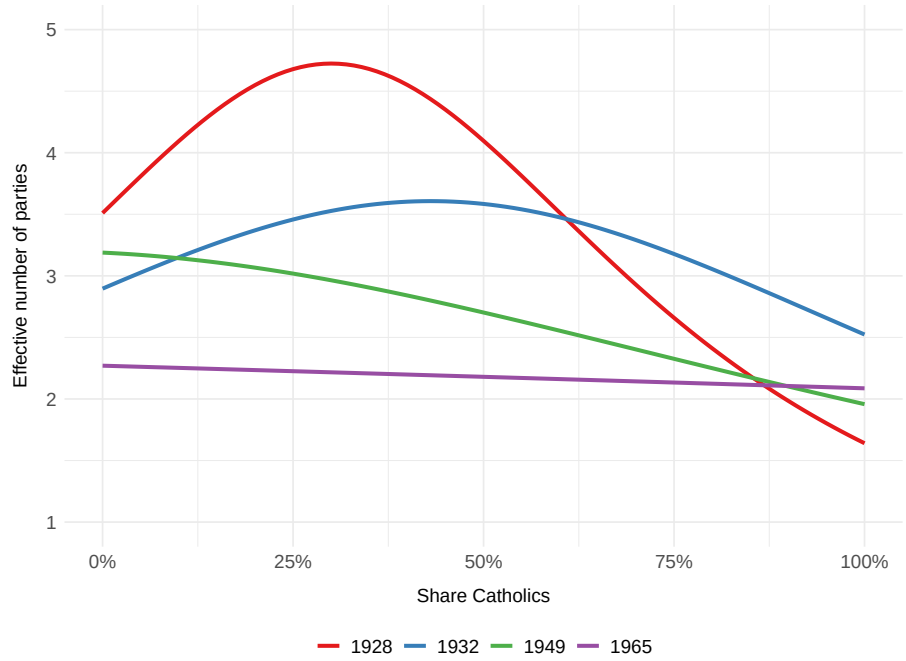
Notes: The figure sketches the predictions of our conceptual framework regarding the voting preferences of the electorate by voter type. We distinguish between Catholic and Protestant voters. Panel (a) illustrates the predictions for a moderate electorate, as in the 1928 election, and panel (b) illustrates the predictions for a radicalized electorate, as in the 1932 election.

parties follows an inverted U-shape in the proportion of Catholics. An all-Catholic electorate is the least fragmented, given the dominance of the Zentrum. Protestant electorates are much more fragmented. Electorates with a significant Catholic minority are the most fragmented, reflecting the presence of two blocs on the center-right—a Catholic and a fragmented Protestant one.

Appendix Figure A-1 shows the party vote shares underlying Figure 2 for an all-Catholic electorate, an all-Protestant electorate, and a mixed electorate that is one-third Catholic and two-thirds Protestant (roughly the share for the *Reich* as a whole). While the Catholic (Z) and Protestant bourgeois (DDP, DNVP) camps have clear majorities in their respective electorates, neither camp necessarily wins a majority in confessionally mixed settings.[6] Catholic-Protestant antagonism thus increased fragmentation and made stable coalition-building more difficult.

[6] In more urban settings, of course, potential majorities for the left/Marxist camp would also apply.

Figure 2: Fragmentation by local denominational composition: Model Predictions



Notes: The figure shows the effective number of political parties as a function of the local share of Catholics (see equation (3)), as predicted by our conceptual framework. We distinguish between the predictions for the 1928, 1932, 1949, and 1965 elections.

1932 election. Next, we consider the November 1932 Reichstag election, which was the last before the Nazis seized power in January 1933. As in Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018), we assume that in response to the Great Depression and the perceived inability of the political center to deal with the crisis, voter preferences bifurcate, with the extremes on both sides gaining traction relative to 1928. As long as their preferences are not too far to the right, Catholic voters are insulated from the NSDAP by their voting norm for the Zentrum. While the NSDAP makes large gains among both Catholics and Protestants, the gains are much larger among Protestants. The NSDAP vote share in 1932 is therefore decreasing in the local share of Catholics. At the same time, the rise of the NSDAP reduces political fragmentation in Protestant parishes by consolidating most votes on the right of the political spectrum. In Catholic areas, by contrast, fragmentation increases as the electorate moves to the right.

Summary. We summarize the predictions of our conceptual framework for the Weimar Republic in Hypotheses 1a and 1b below, and test them empirically in Section 4.

Hypothesis 1a ***Fragmentation***—*Political fragmentation in the 1928 Weimar election follows an inverted U-shape in the proportion of Catholics: lowest in all-Catholic parishes and highest in parishes with a significant Catholic minority. Between 1928 and 1932, fragmentation decreases in all-Protestant parishes and increases in all-Catholic parishes.*

Hypothesis 1b ***Nazi Vote***—*Parishes with a higher proportion of Catholics show a smaller increase in the NSDAP vote between 1928 and 1932 and a lower NSDAP vote in 1932.*

Federal Republic of Germany

The most important innovation in the postwar political landscape was the founding of the CDU as a cross-confessional *Volkspartei*. Unlike the Zentrum, the CDU sought to integrate Catholic and Protestant voters under a common Christian label. One core motivation was to overcome the political fragmentation of Weimar on the center-right—and thus the political instability that had characterized the first German democracy (e.g. Rudzio, 2019; Beckmann, 2022). In the 1950s and 1960s, the CDU further consolidated the center-right by absorbing supporters of smaller right-wing parties such as the *Deutsche Partei* (DP).

We capture this change on the supply side by applying the same voting framework to the postwar party system. Voters again choose among parties ordered from left to right. In the early Federal Republic, the relevant choice set consists of KPD, SPD, *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP), CDU, and smaller right-wing parties such as the DP. The CDU replaces the Zentrum as the main center-right anchor, but with a crucial difference: it seeks to bind Catholic and Protestant voters within the same party. Over time, the KPD disappeared after its ban in 1956, while the DP lost electoral relevance as the CDU consolidated the center-right. For the 1968 state and 1969 Bundestag elections, we add the NPD as the relevant party at the right extreme.

The Catholic clergy supported the CDU early on, so that the refounded Zentrum was only a splinter party in West Germany. At the same time, this clerical support opened the CDU

to accusations of representing primarily Catholic interests. The Protestant Church avoided party-political positioning and engaged openly with the SPD (Besier, 1990).

We therefore let λ^r denote the voting norm for the CDU among voters of denomination r in the postwar period. Whereas $\lambda^p < 0$ in the Weimar Republic captured Protestants' aversion to the Catholic Zentrum, we assume $\lambda^p \geq 0$ after 1949, reflecting the CDU's cross-confessional appeal. In the early postwar period, however, λ^c was still larger than λ^p, reflecting the Catholic clergy's stronger initial endorsement of the CDU.[7] Chancellor Adenauer emphasized the CDU's non-denominational character by balancing Protestants and Catholics across his cabinet ministries from the second cabinet onward. We model the CDU's increasing credibility as a cross-confessional party by assuming that λ^p approaches λ^c over time.

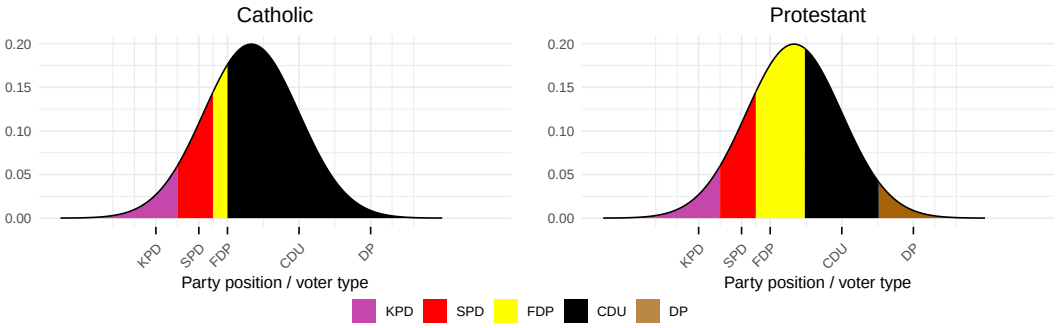
1949 and 1965 elections. Panels (a) and (b) of Figure 3 show the party choice of voters of different ideological types in the 1949 and 1965 Bundestag elections, separately for Catholic and Protestant voters. The green and purple lines in Figure 2 show the respective fragmentation index for the two elections. The key prediction is that the emergence of the CDU significantly reduced political fragmentation on the center-right. The decrease in fragmentation from the prewar to the postwar period should be strongest in Protestant and mixed parishes. The fragmentation hump should therefore flatten in the 1950s and 1960s as the CDU gains acceptance as a cross-confessional party.

1968 and 1969 elections. In the 1968 Baden-Württemberg state election, the NPD received 9.8% of the vote, its best result ever. The NPD's rise is typically attributed to Germany-wide factors, such as the first postwar recession in the mid-1960s, the formation of the Grand Coalition between the CDU and SPD in November 1966, and the onset of student protests. We use this election to test whether a strong norm of voting CDU had taken hold also among Protestant voters by the late 1960s. We again assume that voter preferences bifurcated in response to these

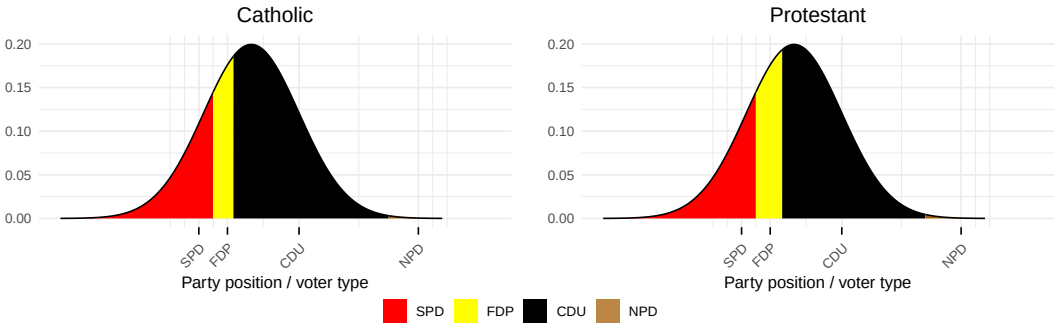
[7] Survey evidence from 1968 is consistent with this assumption: respondents of both confessions perceived their church as favorably disposed toward the CDU, but Catholics perceived a stronger pro-CDU signal than Protestants (see Figure 10, Appendix Figure A-7, and Section 6).

Figure 3: Confessional voting in the Federal Republic of Germany: Predictions

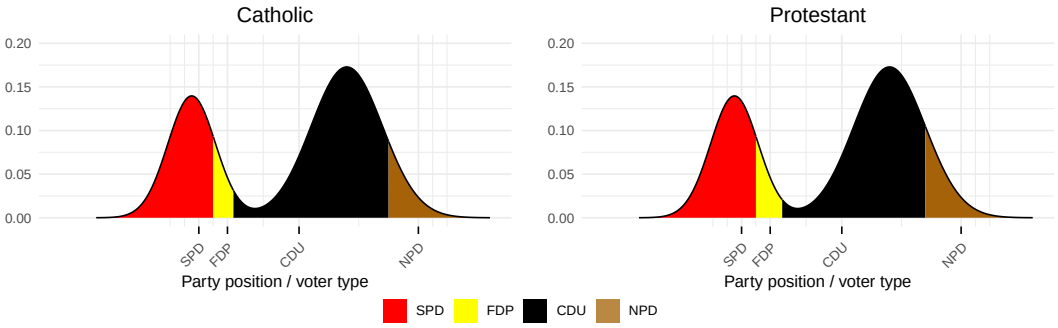
(a) 1949: Moderate electorate, $\lambda^c \gg \lambda^p > 0$



(b) 1965: Moderate electorate, $\lambda^c \geq \lambda^p > 0$



(c) 1968/69: Radicalized electorate, $\lambda^c \geq \lambda^p > 0$



Notes: The figure sketches the predictions of our conceptual framework regarding the voting preferences of the electorate by voter type. We distinguish between Catholic and Protestant voters. Panels (a) and (b) illustrate the predictions for a moderate electorate, as in the 1949 and 1965 elections, and panel (c) illustrates the predictions for a radicalized electorate, as in the 1968 state and 1969 Bundestag elections.

crises. In the model, the center-right norm of voting CDU limits the NPD's rise. If the norm remained stronger among Catholics, the model still predicts lower NPD support in Catholic parishes (see panel (c) of Figure 3). The same reasoning applies to the 1969 Bundestag election, which forms the basis of our parish-level analysis in Section 5.

Summary. We summarize the predictions of our conceptual framework for postwar West Germany in Hypotheses 2a and 2b below, and test them empirically in Section 5.

Hypothesis 2a ***Fragmentation***—*Relative to the prewar period, political fragmentation decreases mainly in Protestant and denominationally mixed parishes. The fragmentation hump in the share of Catholics becomes increasingly flat in the 1950s and 1960s.*

Hypothesis 2b ***NPD Vote***—*Parishes with a higher proportion of Catholics show a lower NPD vote in the late 1960s. However, the confessional gap in NPD support is substantially smaller than the corresponding gap in Nazi support in 1932.*

3 Data and Empirical Strategy

Data. Our data cover all civil parishes (*Gemeinden*) in Baden and Württemberg. We use administrative borders as of 1939, merging some parishes to maintain consistency over 1928–1969. The resulting dataset covers 3,180 parishes. The median parish area is 8.56 square kilometers, and the median 1925 population size was 662. Most parishes were religiously homogeneous: 82 percent had more than 90 percent adherence to a single denomination.

Electoral data on federal and state elections come from several sources. For the Weimar period, our primary source is Falter & Hänisch (1990b), who provide parish-level data for Reichstag elections in Baden between 1924 and 1933. Following Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018), we focus on the November 1932 election. Comparable parish-level data for Württemberg are available only for the state election of 24 April 1932 (Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt, 1932). Consequently, our prewar analysis focuses primarily on Baden. For the postwar period, we assemble parish-level data for Baden-Württemberg from the state's online archive, and cross-check

it against published volumes (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, 2026). Baden-Württemberg was created in 1952 through the merger of the former states of Baden and Württemberg with the small Prussian province of Hohenzollern.

Religious composition, our main explanatory variable, and socioeconomic controls come from population and occupation censuses. These censuses provide information on population size, the female population share, and the sectoral composition of the workforce. For Baden, the prewar data come from the 1925 census (Falter & Hänisch, 1990b). For Württemberg, data are drawn from the 1933 census (Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt, 1935), except for religious composition, which is available from the 1925 census. The 1933 Württemberg census also reports unemployment rates, which are unavailable for Baden. For the postwar period, we use the 1950, 1961, and 1970 censuses for Baden-Württemberg (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, 2026). We also construct geographical controls, including soil type, river access, and terrain ruggedness.

We supplement the parish-level data with individual-level survey data from the 1968 Baden-Württemberg state election (Klingemann, 2012). The post-election survey sampled 895 respondents representative of the electorate in Baden-Württemberg. The survey contains information on respondents' voting behavior and focuses on questions related to the rise of the right-wing NPD, including respondents' attitudes toward the NPD and toward nationalism. Crucially, the survey also contains information on respondents' religious affiliation and church attachment, as well as their perceptions of the churches' party-political positions.

Appendix A gives an overview of all sources used.

Specifications. Let y_{it} denote a political outcome of interest of parish i in year t, including the NSDAP vote share in Weimar Germany, the NPD vote share in West Germany, and measures of political fragmentation in both German states. Vote shares are measured as percentages of valid votes, and political fragmentation is measured by the effective number of electoral parties (see equation (2)). To assess the relationship between Catholic population share and these outcomes, we estimate OLS regression models of the following type:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \beta CatholicShare_{it} + f(lat_i, lon_i) + \mathbf{X}_{it}\gamma + \epsilon_{it}. \tag{4}$$

Here, $CatholicShare_{it}$ refers to the percent share of Catholics in the population, $f(lat_i, lon_i)$ is a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude to capture spatial trends, $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ is a (row) vector of control variables, and ϵ_{it} is an error term. For Weimar outcomes, we measure religious composition in 1925; for postwar outcomes, we use religious composition in 1950.

The parameter of interest is β. It indicates the (percentage) point change in vote shares and fragmentation associated with a one-percentage point increase in a parish's share of Catholics, holding other factors constant. For fragmentation outcomes, where our conceptual framework predicts an inverted U-shape, we also include quadratic and cubic terms in $CatholicShare_{it}$. Control variables include the local share of Jews, of women, of workers, population size (in logs), the employment share in industry, as well as geographical controls for soil types, elevation, and area, in line with the literature.

We address remaining concerns that unobserved variables are driving the relationship between the religious composition of parishes and political outcomes in three ways: first, by using only within-county variation; second, by demeaning the data with respect to a close neighborhood of parishes; and third, by comparing religious enclaves with their neighboring communities. As a robustness check, we also estimate IV regressions using parishes' religious confessions in 1619 as an instrumental variable, following Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018).

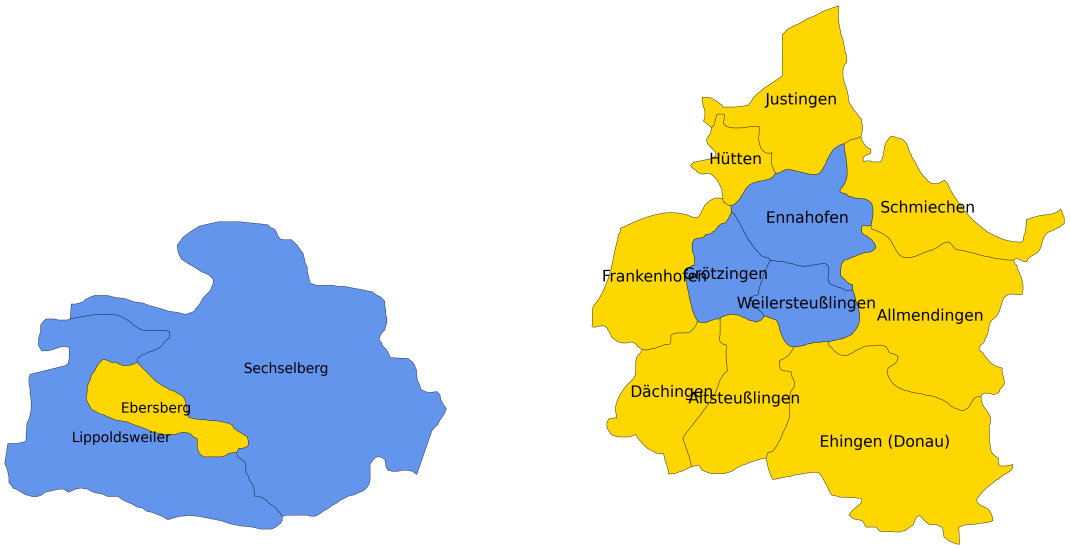
Within-county variation. Our first identification strategy uses only within-county variation, adding county-fixed effects to equation (4). At the time, Baden and Württemberg had 103 counties. With a median size of 322 square kilometers, these counties are comparatively small administrative units that serve as the unit of analysis in many papers on the Nazi Party's electoral success (e.g. Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018; Falter, 2020; Becker & Voth, 2023). By comparing parishes within these counties, we exploit variation only in the religious composition of nearby parishes, which should differ little in observable–and, by extension, unobservable–characteristics. We provide evidence in line with this argument below.

Within-neighborhood variation. Our second identification strategy transforms equation (4) by subtracting the respective mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of the centroid of each parish from the dependent and independent variables. We choose this radius to ensure that each parish has at least one neighbor within it. This approach is similar to our first identification strategy; however, instead of comparing parishes within administrative boundaries, we compare parishes within geographic neighborhoods. Both identification strategies have also been proposed to deal with strong spatial autocorrelation (Becker et al., 2025; Müller & Watson, 2024).

Religious enclaves. Our third strategy relies on "historical accidents" that created several religious enclaves in Baden and Württemberg. We define a religious enclave as one or more parishes of one Christian denomination that are surrounded by parishes of the other denomination. Again, the idea behind the identification strategy is that the surrounding communities serve as a suitable control group because they likely differ from the enclaves only in their Christian denomination. Empirically, we restrict the sample to enclave parishes and their surrounding communities, include fixed effects for each enclave case, and add a control for enclave parishes. There are a total of 44 enclave cases in Baden and Württemberg, with a total sample size of 450 parishes (meaning the enclaves and their neighbors).

Figure 4 displays two examples (see Appendix B for a list of all cases). The left panel shows the Catholic parish of Ebersberg, surrounded by the Protestant villages of Sechselberg and Lippoldsweiler. In 1654, Ebersberg was sold to Jeremias Vollmar Schenk von Winterstetten, who invoked *cuius regio, eius religio* to reintroduce Catholicism, pressuring inhabitants to convert; those unwilling emigrated. The right panel shows the "Lutheran Mountains" (*Lutherische Berge*), consisting of the Protestant communities of Ennahofen, Grötzingen, and Weilersteußlingen. The area takes its name from Duke Ludwig of Württemberg, who introduced the Reformation there in 1581 after the Steußlingen territory reverted to him as a fief, leaving the surrounding villages Catholic.

Figure 4: Religious Enclaves in Baden-Württemberg



Notes: The figure shows two examples of enclave cases in our data. Yellow parishes are Catholic; blue parishes are Protestant. See the main text for historical background on the two cases.

Instrumental variables regression. As a robustness check, we follow Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018) and use the religious situation at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War as an instrumental variable for the religion of voters 300 years later. Specifically, we assign each parish the religion of the lord who reigned over the corresponding area in 1619. For the exclusion restriction to hold, the choices of rulers in the 16th and early 17th centuries must be uncorrelated with unobserved factors that determine election outcomes in Weimar and West Germany. Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018, p. 27) argues that, conditional on covariates, "identification in our IV approach comes from idiosyncrasies in rulers' choices." While this is plausible, the instrument strongly predicts the endogenous variable in our case.[8] This strong first stage reduces concerns about weak instruments. At the same time, it implies that the variation isolated by the IV regressions is close to the variation used in our OLS specifications.

[8]Conditional on covariates and county-level fixed effects, the share of Catholics is 83 percentage points higher in parishes that were already Catholic in 1619. The residual R2 of the first stage regression is 0.91.

Standard errors. We report standard errors clustered at the county level to allow for arbitrary forms of correlation in the residuals of nearby parishes. In our regressions involving enclaves, we cluster standard errors at the case level where a case refers to the enclave and its surrounding control parishes.

Comparison between nearby parishes in predetermined characteristics. Our core identification strategies all exploit variation in religious composition across nearby parishes. We define "nearby" in three ways: being located in the same county, being within a 10-kilometer radius, or being adjacent to a religious enclave. The logic is straightforward. Neighboring parishes should be similar in predetermined characteristics, alleviating concerns that unobserved local factors drive the relationship between a parish's religious composition and its political outcomes.

Table 1 supports our empirical strategy. The table documents significant differences in predetermined characteristics between parishes that are more than 90% Catholic (Column 1) or Protestant (Column 2). Longitude and latitude data show that Catholic parishes, on average, are more likely to be located in the south and west of the study area. They are also more likely to be located at higher altitudes, in river valleys, and in hilly areas. Column (3) shows that many of these differences are statistically significant in unconditional regressions of predetermined characteristics on religious makeup in 1925.

Columns (4) through (6) show that our identification strategies level out these differences. Column (4) reports differences between Catholic and Protestant parishes within counties (from regressions of each characteristic on the 1925 share of Catholics and county fixed effects). The differences shrink markedly for all characteristics, though smaller differences in soil type persist. Column (5) applies the same 10 km spatial-difference transformation to each characteristic and to the Catholic share. Again, the differences shrink considerably and mostly become statistically insignificant. Finally, Column (6) restricts the sample to religious enclaves and their surrounding parishes, comparing only neighboring parishes. None of the differences remain statistically significant at the 5% level (although the small sample size may contribute to this result).

Note that parishes of different denominations in close proximity need not share similar

Table 1: Comparison of Predetermined Characteristics between Protestant and Catholic Parishes

	Averages:		Catholic Coefficient:			
			Un-	Within transformation		
	Catholic	Protestant	conditional	Counties	Neighborhoods	Enclaves
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Longitude	8.911	9.120	-0.002*	0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Latitude	48.315	48.762	-0.005***	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000
	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Average elevation (*in m*)	518.721	424.052	1.057***	0.082	-0.007	-0.008
	(5.783)	(4.907)	(0.303)	(0.146)	(0.042)	(0.043)
River access (%)	8.416	6.093	0.018	0.030	0.025	0.032
	(0.739)	(0.691)	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.017)	(0.042)
Area (*sq. km*)	10.489	9.738	0.008	0.001	-0.004	0.012
	(0.197)	(0.232)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.014)
Soil type (in %):						
Coastal area and bog soils	0.544	0.226	0.004	-0.004	-0.006	-0.007
	(0.123)	(0.097)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.007)
Broad river valleys	13.871	4.751	0.089***	0.003	0.002	-0.014
	(0.761)	(0.579)	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.013)	(0.020)
Undulating lowlands and hilly areas	21.262	0.114	0.234***	0.006	0.007	0.017*
	(1.001)	(0.078)	(0.051)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.010)
Loess area	9.774	25.177	-0.174***	-0.077**	-0.051***	0.007
	(0.625)	(1.043)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.017)	(0.022)
Mountain and hill soils	54.163	69.446	-0.156**	0.070*	0.045**	-0.008
	(1.215)	(1.138)	(0.063)	(0.036)	(0.018)	(0.020)
Alpine soils	0.311	0.286	0.001	0.003	0.004**	0.005
	(0.052)	(0.051)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.004)

Notes: The table reports group mean values of predetermined local characteristics for Catholic parishes (Column (1)) and Protestant parishes (Column (2)), defined as parishes with at least 90% adherence to the respective denomination. Columns (3)–(6) present coefficients from regressions of each characteristic listed in the left column on the local share of Catholics in 1925. All specifications control for the 1925 shares of Jews and other religions. Column (4) adds county fixed effects. Column (5) reports coefficients from regressions using variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. Column (6) restricts the sample to religious enclaves and reports coefficients conditional on fixed effects for each enclave case, where each case consists of an enclave and its surrounding parishes. See the main text and appendix for data sources and further details. Standard deviations of the means are shown in parentheses in Columns (1) and (2). Robust standard errors clustered at the county and enclave-case level are shown in Columns (3)–(5) and (6), respectively. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

socioeconomic characteristics, such as sectoral employment structures. Following Max Weber, a large literature examines whether Protestantism affects economic development (see Becker et al., 2016, 2024, for recent literature reviews). Because local socioeconomic characteristics may themselves be outcomes of religious composition, they are, strictly speaking, bad controls. Nevertheless, following the existing literature, our regressions generally condition on socioeconomic parish characteristics. However, we also show that specifications estimated without these potentially endogenous controls produce very similar results.

Ecological fallacy. Our estimates are based on ecological regressions at the parish level. Therefore, our results regarding voting outcomes do not have to align with the difference in Nazi support between Protestant and Catholic voters. However, Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018) show that instrumental variable regressions also recover the individual-level difference in Nazi support between Catholic and Protestant voters when the exclusion restriction holds. Furthermore, the ecological inference problem should be small in our context because we mostly compare parishes that are almost entirely Protestant or Catholic. Finally, we also report survey evidence at the individual level regarding the voting behavior of Protestants and Catholics in postwar Germany.

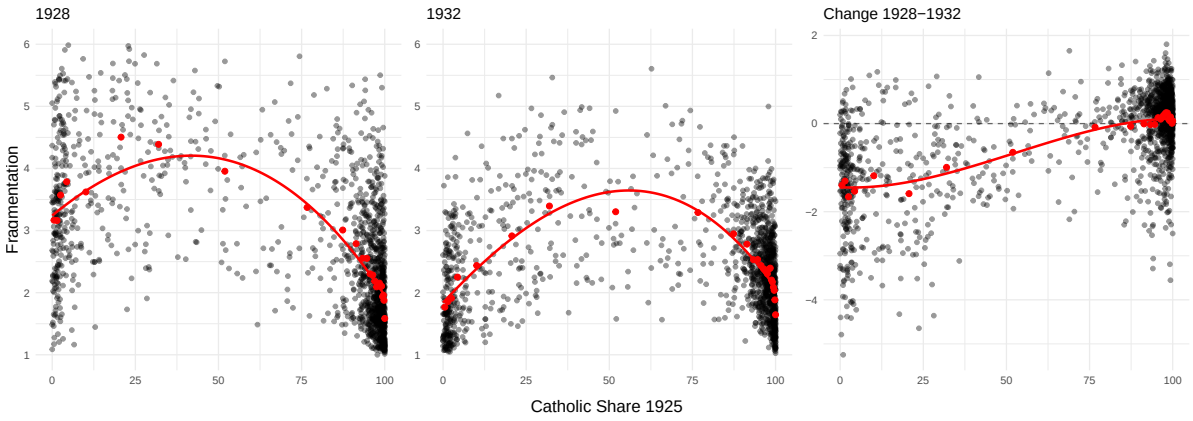
4 Results for the Weimar Republic

Fragmentation. Figure 5 plots our index of political fragmentation against the 1925 share of Catholics in a parish for the May 1928 and November 1932 Reichstag elections in Baden. A cubic polynomial regression fit is overlaid in red, together with red markers indicating mean values computed within 25 equally sized bins. The panel on the right shows the change in fragmentation between the two elections.

For Protestant parishes, the differences between the two elections are stark and closely align with Hypothesis 1a. In the May 1928 election, Protestant parishes were politically fragmented. In parishes that were 95% or more Protestant, the effective number of electoral parties was 3.40, despite their homogeneous religious composition. This contrasts sharply with overwhelmingly Catholic parishes, where the effective number of parties was only 2.06.

As hypothesized, political fragmentation was greatest in predominantly Protestant parishes with a sizeable Catholic minority, resulting in an inverted U-shaped relationship between political fragmentation and the Catholic population share in the 1928 election. This pattern is noteworthy because the Reich as a whole had a similar configuration—predominantly Protestant, but with a large Catholic minority. The Catholic population share (and its squared and cubic terms) alone explains about 40% of the cross-parish variation in the fragmentation index. Appendix Table A-3 shows that the inverted U-shaped relationship remains intact when we add controls and exploit

Figure 5: Share Catholic and political fragmentation in Baden, 5/1928 and 11/1932 elections



Notes: The figure presents scatter plots of the political fragmentation index against the 1925 Catholic population share across parishes in Baden. From left to right, the panels correspond to the Reichstag elections of 20 May 1928 and 6 November 1932, and the change in fragmentation between the two elections. The reference line at zero in the change panel distinguishes parishes where fragmentation increased from those where it decreased. A cubic polynomial regression fit is overlaid in red, together with red markers indicating mean fragmentation values within 25 equally sized quantile bins.

only variation within counties or neighborhoods.

In contrast, Protestant parishes were *less* politically fragmented than Catholic ones in the November 1932 election (see the middle panel of Figure 5). Their mean effective number of parties fell to just 1.86, compared to 2.19 in parishes with a Catholic share of 95% or more. The Nazis thus succeeded in unifying the previously fragmented (rural) Protestant vote in the 1932 elections. In Catholic parishes, by contrast, fragmentation changed little due to the continued dominance of the Zentrum, despite some Nazi gains. The inverted U-shape between fragmentation and Catholic population share remains intact for the November 1932 election (see also the regression results in Appendix Table A-4).

Nazi vote share. We turn now to Hypothesis 1b. Table 2 summarizes our results on the relationship between local religious composition and the NSDAP vote share. We focus on the Reichstagswahl of 6 November 1932 in Baden. The univariate regression in Column (1) suggests that an increase in the local Catholic population share by one percentage point (pp) is associated with a 0.438 pp decrease in the NSDAP vote share. Put differently, the Nazi vote share was, on

average, 43.8 percentage points lower in an all-Catholic parish than in an all-Protestant one. The Jewish population share also exhibits a strong negative correlation with Nazi voting. Religious composition alone explains about 53% of the parish-level variation in NSDAP vote shares.

Columns (2) to (4) successively add a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude to account for spatial trends, as well as geographic and sociodemographic controls. The coefficient on the Catholic share remains largely unchanged across these specifications, indicating that omitted variables correlated with Catholic settlement patterns are unlikely to drive the observed relationship. The share of explained variation increases only modestly, reaching about 62% in specification (4) with the full set of controls.[9]

Columns (5) to (7) of Table 2 address remaining concerns that unobserved variables drive the relationship between parish-level religious composition and Nazi voting by relying on comparisons across nearby parishes. Specifically, we consider regressions that add county fixed effects (Column (5)), exploit only deviations from the mean within a circular neighborhood around each parish (Column (6)), or compare religious enclaves with their surrounding parishes (Column (7)). All three specifications confirm our baseline estimates, with point estimates ranging from –0.431 to –0.538, even in the enclave specification, which uses only about one tenth of the full sample.

We conduct three types of robustness checks for Baden. First, Column (8) shows that our results are quantitatively similar when we focus on the change in the NSDAP vote share between May 1928 and November 1932. Second, Column (9) confirms our findings using an alternative specification that replaces the Catholic population share with a dummy variable for Catholic parishes and restricts the sample to religiously homogeneous locations—those with at least 95% Catholic or 95% Protestant populations. The estimates imply that the NSDAP vote share was, on average, 48.1 pp lower in Catholic than in Protestant parishes. Third, Columns (10) and (11) confirm that our results remain virtually unchanged when we follow Spenkuch & Tillmann (2018) and use the religious situation in 1619 as an instrumental variable for voters' religion in 1925.

[9]Appendix Figure A-2 quantifies the central role of the Catholic population share in explaining local variation in Nazi voting using general dominance statistics. These statistics are Shapley values that decompose the overall variation explained in Column (4) into components attributable to each explanatory variable. The Catholic population share accounts for almost three quarters of the model's fit, making it by far the most important predictor of the NSDAP vote share in the Reichstag election of 6 November 1932.

Table 2: Religious composition and NSDAP voting across parishes in Baden, November 1932

	OLS 11/1932 (1)	OLS 11/1932 (2)	OLS 11/1932 (3)	OLS 11/1932 (4)	OLS 11/1932 (5)	OLS 11/1932 (6)	OLS 11/1932 (7)	OLS Δ 1928-32 (8)	OLS 11/1932 (9)	2SLS 11/1932 (10)	2SLS 11/1932 (11)
Catholics (%)	-0.438***	-0.460***	-0.451***	-0.457***	-0.490***	-0.538***	-0.431***	-0.397***		-0.437***	-0.468***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.063)	(0.030)		(0.028)	(0.032)
Jews (%)	-1.231***	-1.061***	-0.936***	-0.697***	-0.785***	-0.803***	-1.112	-1.052**		-0.465*	-0.552***
	(0.293)	(0.233)	(0.263)	(0.247)	(0.226)	(0.198)	(0.834)	(0.429)		(0.260)	(0.183)
Others (%)	0.078	0.019	0.033	-0.038	0.012	-0.097	-0.551	0.111		-0.011	0.052
	(0.248)	(0.225)	(0.203)	(0.167)	(0.139)	(0.151)	(0.855)	(0.145)		(0.161)	(0.128)
Catholic parish (0/1)									-0.481***		
									(0.032)		
Obs.	1436	1436	1436	1436	1436	1436	146	1436	866	1162	1162
R2	0.530	0.551	0.564	0.618	0.667	0.485	0.738	0.567	0.688		
Kleibergen-Paap F										3504	2329
Spatial trend	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Geo. controls	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sociodem. controls	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Within transformation	none	none	none	none	county	radius	enclave	county	county	none	county

Notes: The table shows the relationship between religious composition–as measured by the population share of Catholics, Jews, and other religious groups, with the residual category being Protestants–and the Nazi vote share across parishes in Baden. Results are for the *Reichstagswahl* on 6 November 1932 in Baden. Columns (1) to (9) present OLS estimates, while Columns (10) and (11) report 2SLS estimates using parish religion in 1619 as an instrument for the Catholic population share in 1925. Parishes lacking information on religious composition in 1619 are excluded from the 2SLS specifications. Column (1) is for a parsimonious model without further controls. The remaining columns successively add a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude to control for spatial trends as well as geographic and sociodemographic control variables, respectively. Columns (5), (8), (9) and (11) add county fixed effects. Column (6) reports coefficients from regressions using variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. Column (7) restricts the sample to enclaves and surrounding parishes, adding fixed effects for each enclave case. Column (8) uses the change in the Nazi vote share between the elections in May 1928 and November 1932 as the dependent variable. Column (9) keeps only parishes that are either 95% or more Catholic or Protestant, dropping parishes with a mixed religious composition. It replaces population shares of the different religions with a dummy variable for Catholic parishes. Robust standard errors, clustered at the enclave-case level in Column (7) and at the county level in all other columns, are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Appendix Table A-5 replicates our analysis for the state election in Württemberg held on 24 April 1932. The results resemble those of the Reichstag election in Baden six months later, with substantially higher Nazi vote shares in Protestant parishes. However, the Protestant–Catholic differences in Nazi voting were smaller in Württemberg than in Baden. The regression with county fixed effects suggests that an increase in the local Catholic population share by one pp decreased the NSDAP vote share by 0.295 pp in Württemberg, compared with 0.490 pp in Baden. One possible explanation is that the *Württembergischer Bauern- und Weingärtnerbund* played a role for the rural Protestant population in Württemberg similar to that of the Zentrum for Catholics in Baden. This relatively close partisan alignment prevented the NSDAP from fully consolidating the Protestant vote in Württemberg.

5 Results for West Germany

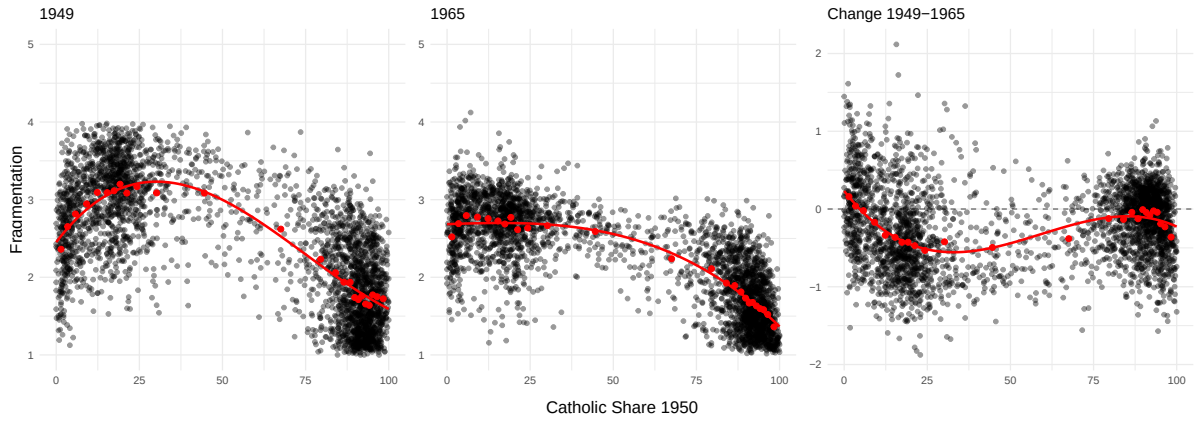
Fragmentation. Figure 6 shows that the relationship between fragmentation and the Catholic population share changed substantially between 1949 and 1965. In 1949, the pattern still resembled the hump-shaped relationship observed in the 1928 *Reichstag* election. Mean fragmentation stood at 2.36 in the most Protestant parishes, increased to 3.20 in parishes with around 19% Catholic population, and then decreased sharply to 1.72 in the most Catholic parishes.[10]

By 1965, the fragmentation hump had largely disappeared, consistent with Hypothesis 2a. Fragmentation at the Protestant end of the distribution was nearly flat, with only small differences between almost entirely Protestant parishes and parishes with a Catholic population share around the former peak. Catholic parishes remained less fragmented, with mean values between 1.36 and 1.68 among bins with Catholic shares above 90%. The change panel shows that the decline was largest in confessionally mixed parishes, where fragmentation fell by 0.53 among parishes with a Catholic population share around 24%. On average, parish-level fragmentation declined by 0.21 between 1949 and 1965.[11]

[10] One reason the hump-shaped pattern persisted in 1949 that is not captured by our conceptual framework is that independent candidates who mostly represented the interests of displaced persons were particularly successful in Protestant areas that received Catholic refugees after 1945. With time, support for refugee parties waned, and they were no longer represented in the *Bundestag* since 1957.

[11] Looking at Baden only suggests that much of the decline in fragmentation between the Weimar Republic

Figure 6: Share Catholic and political fragmentation in Baden-Württemberg, 8/1949 and 9/1965 elections



Notes: The figure presents scatter plots of the political fragmentation index against the 1950 Catholic population share across parishes in Baden-Württemberg. From left to right, the panels correspond to the Bundestag elections of 14 August 1949 and 19 September 1965, and the change in fragmentation between the two elections. The reference line at zero in the change panel distinguishes parishes where fragmentation increased from those where it decreased. A cubic polynomial regression fit is overlaid in red, together with red markers indicating mean fragmentation values within 25 equally sized quantile bins.

By separating Baden from Württemberg, Appendix Figure A-3 reveals a qualitatively similar pattern in both parts of the state: a hump-shaped relationship in 1949 that largely flattens in the Protestant and mixed-religion range by 1965. Subtle differences exist, however. First, the hump-shaped pattern in 1949 was more pronounced in Württemberg, where the religious distribution was more bimodal in 1950 with fewer religiously mixed parishes. Second, the gap between the Protestant and Catholic ends of the distribution widened slightly more in Baden, with modest increases in fragmentation at the Protestant end and decreases at the Catholic end.

CDU and NPD vote shares. Table 3 summarizes our results on the relationship between local religious composition and the vote shares of the CDU, the main innovation on the center-right of the political spectrum, and the NPD, the main far-right party in the mid- and late-1960s.

The first key result is that the CDU still won considerably higher vote shares in Catholic

and the Federal Republic had already occurred by 1949. The mean change between the *Reichstag* and *Bundestag* elections was -0.427 between 1928 and 1949 and -0.644 between 1928 and 1965. The decline by 1949 partly reflects the introduction of the 5% electoral threshold, which applied separately to the federal states in the 1949 election.

Table 3: CDU & NPD Support in 1949, 1965 and 1969

	(1) CDU 1949	(2) CDU 1965	(3) NPD 1965	(4) CDU 1969	(5) NPD 1969
Share of Catholic Population (%)	0.496***	0.310***	-0.013***	0.268***	-0.039***
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.00)	(0.06)	(0.01)
Population (*in logs*)	-2.986***	-3.184***	0.101**	-3.671***	-0.607***
	(0.42)	(0.32)	(0.05)	(0.29)	(0.10)
Industry (%)	-0.195***	-0.139***	-0.000	-0.049***	-0.011**
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Females (%)	0.029	-0.060	0.004	0.010	-0.015
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.01)	(0.08)	(0.03)
Observations	3052	3117	3117	3117	3117
R-Squared	0.795	0.711	0.378	0.683	0.390
Spatial Trend	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Within Transf.	radius	radius	radius	radius	radius

Notes: The table shows the relationship between religious composition, as measured by the population share of Catholics, and CDU and NPD vote shares across parishes in Baden-Württemberg. Results are for the *Bundestagswahl* on 14 August 1949 (Column (1)), 19 September 1965 (Columns (2) and (3)), and 28 September 1969 (Columns (4) and (5)). All regression models use variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. All models include a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude to control for spatial trends as well as geographic and sociodemographic control variables. Column (1) is missing 65 observations due to missing data in the original data source. Robust standard errors, clustered at the county level, are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

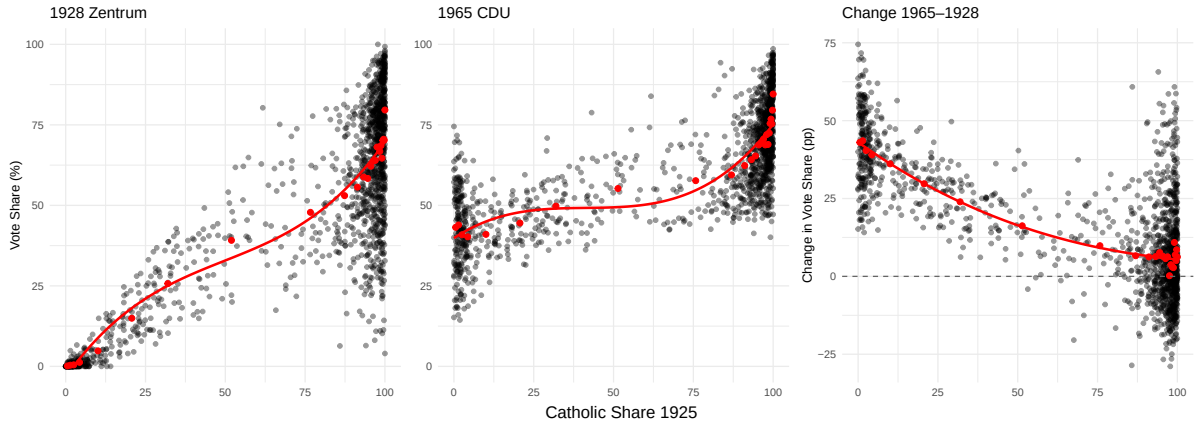
parishes. In the 1949 Bundestag election, a one pp increase in the Catholic population share was associated with a 0.496 pp higher CDU vote share. This association weakened somewhat over time, but the coefficient is still at 0.310 pp in 1965.

Figure 7 illustrates the second key finding by comparing the Zentrum's vote share in 1928 with the CDU's in 1965 across parishes in Baden. While the Zentrum received virtually no votes in predominantly Protestant parishes in 1928 (left panel), the CDU gained considerable support across the entire religious spectrum in 1965 (center panel). Overall, the CDU gained ground everywhere relative to the Zentrum, but the increase was most significant in predominantly Protestant parishes (right panel). The CDU's integrative success thus lay not in completely eliminating confessional differences, but in creating a common center-right party that could bind both Catholic and Protestant voters.

The third key result, which speaks to Hypothesis 2b, relates to the rise of the NPD in the

late 1960s. Table 3 shows that NPD support was lower in Catholic parishes. The coefficient is already negative in 1965 (-0.013) and becomes larger in magnitude by 1969 (-0.039), when the NPD reached its strongest federal result. This finding reveals a limitation of the CDU's integrative success. Despite consolidating the center-right vote across denominational lines, the CDU did not make Protestant parishes immune to the appeal of new right-wing parties. The NPD's disproportionate support in Protestant areas shows that the confessional divide in far-right voting persisted into the late 1960s. However, the scale differed sharply from Weimar: far-right mobilization remained much more contained in the postwar party system.

Figure 7: Zentrum and CDU vote shares in Baden: 1928, 1965, and change



Notes: The figure presents scatter plots of vote shares against the 1925 Catholic population share across parishes in Baden. The left panel shows the Zentrum vote share in the Reichstag election of May 1928; the center panel shows the CDU vote share in the Bundestag election of September 1965; the right panel shows the change in vote share between the two elections (CDU 1965 minus Zentrum 1928). The reference line at zero in the change panel distinguishes parishes where the CDU gained relative to the Zentrum from those where it lost votes. A cubic regression fit is overlaid in red, together with red markers indicating mean vote shares within 25 equally sized quantile bins.

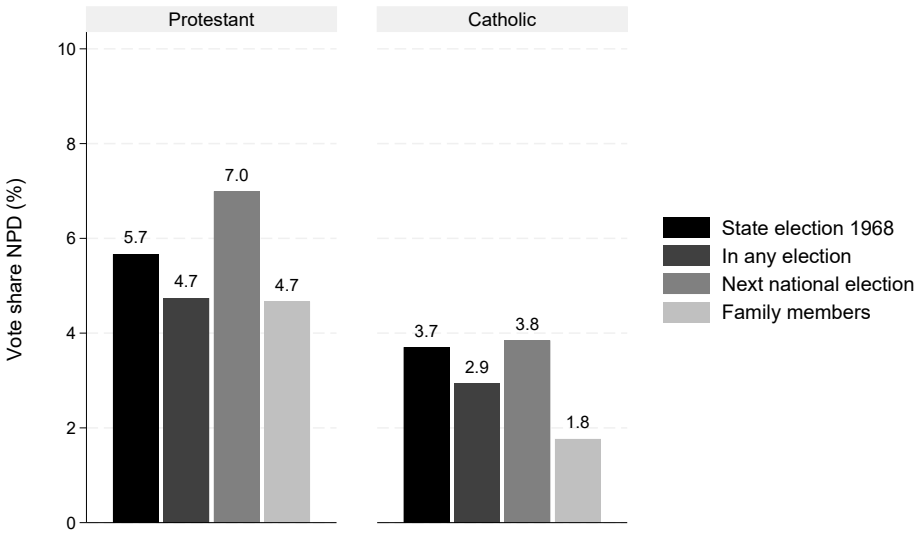
6 Mechanisms: Individual-Level Evidence from 1968

The parish-level evidence documents a robust negative relationship between the local Catholic population share and support for the NPD. Yet these ecological correlations do not by themselves identify the individual-level mechanism. The confessional gap could reflect church influence: Catholic clergy may have steered followers away from right-wing extremism and toward the CDU (Spenkuch & Tillmann, 2018). Alternatively, Catholics and Protestants may simply have held

different political views. This section uses survey evidence from the 1968 Baden-Württemberg state election to distinguish these competing explanations for the confessional gap in voting.

Protestants were more likely to vote NPD. Before we turn to mechanisms, Figure 8 confirms that Protestants report substantially higher rates of NPD support than Catholics across four indicators: having voted for the NPD in the 1968 state election, having voted for the NPD in any past election, intending to vote for the NPD in the next national election, and having family members who support the NPD.[12] These results suggest that the parish-level patterns documented in Section 5 indeed reflect differences in individual voting behavior. Appendix Table A-6 also suggests that these raw differences persist conditional on socioeconomic controls. Conversely, Catholics were considerably more likely to have voted for the CDU in 1968, consistent with the aggregate evidence from the previous section.[13]

Figure 8: NPD support, by confession



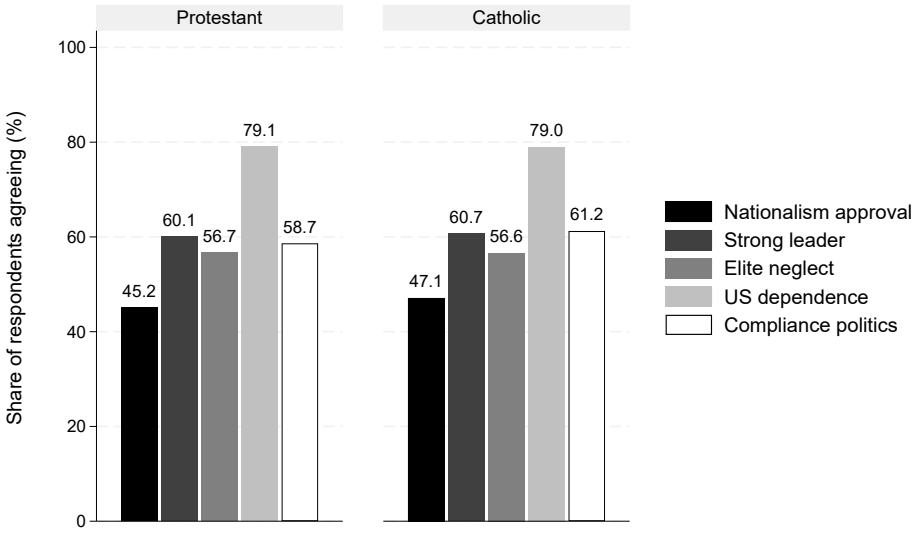
Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they or their family support the NPD. The first bar shows the percentage of respondents who state that they voted for the NPD in Baden-Württemberg's 1968 state election, conditional on voting. The second bar indicates the percentage of respondents who state that they voted for the NPD in any past election. The third bar indicates the percentage of voters who say they will vote for the NPD in the next national election. Finally, the fourth bar indicates the percentage of respondents whose family members generally support the NPD.

[12] Following Klingemann (1971), we also use indirect measures of NPD support to mitigate potential underreporting due to respondents' reluctance to reveal an extremist vote in face-to-face interviews.

[13] Appendix Figure A-4 shows stated voting behavior for all four major parties in the 1968 state election, broken down by religious affiliation.

Similar policy preferences. One explanation for the confessional gap is that Catholics and Protestants have different interests and political views. However, the survey evidence points against this interpretation. Figure 9 shows agreement with a set of NPD-aligned positions—including nationalism approval, support for a strong national leader, anti-elitism, resentment of US dominance, and the view that Germany pursues a compliance policy toward the victorious powers—broken down by confession. The share of respondents agreeing with these positions is strikingly similar between Catholics and Protestants.[14] For example, 45% of Protestants and 47% of Catholics agreed that nationalism is a good party characteristic, while 60% of Protestants and 61% of Catholics agreed that there is nothing wrong with a strong national leader.

Figure 9: Support for NPD positions, by confession



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who agree with statements supported by the NPD. We aggregate the proportion of respondents expressing weak and strong agreement. The 'nationalism approval' statement holds that nationalism is a good party characteristic. The 'strong leader' statement asserts that there is nothing wrong with a strong national leader, such as those that Germany used to have, provided they are fair. The 'elite neglect' statement is that wealthy people do not care about ordinary people. The 'US dependence' statement asserts that it is detrimental to the German economy to be under American control. The 'compliance politics' statement asserts that Germany conducts compliance policy (*Erfüllungspolitik*) toward the victorious powers. The left panel shows the results for Protestant respondents, and the right panel shows the results for Catholic respondents.

[14]Appendix Figures A-5 and A-6 and Appendix Tables A-7 and A-8 extend this finding to a broader set of policy topics and statements: the issues that Catholics and Protestants consider important, and the policy goals they endorse, show only small and largely statistically insignificant differences. The main exception is confessional schools, which are more important to Catholics.

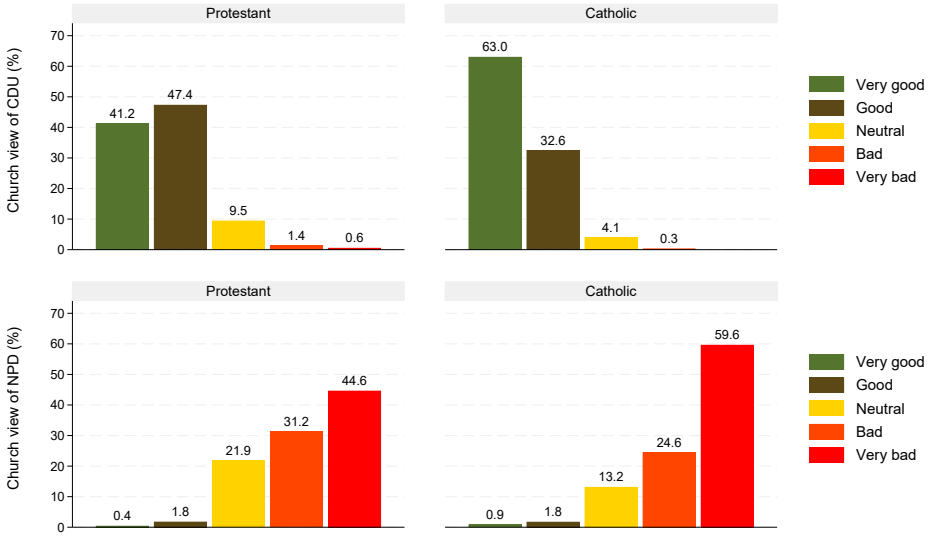
Elite influence of the clergy. The elite mechanism implies that the Catholic Church's opposition to the NPD influenced its followers' voting behavior, despite their political preferences. For the mechanism to work, Catholics had to perceive the Catholic Church as opposing the NPD and uphold an electoral norm of voting CDU instead. At the same time, we would expect those who value the church more highly to act on that signal.

Figure 10 shows moderate but visible differences in how respondents perceived their own churches' stances toward the CDU and the NPD. For Catholic respondents, the message is clear: the vast majority viewed the Catholic Church's stance on the NPD as 'bad' or 'very bad' (84%), while viewing its stance on the CDU as 'good' or 'very good' (96%). Among Protestant respondents, the perceived stance on the NPD is more ambiguous, with 24% viewing their churches' stance on the party as neutral or even positive. Most Protestants view their churches' stance on the CDU positively, which is a clear sign of the CDU's growing cross-confessional appeal. However, the proportion of Protestants who perceive their churches' view of the CDU as 'very good' is substantially lower than among Catholics.

Overall, the Catholic Church sent a clearer anti-NPD and pro-CDU signal to its followers than the Protestant churches did. Appendix Figure A-7 corroborates this pattern. A significant proportion of Protestants viewed their churches' stance on the liberals and Social Democrats as being as favorable as their position on the CDU. In contrast, the majority of Catholics identified the CDU as the party most strongly favored by their church.

Figure 11 shows that church attachment was closely related to voting behavior. Among Catholics, respondents who placed high importance on their church were more likely to vote CDU and less likely to vote NPD than Catholics who were largely indifferent towards the church. A similar pattern holds among Protestants: those who considered their church very important also reported very low NPD vote shares, comparable to their Catholic counterparts (consistent with previous evidence in Klingemann, 1971; Liepelt, 1967). The aggregate confessional gap in NPD voting is therefore partly compositional. Catholics were more likely to be devout: 29% of Catholic respondents said the church was very important to them, compared with 18% of Protestants.

Figure 10: Perception of CDU and NPD by the Protestant and Catholic Churches



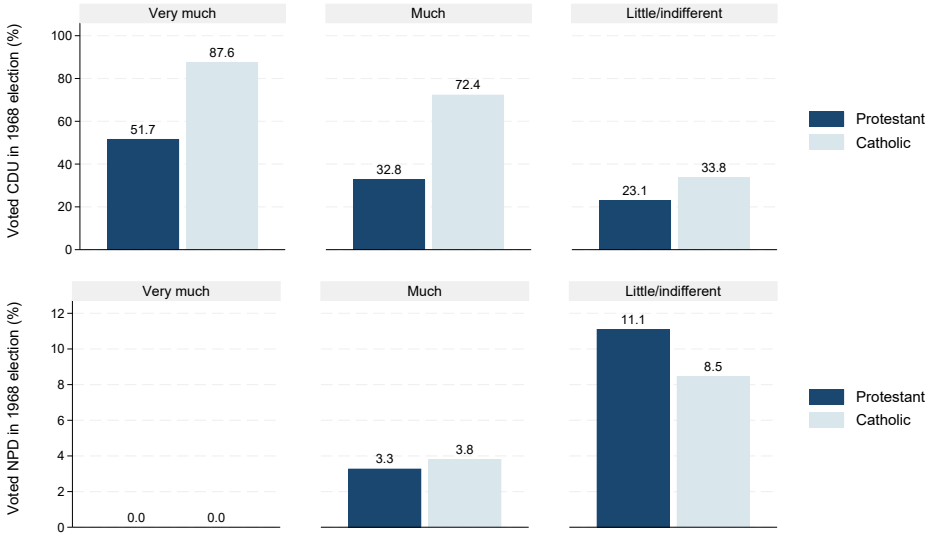
Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who assessed their churches' stances toward the CDU (upper panel) and the NPD (lower panel) as very good, good, neutral, bad, and very bad. The left panel shows the results for Protestant respondents, while the right panel shows the results for Catholic respondents.

Since NPD support was low among devout respondents in both confessions, Catholics' stronger church attachment contributed to their lower aggregate NPD support.

Appendix Table A-9 confirms these patterns in a regression framework, conditioning on age, gender, education, marital status, and community size. Columns (1)–(4) show that church importance is a significant positive predictor of CDU voting. The association is present in both confessions but stronger among Catholics, as indicated by the positive interaction between church importance and Catholic affiliation in Column (4). This pattern is consistent with the stronger pro-CDU signal Catholics received from their church, but also shows that the CDU made inroads among devout Protestants. By contrast, local club membership does not predict CDU voting, even among Catholics. This is consistent with Haffert (2022), who argues that southern German Catholic mobilization relied more on the church itself than on the dense associational networks usually associated with the Catholic milieu.

Columns (5)–(8) show that high church importance is associated with significantly lower NPD support. Unlike for CDU voting, the interaction between church importance and Catholic

Figure 11: Share of CDU and NPD voters by individual importance of church and confession



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who voted for the CDU (top panel) or the NPD (bottom panel) in the 1968 election in Baden-Württemberg. Respondents are categorized based on the importance they attach to their church (very much, much, or little/indifferent) and their religious affiliation. Non-voters are excluded.

affiliation in Column (8) is small and not statistically significant. This suggests that church attachment reduced NPD support similarly among Catholics and Protestants. The pattern matches Figure 11: among respondents who placed a very high importance on their church, NPD support was essentially zero in both confessions. The confessional gap in NPD voting therefore partly reflected differences in religiosity.

Taken together, the individual-level evidence favors the elite influence explanation over the preference explanation. Despite holding similar nationalist and anti-establishment views, Catholics were considerably less likely to vote NPD—a gap driven by two reinforcing mechanisms. First, the Catholic Church sent a clearer political signal: Catholics overwhelmingly perceived it as opposing the NPD and favoring the CDU, whereas Protestants viewed their church's stance as less clear. Second, Catholics were more likely to attach very high importance to their church.

7 Conclusion

It has long been argued that the political instability that brought down the Weimar Republic was rooted in party fragmentation on the center-right (e.g. Hermens, 1968; Jones, 1972), and that

overcoming this fragmentation was key to West Germany's postwar stability (e.g. Smith, 1982). This paper empirically demonstrates how confessional politics shaped both Weimar fragmentation and its postwar attenuation, using the rich confessional mosaic of southwestern Germany for identification.

In Weimar, the Catholic-Protestant divide produced a hump-shaped fragmentation pattern, peaking in mixed parishes where a fragmented Protestant bloc competed with the Catholic Zentrum. As preferences polarized during the Great Depression, the NSDAP consolidated the fragmented Protestant vote while the Zentrum remained the main anchor for the Catholic vote. The CDU altered this dynamic after the war by appealing to Catholic and Protestant voters on the center-right, thereby gradually dissolving the fragmentation hump.

However, confessional voting did not disappear completely, and Protestant areas were more susceptible to the NPD in the late 1960s. Survey evidence reveals that Catholics were less likely than Protestants to vote for the NPD, despite holding similar nationalist and anti-establishment attitudes. This gap is explained by two reinforcing mechanisms, consistent with the elite influence explanation: the Catholic Church conveyed a stronger anti-NPD and pro-CDU message than the Protestant Church, and Catholics placed greater importance on their church.

Taken together, these findings highlight how organizational structures shape the effect of religious divisions on party fragmentation and election outcomes. During Weimar, Catholic voters were loyal to the Zentrum, while Protestant center-right voters lacked an equivalent political home. In West Germany, the CDU reduced this asymmetry by providing a cross-confessional anchor. More broadly, the German case suggests that cross-cleavage parties can mitigate the fragmentation risks associated with social divisions—an organizational lesson for maintaining stability in divided societies.

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A Data Sources

Table A-1A: Data sources (Part A)

Year	Variable	State	Source
A. Election Outcomes			
1928, 1932	Vote Shares, Reichstag Elections	Baden	Falter & Hänisch (1990)
1932	Vote Shares, State Elections	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1932)
1949, 1965, 1969	Vote Shares, Bundestag Elections	Baden & Württemberg	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (2026)
1968	Vote Shares, State Elections	Baden & Württemberg	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (2026)
B. Population, Demography, and Religion			
1925	Total Population	Baden	Falter & Hänisch (1990)
1925	Female Population	Baden	Badisches Statistisches Landesamt (1927)
1925	Total Population	Württemberg	Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (2025)
1933	Total Population	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1935)
1925	Religious Composition	Baden	Falter & Hänisch (1990)
1925	Religious Composition	Württemberg	Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (2025)
1950, 1956, 1961, 1970	Population and Female Population	Baden & Württemberg	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (2026)
1950	Religious Composition	Baden & Württemberg	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (2026)
C. Economic Structure			
1925	Population in Industry	Baden	Falter & Hänisch (1990)
1933	Population in Industry	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1935)
1932	Taxation per capita	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1935)
1933	Unemployment	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1935)
1933	Sectoral Workforce Composition	Württemberg	Württembergisches Statistisches Landesamt (1935)
1950, 1961, 1970	Sectoral Workforce Composition	Baden & Württemberg	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (2026)

Table A-1B: Data sources (Part B)

Variable	Explanation	State	Source
D. Geography			
–	Elevation	Baden & Württemberg	Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie (2017)
–	Ruggedness	Baden & Württemberg	Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie (2017)
–	Soil Type (6 Classifications)	Baden & Württemberg	Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe (2013)
–	Latitude	Baden & Württemberg	Authors' own
–	Longitude	Baden & Württemberg	Authors' own
–	Area	Baden & Württemberg	Authors' own
–	Navigable River Access	Baden & Württemberg	Authors' own
E. Miscellaneous			
–	Reformation Status in 1619	Baden & Württemberg	Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie (2017)
–	City before Reformation	Württemberg	Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg (1988)
–	Enclave Specification	Baden & Württemberg	Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg (1988)
F. Individual-Level Survey Data			
1968	Individual-Level Political Attitudes	Baden & Württemberg	Klingemann (2012)

B Enclave Cases

Table A-2A: Enclave cases: Enclave(s) and surrounding parishes (Cases 1–22)

Case ID	Enclave(s)	Surrounding Parishes
1	Pflummern	Altheim, Andelfingen, Daugendorf, Friedingen, Grüningen, Mörsingen, Upflamör
2	Ebersberg	Lippoldsweiler, Sechselberg
3	Dätzingen	Aidlingen, Deufringen, Döffingen, Gechingen, Ostelsheim, Schafhausen
4	Biberach, Kirchhausen, Massenbachhausen	Bonfeld, Frankenbach, Fürfeld, Großgartach, Heilbronn, Massenbach, Obereisesheim, Schwaigern
5	Stockheim	Brackenheim, Frauenzimmern, Haberschlacht, Kleingartach, Niederhofen
6	Neuhausen auf den Fildern	Bernhausen, Denkendorf, Nellingen auf den Fildern, Scharnhausen, Sielmingen, Stuttgart, Stadt, Unterensingen, Wolfschlugen
7	Wernau (Neckar)	Deizisau, Hochdorf, Kirchheim unter Teck, Köngen, Notzingen, Plochingen, Reichenbach an der Fils, Wendlingen am Neckar
8	Talheim	Flein, Heilbronn, Horkheim, Ilsfeld, Lauffen am Neckar, Schozach, Untergruppenbach
9	Weil der Stadt	Malmsheim, Merklingen, Ostelsheim, Renningen, Schafhausen, Simmozheim
10	Oeffingen	Aldingen am Neckar, Hegnach, Neckarrems, Schmiden, Stuttgart, Stadt, Waiblingen
11	Wimmental	Dimbach, Eberstadt, Ellhofen, Grantschen, Sülzbach, Willsbach
12	Lautlingen, Margrethausen	Burgfelden, Ebingen, Hossingen, Laufen an der Eyach, Meßstetten, Pfeffingen, Tailfingen
13	Unterboihingen	Kirchheim unter Teck, Köngen, Oberboihingen, Unterensingen, Wendlingen am Neckar
14	Großengstingen	Erpfingen, Honau, Kleinengstingen, Meidelstetten, Undingen
15	Brigach, Buchenberg, Burgberg, Erdmannsweiler, Flözlingen, Gutach (Schwarzwaldbahn), Hornberg, Kirnbach, Königsfeld im Schwarzwald, Langenschiltach, Lehengericht, Mönchweiler, Peterzell, Reichenbach, Schiltach, St. Georgen, Stockburg, Tennenbronn, Weiler	Aichhalden, Fischbach, Gremmelsbach, Hardt, Hausach, Horgen, Kinzigtal, Lackendorf, Langenbach, Lauterbach, Mühlenbach, Neuhausen, Niedereschach, Niederwasser, Nußbach, Obereschach, Prechtal, Rohrbach im Schwarzwald, Schenkenzell, Schramberg, Stetten ob Rottweil, Unterkirnach, Villingen im Schwarzwald, Wolfach, Zimmern ob Rottweil
16	Schwenningen am Neckar	Bad Dürrheim, Dauchingen, Hochemmingen, Mühlhausen, Villingen im Schwarzwald, Weilersbach
17	Tuttlingen	Emmingen ab Egg, Hattingen, Liptingen, Möhringen, Nendingen, Wurmlingen
18	Hausen ob Verena, Rietheim	Balgheim, Dürbheim, Gunningen, Seitingen, Spaichingen, Weilheim, Wurmlingen
19	Neuhausen ob Eck	Buchheim, Fridingen an der Donau, Gallmannsweil, Heudorf im Hegau, Liptingen, Nendingen, Schwandorf, Worndorf
20	Biesingen, Oberbaldingen, Schura, Sunthausen, Talheim, Trossingen, Tuningen, Öfingen	Aasen, Aixheim, Aldingen, Deißlingen, Durchhausen, Eßlingen, Gunningen, Heidenhofen, Hochemmingen, Ippingen, Mühlhausen, Oberflacht, Pfohren, Unterbaldingen, Weigheim, Zimmern
21	Laubach, Neubronn	Abtsgmünd, Dewangen, Heuchlingen, Hohenstadt, Schechingen
22	Walxheim	Pfahlheim, Tannhausen, Unterschneidheim, Zöbingen

Table A-2B: Enclave cases: Enclave(s) and surrounding parishes (Cases 23–44)

Case ID	Enclave(s)	Surrounding Parishes
23	Hausen an der Rot	Fichtenberg (Vichberg), Fornsbach, Oberrot, Ottendorf (Oedendorf)
24	Amrichshausen	Kocherstetten, Künzelsau, Laßbach, Morsbach, Steinbach
25	Haagen, Honsbronn, Laudenbach	Elpersheim, Herrenzimmern, Neubronn, Pfitzingen, Queckbronn, Rüsselhausen, Vorbachzimmern, Weikersheim, Wermutshausen
26	Schweindorf	Kösingen, Ohmenheim, Utzmemmingen
27	Ahlen, Attenweiler, Biberach an der Riß	Aßmannshardt, Birkenhard, Laupertshausen, Mettenberg, Mittelbiberach, Moosbeuren, Reute, Rißegg, Rupertshofen, Seekirch, Stafflangen, Tiefenbach, Ummendorf, Uttenweiler, Warthausen
28	Ersingen	Achstetten, Dellmensingen, Donaurieden, Oberdischingen, Rißtissen, Stetten, Öpfingen
29	Ennahofen, Grötzingen, Weilersteußlingen	Allmendingen, Altsteußlingen, Dächingen, Ehingen (Donau), Frankenhofen, Hütten, Justingen, Schmiechen
30	Mundingen	Anhausen, Dächingen, Erbstetten, Granheim, Kirchen, Lauterach
31	Rottenacker	Berg, Dettingen, Herbertshofen, Kirchbierlingen, Kirchen, Munderkingen, Volkersheim
32	Bad Ditzenbach, Deggingen, Drackenstein, Gosbach, Hohenstadt, Mühlhausen im Täle, Reichenbach im Täle, Westerheim, Wiesensteig	Auendorf, Aufhausen, Donnstetten, Feldstetten, Gruibingen, Hausen an der Fils, Laichingen, Machtolsheim, Merklingen, Neidlingen, Nellingen, Schlat, Schopfloch, Unterböhringen, Zainingen
33	Oberholzheim	Achstetten, Bihlafingen, Bronnen, Burgrieden, Hüttisheim, Stetten
34	Steinberg, Unterbalzheim, Wain	Dietenheim, Großschafhausen, Gutenzell, Kirchberg an der Iller, Orsenhausen, Schwendi, Sießen im Wald
35	Wilhelmsdorf	Esenhausen, Pfrungen, Zußdorf
36	Bissingen ob Lontal, Burgberg, Niederstotzingen, Oberstotzingen, Rammingen, Stetten ob Lontal	Asselfingen, Bergenweiler, Dettingen am Albuch, Hausen ob Lontal, Hermaringen, Hürben, Langenau, Setzingen, Sontheim an der Brenz, Öllingen
37	Gallenweiler	Eschbach, Grunern, Heitersheim, Tunsel, Wettelbrunn
38	Mengen, Opfingen, Schallstadt, Tiengen, Wolfenweiler	Biengen, Bollschweil, Ebringen, Freiburg, Hausen a. d. Möhlin, Kirchhofen, Merdingen, Munzingen, Niederrimsingen, Norsingen, Offnadingen, Pfaffenweiler, Scherzingen, Umkirch, Waltershofen
39	Bischoffingen, Königschaffhausen, Leiselheim	Amoltern, Burkheim, Endingen, Forchheim, Jechtingen, Kiechlinsbergen, Oberbergen, Oberrotweil, Sasbach, Wyhl
40	Weisweil	Forchheim, Kenzingen, Oberhausen, Wyhl
41	Hamberg, Hohenwart, Lehningen, Mühlhausen, Neuhausen, Schellbronn, Steinegg, Tiefenbronn	Bad Liebenzell, Bieselsberg, Büchenbronn, Friolzheim, Hausen an der Würm, Heimsheim, Huchenfeld, Monakam, Möttlingen, Münklingen, Pforzheim, Unterhaugstett, Unterreichenbach, Wimsheim, Würm
42	Bilfingen, Ersingen	Dietlingen, Eisingen, Ispringen, Königsbach, Pforzheim, Stein, Wilferdingen
43	Neibsheim	Bretten, Büchig bei Bretten, Diedelsheim, Gondelsheim, Gölshausen, Heidelsheim, Helmsheim, Oberacker
44	Waibstadt	Adersbach, Daisbach, Helmstadt, Neckarbischofsheim, Neidenstein, Rohrbach, Sinsheim

C Additional Tables

Table A-3: The impact of religious composition on fragmentation in Baden, May 1928

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Catholics (%)	0.060***	0.065***	0.073***	0.070***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Catholics squared (% * 10^{-2})	-0.081*	-0.142***	-0.158***	-0.158***
	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Catholics cubed (% * 10^{-4})	0.007	0.064***	0.072***	0.075***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
R2	0.402	0.528	0.587	0.412
Spatial trend	no	yes	yes	yes
Controls	no	yes	yes	yes
Within transformation	none	none	county	radius

Notes: The table reports results from regressions of political fragmentation in Baden's May 1928 Reichstag election on the 1925 share of Catholics in a parish, its square, and its cube. All specifications control for the 1925 shares of Jews and other religions. Column (2) adds control variables for local geographic and economic characteristics. Column (3) adds county fixed effects. Column (4) reports coefficients from regressions using variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. Robust standard errors, clustered at the county level, are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Table A-4: The impact of religious composition on fragmentation in Baden, November 1932

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Catholics (%)	0.056***	0.052***	0.055***	0.053***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Catholics squared (% * 10^{-2})	-0.028	-0.066***	-0.070***	-0.068***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Catholics cubed (% * 10^{-4})	-0.026	0.017	0.017	0.017
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
R2	0.299	0.559	0.610	0.492
Spatial trend	no	yes	yes	yes
Controls	no	yes	yes	yes
Within transformation	none	none	county	radius

Notes: The table reports results from regressions of political fragmentation in Baden's November 1932 Reichstag election on the 1925 share of Catholics in a parish, its square, and its cube. All specifications control for the 1925 shares of Jews and other religions. Column (2) adds control variables for local geographic and economic characteristics. Column (3) adds county fixed effects. Column (4) reports coefficients from regressions using variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. Robust standard errors, clustered at the county level, are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Table A-5: Religious composition and NSDAP voting across parishes in Württemberg, April 1932

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Catholics (%)	-0.265***	-0.291***	-0.290***	-0.287***	-0.295***	-0.307***	-0.285***
	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.025)
Jews (%)	-0.006	-0.050	-0.020	-0.361	-0.531	-0.484*	-0.270
	(0.261)	(0.247)	(0.239)	(0.236)	(0.320)	(0.264)	(1.350)
Others (%)	-0.560**	-0.427*	-0.413*	-0.506**	-0.302	-0.363	-0.583
	(0.255)	(0.229)	(0.224)	(0.225)	(0.216)	(0.221)	(0.454)
Obs.	1744	1744	1744	1744	1744	1744	304
R2	0.437	0.485	0.493	0.504	0.589	0.245	0.619
Spatial trend	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Geo. controls	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sociodem. controls	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Within transformation	none	none	none	none	county	radius	enclave

Notes: The table shows the relationship between religious composition—as measured by the population share of Catholics, Jews, and other religious groups, with the residual category being Protestants—and the Nazi vote share across parishes in Württemberg's state election on 24 April 1932. All columns present OLS estimates. Column (1) is for a parsimonious model without further controls. The remaining columns successively add a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude to control for spatial trends as well as geographic and sociodemographic control variables, respectively. Column (5) adds county fixed effects. Column (6) reports coefficients from regressions using variables that have been transformed by subtracting the mean of all observations within a 10 km radius of each parish centroid. Column (7) restricts the sample to enclaves and surrounding parishes, adding fixed effects for each enclave case. Robust standard errors, clustered at the enclave-case level in Column (7) and at the county level in all other columns, are reported in parentheses. ***,**,* denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Table A-6: Protestant-Catholic differences in party support, individual-level evidence

	NPD support:								CDU support:	
	State election 1968		Any election		Next national election		Family members		State election 1968	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Catholic (0/1)	-0.020	-0.022	-0.018	-0.022*	-0.031*	-0.035*	-0.029**	-0.035**	0.344***	0.332***
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.039)	(0.040)
Obs.	570	570	852	852	641	641	583	583	570	570
Control mean	0.057	0.057	0.070	0.070	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.330	0.330
Controls	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes

Notes: The table shows the results of OLS regressions of indicators for NPD and CDU support on a dummy variable for Catholic respondents, with results for NPD support in Columns (1)–(8) and CDU support in Columns (9)–(10). The control group comprises Protestant respondents. The NPD support indicators capture whether respondents voted for the NPD in the 1968 state election (Columns (1)–(2)), in any previous election (Columns (3)–(4)), intend to vote NPD in the next federal election (Columns (5)–(6)), or have family members who generally support the NPD (Columns (7)–(8)). Non-voters are excluded in Columns (1), (2), (5), (6), (9), and (10). Conditional regressions control for age, gender, education, marital status, and community size. Robust standard errors in round brackets. ***, **, * denote significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

Table A-7: Protestant-Catholic differences in evaluating policy topics as important

	Catholics:		Protestants:		Differences:	
	mean	st.d.	mean	st.d.	mean	s.e.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Inflation	0.516	0.500	0.463	0.499	0.053	0.034
Confessional schools	0.267	0.443	0.187	0.391	0.079***	0.029
Agriculture	0.487	0.500	0.483	0.500	0.003	0.034
Grand coalition	0.487	0.500	0.481	0.500	0.006	0.034
Antisemitism	0.445	0.498	0.449	0.498	-0.004	0.034
Development aid	0.487	0.500	0.503	0.501	-0.017	0.034
Student riots	0.577	0.495	0.564	0.496	0.013	0.034
Defense spending	0.516	0.500	0.537	0.499	-0.021	0.034
Right to strike	0.279	0.449	0.300	0.459	-0.021	0.031
Major industries	0.191	0.393	0.156	0.363	0.035	0.026
Basic rights	0.357	0.480	0.293	0.456	0.064**	0.032
Eastern border	0.359	0.480	0.350	0.477	0.010	0.033
GDR relations	0.484	0.500	0.474	0.500	0.010	0.034
USA relations	0.306	0.461	0.248	0.433	0.057*	0.031
KPD ban	0.325	0.469	0.255	0.436	0.070**	0.031
Nazi politicians	0.200	0.401	0.181	0.385	0.020	0.027

Notes: The table shows sample means and standard deviations for the proportion of Catholics (Columns 1–2) and Protestants (Columns 3–4) who view a policy topic as important. Columns (5)–(6) show the mean difference and its standard error from a two-sided t-test. ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

Table A-8: Protestant-Catholic differences in agreeing with policy statements

	Catholics:		Protestants:		Differences:	
	mean	st.d.	mean	st.d.	mean	s.e.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Fight inflation through unempl.	0.544	0.499	0.588	0.493	-0.044	0.043
Support confessional schools	0.077	0.267	0.169	0.375	-0.092***	0.025
Support agriculture	0.697	0.461	0.701	0.459	-0.005	0.039
Grand coalition continues	0.655	0.476	0.757	0.430	-0.102***	0.039
Fight antisemitic statements	0.761	0.427	0.824	0.381	-0.064*	0.035
Reduce development aid	0.781	0.414	0.780	0.415	0.001	0.035
Fight student riots	0.735	0.442	0.787	0.410	-0.052	0.034
Reduce defense spending	0.778	0.416	0.782	0.413	-0.004	0.035
Limit right to strike	0.278	0.449	0.293	0.456	-0.015	0.039
Nationalize major industries	0.203	0.403	0.207	0.406	-0.004	0.040
Limit basic rights	0.209	0.407	0.184	0.389	0.025	0.034
Recognize Eastern border	0.385	0.488	0.404	0.492	-0.019	0.042
Establish relations to GDR	0.682	0.466	0.696	0.461	-0.014	0.039
Closer ties with USA	0.336	0.473	0.399	0.491	-0.063	0.042
Lift KPD ban	0.402	0.491	0.362	0.481	0.040	0.042
Allow ex-Nazi into politics	0.189	0.392	0.179	0.384	0.010	0.034

Notes: The table shows sample means and standard deviations for the proportion of Catholics (Columns (1)–(2)) and Protestants (Columns (3)–(4)) who agree with a particular policy goal. Columns (5)–(6) show the mean difference and its standard error from a two-sided t-test. ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

Table A-9: Individual-level determinants of CDU and NPD voting

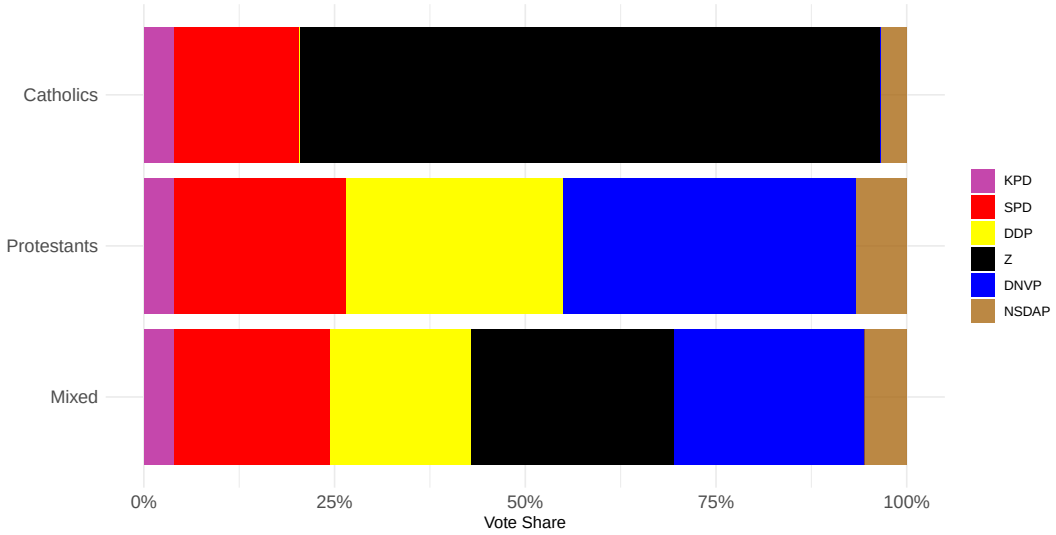
	CDU (1)	CDU (2)	CDU (3)	CDU (4)	NPD (5)	NPD (6)	NPD (7)	NPD (8)
Catholic (0/1)	0.332***	0.293***	0.292***	0.100	-0.022	-0.012	-0.012	-0.024
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.075)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.043)
Church very important (0/1)		0.349***	0.355***	0.255***		-0.084***	-0.084***	-0.092***
		(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.078)		(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.028)
Church important (0/1)		0.184***	0.189***	0.058		-0.057**	-0.057**	-0.067**
		(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.059)		(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.033)
Member in local club (0/1)			-0.069	-0.069			-0.002	0.003
			(0.047)	(0.061)			(0.022)	(0.032)
Catholic × church very important (0/1)				0.232**				0.019
				(0.101)				(0.046)
Catholic × church important (0/1)				0.318***				0.025
				(0.092)				(0.050)
Catholic × membership in local club (0/1)				0.001				-0.012
				(0.087)				(0.043)
R squared	0.188	0.251	0.254	0.272	0.048	0.069	0.070	0.070
Observations	570	564	564	564	570	564	564	564

Notes: The table shows the effects of religious affiliation, the importance of the church, and membership in a local club on whether respondents voted for the CDU (Columns (1) to (4)) or the NPD (Columns (5) to (8)) in the 1968 state election in Baden-Württemberg. All regressions control for respondents' age, gender, education, marital status, and the size of their place of residence. All models (1) to (8) also include a dummy variable for Catholic respondents. The baseline category is Protestant respondents; respondents who are neither Catholic nor Protestant are excluded. Columns (2) to (4) and (6) to (8) also include indicators for respondents who consider their church very or somewhat important. The baseline category is respondents who view their church as less important or are indifferent. Columns (3) to (4) and (7) to (8) add an indicator variable for whether respondents are members of a local club (sports, singing, or heritage). Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

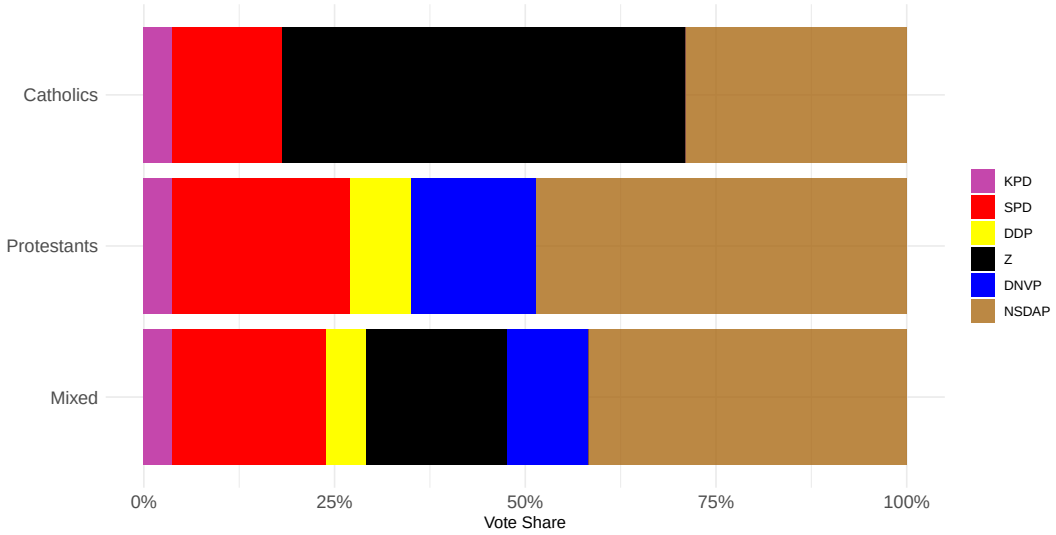
D Additional Figures

Figure A-1: Confessional voting in the Weimar Republic: Vote shares

(a) 1928: Moderate electorate

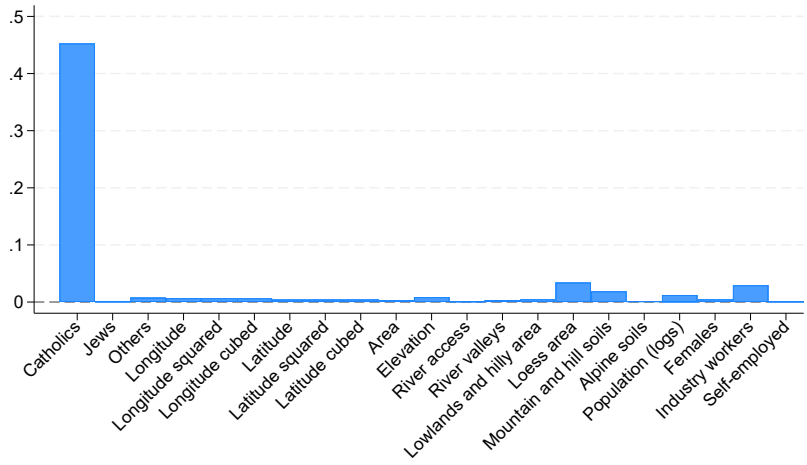


(b) 1932: Radicalized electorate



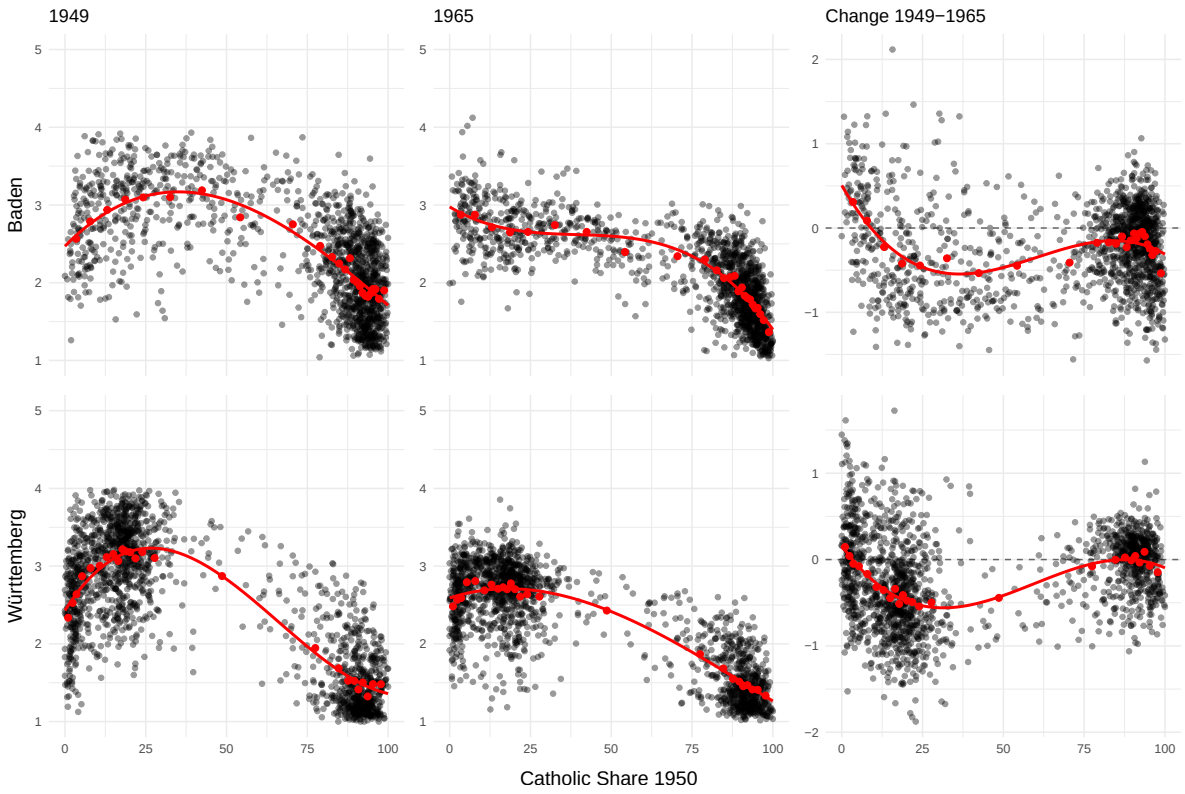
Notes: The figure shows the vote shares that result from the model predictions in Figure 1. We distinguish between an all-Catholic electorate, an all-Protestant electorate, and an electorate that is one-third Catholic and two-thirds Protestant. Panel (a) illustrates the predictions for a moderate electorate, as in the 1928 election, and panel (b) illustrates the predictions for a radicalized electorate, as in the 1932 election.

Figure A-2: Relative importance of predictors of NSDAP vote share in Baden, November 1932



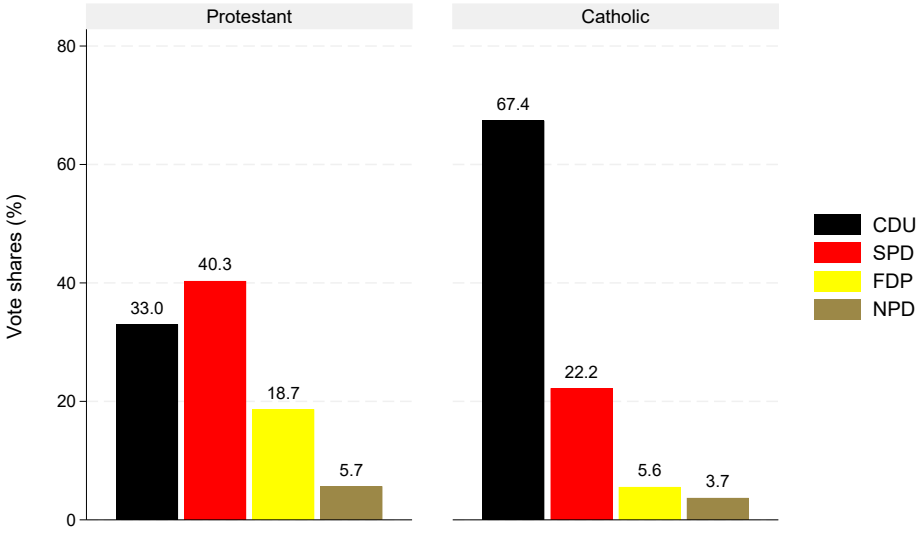
Notes: The figure illustrates the relative importance of each independent variable in predicting the Nazi vote share in the Reichstag election on 6 November 1932 in Baden, as determined by general dominance statistics calculated using Stata's domin command (Luchman, 2021). These statistics are Shapley values that decompose the overall R-squared of the underlying regression model into components attributable to each explanatory variable. Similar to Column (4) of Table 2, the underlying model regresses the local Nazi vote share against local religious composition, a cubic polynomial in longitude and latitude, and geographic and sociodemographic control variables.

Figure A-3: Share Catholic and political fragmentation in Baden and Württemberg, 8/1949 and 9/1965 elections



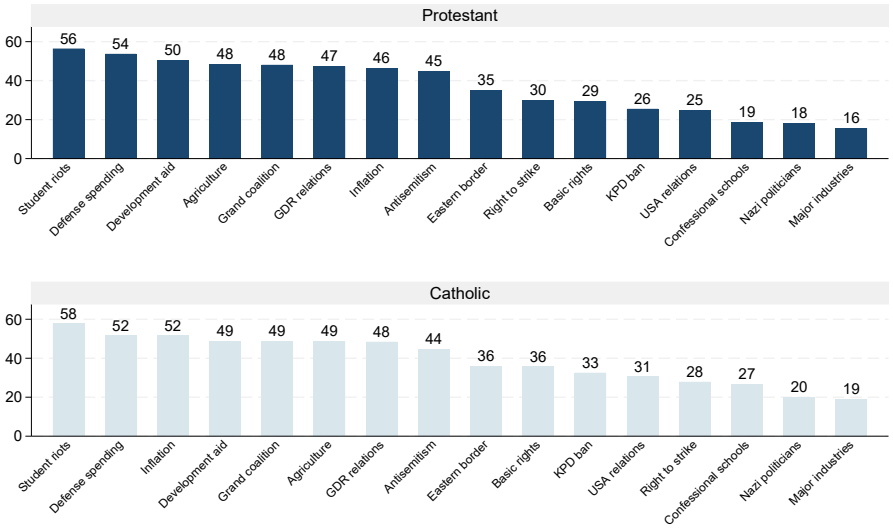
Notes: The figure presents scatter plots of the political fragmentation index against the 1950 Catholic population share, separately for Baden (upper row) and Württemberg (lower row). Column panels correspond to the Bundestag elections of 14 August 1949 and 19 September 1965, and the change in fragmentation between the two elections. The reference line at zero in the change panels distinguishes parishes where fragmentation increased from those where it decreased. A cubic polynomial regression fit is overlaid in red, together with red markers indicating mean fragmentation values within 25 equally sized quantile bins.

Figure A-4: Voting in the 1968 state election, by confession



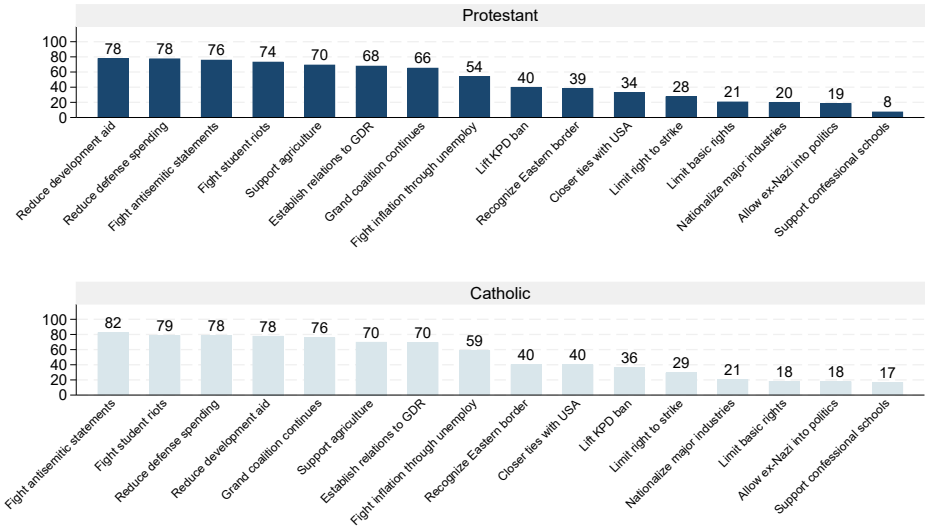
Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they voted for one of the four main parties in Baden-Württemberg's 1968 state election, broken down by denomination. The left panel shows the results for Protestant respondents and the right panel shows the results for Catholic respondents. Respondents who did not vote are excluded.

Figure A-5: Percentage of respondents evaluating a policy topic as important, by confession



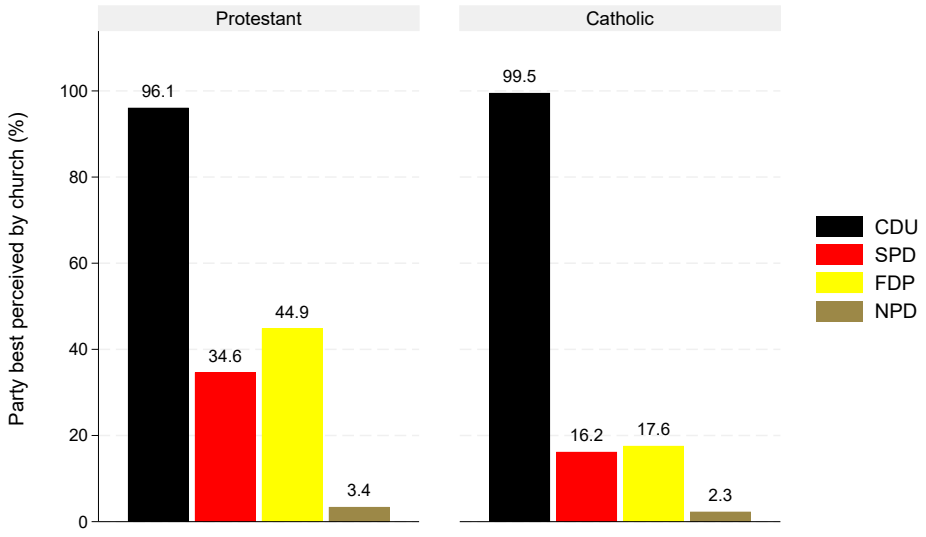
Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who identified a specific policy issue as important. The top panel shows the results for Protestant respondents and the bottom panel shows the results for Catholic respondents. Topics are ordered by the proportion of respondents naming them as important.

Figure A-6: Percentage of respondents agreeing with a policy statement, by confession



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who agreed with a particular policy (goal). The top panel shows the results for Protestant respondents, while the bottom panel shows the results for Catholic respondents. Topics are ordered by the proportion of respondents who agreed with them.

Figure A-7: Party perceived as most favored by the Protestant and Catholic churches



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of respondents who rated the CDU, SPD, FDP, and NPD as the party most favored by their church. If two or more parties received the highest score, both were counted as most favored choices (i.e., multiple best choices are possible). The left panel shows the results for Protestant respondents and the right panel shows the results for Catholic respondents.

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