Julian Michel, 06/11/2018

Electoral Malfeasance and Monetary Contributions to the Social Democratic Party of Germany between 1890 and 1914

1. Introduction

Between the end of the anti-socialist laws in 1890 and the beginning of WWI., the Social Democratic Party of Germany turned from a weakly-organized party – whose public activities had been repressed under Bismarck (1878-1890) and won only 8.8% of the seats in the 1890 federal elections – into a professionalized, decentralized party apparatus that contested more districts and won more seats than any other party in the federal elections of 1912.

In this project, I will examine the relationship between incidences of district-level electoral malfeasance complaints and the amount of private monetary contributions to the Social Democratic Party (SPD). This question is interesting because in the absence of access to state resources, the SPD was almost exclusively dependent on voluntary monetary contributions by their supporters to finance the institutionalization and professionalization of the party, the proliferation of party newspapers, and crucial mobilizational activities on the ground. Any account of how the SPD was able to develop into a highly encompassing party organization that famously attempted to influence daily activities in the social democratic milieu "from the cradle to the grave" needs to account for the funding sources of the party. Yet, this topic is noticeably absent from the discourse on the party system and electoral competitiveness in the latest stages of the German monarchy (see, for instance, Ziblatt 2008; 2009; 2017; Mares 2015; Kasara and Mares 2017).

In addition, there is an ongoing debate about the mobilizational effects of low-intensity repression such as the skewing of the electoral playing-field. While recent contributions illuminated the effect of electoral malfeasance on vote choice (Enikopolov et al. 2013; Mares and Young 2016) and post-election violence (Daxecker 2012; Hafner-Burton et al. 2016), the effect of electoral malfeasance on monetary donations to the party being subjected to malfeasance has not been established to this day. This is surprising given that many, if not most, opposition parties in dictatorships experience electoral malpractice (Schedler 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010) and depend on monetary contributions (Magaloni 2006). This study addresses this gap by utilizing fine-grained monthly information from SPD party records on magnitude and location of donations to the SPD.

To isolate the effect of electoral malfeasance on subsequent donations to the SPD, I will employ "selection on observables" as an identification strategy. In the context of estimating the covariate balancing propensity score, this means that I will control for a range of district-level economic, socio-demographic, and political variables that predict which districts experience malfeasance. Under the assumptions of (1) common support and (2) conditional ignorability, I can inversely reweight observations according to how likely they were to receive treatment to obtain the average treatment effect of malfeasance reports on monetary support.

2. Theoretical Expectations

The current literature is inconclusive about whether individuals are less willing to support parties that are negatively affected by electoral malpractice. One might argue in line with theories of strategic voting that individuals are more willing to support a party when they expect the party to have a fair chance of gaining public office. However, there also is a vast literature on the "repression-mobilization nexus" that shows that repression is often counterproductive in the sense that it leads to increased rates of mobilization (for an overview of the literature on the "repression-mobilization-nexus", see Shadmehr 2014). Mares (2015) illustrates that electoral malfeasance was most likely in districts with intermediate levels of SPD strength (as measured by prior vote shares) and usually took the form of voter intimidation by employers or their political representatives. While such intimidation has been associated with pro-incumbent vote choice in settings such as authoritarian Chile and Germany (Baland and Robinson 2008; Mares 2015), we currently lack empirically-grounded theoretical priors for its relation to monetary contributions to opposition parties in non-democratic settings. Therefore, I will refrain from formulating a directed hypothesis regarding an unconditional effect of malfeasance complaints.

Instead, I argue that the effect of malfeasance is conditional on district-level party strength: malfeasance is hypothesized to have a negative effect on monetary contributions to the SPD in districts that were strongholds of the conservative establishment as the malfeasance signaled the dominance of the (conservative) incumbents. Conversely, when violations of electoral rules occurred in SPD core districts, we should find an increase in monetary contributions. The logic is that SPD supporters increase their efforts to maintain the political status quo in the district after observing an interference with the electoral rules by the conservatives. The same effect is hypothesized for swing districts in which no party has a stronghold as SPD supporters will perceive that their party stood a real chance of winning the election if it hadn't been for the manipulation and that even a modest increase in (monetary) mobilization would have made all the difference.

As my empirical strategy relies heavily on correctly specifying which economic, socio-demographic, and political district-covariates predict the occurrence of malfeasance complaints, we need to establish how these variables should be associated with treatment uptake.

The crucial district-level economic covariates that influence the number of malfeasance complaints are landholding inequality, the percent of individuals not employed in agriculture, the percentage of skilled workers as share of all workers, and occupational heterogeneity. In districts with high landholding inequality, employers in agriculture have more means to sanction SPD voters. At the same time, SPD supporters are more dependent on their employer where landownership is concentrated (Ziblatt 2008, 2009; Mares 2015: 102f.). Therefore, malfeasance complaints should be observed at intermediate levels of landholding inequality where employers have the capacity to repress and workers are independent enough to be willing to file complaints. The percent of individuals not employed in agriculture should also take the form of an inversed-u-shaped relationship to treatment as the repression of Social

Democrats was most likely were they posed a challenge to the conservatives but weren't strong enough to make conservative election interference exceedingly costly. Where individuals were ceteris paribus higher skilled and employed in a district with larger occupational heterogeneity, punishing employees for their vote choice was more costly to employers (Mares 2015: 31f., 36f.). In consequence, we should be less likely to observe malfeasance complaints in settings with a high-skilled workforce and pronounced occupational heterogeneity.

In terms of socio-demographic covariates, both the district's population size and percent of Catholics should be associated with malfeasance complaints. While the districts were formed to reflect populations of roughly 100,000 individuals in 1871, they weren't altered as a consequence of urbanization and within-country migration. I expect to find more instances of malfeasance complaints were population size is larger because both electoral malfeasance and the sanctioning of SPD voters more generally should be more observable were populations are larger. The percent of individuals identifying as Catholic is relevant given that complaints should be more likely at intermediate levels of Catholic "strength": As the SPD was more appealing to non-Catholics, it is only in districts with roughly equal share of Catholics and Protestants that conservative parties have enough means and the incentive to interfere with electoral rules. Therefore, the religious identity of a district should also be associated with the status of a district (core vs. swing district).

Finally, the amount of malfeasance appeals to the national electoral commission depends on the political institutions and previous political behavior in a district. Those districts in which the secret ballot had been implemented should witness less malfeasance reports because employers were less able to identify SPD voters. Where the right side of the political spectrum was fragmented, each single conservative party was less able to employ the state apparatus as a means of voter repression (Mares 2015: 104). The margin of victory in the decisive round of the last national election should be strongly negatively related to electoral malfeasance: The closer the race, the higher the incentives to interfere with electoral rules. In addition, if we believe that malfeasance complaints are merely strategic and do not reflect actual levels of malfeasance, we should be most likely to observe false strategic malfeasance accusations where races are close. Relatedly, a district is considered to be a core district of the party if the party managed to obtain the seat in two consecutive elections. Malfeasance should be highest in swing districts. Various measures of the lagged treatment – a dummy for a malfeasance complaint in the previous election, the cumulative number of elections with at least one malfeasance complaint in a district, and the pre-1890 cumulative number of elections with district-level malfeasance – should be positively related to future treatment uptake as experience with malfeasance is hypothesized to make individuals more acceptant of electoral interference.

3. Conceptualizations

This section clarifies the concepts for the covariates, treatment, and the outcome of interest.

Malfeasance complaints: The treatment in this study is a district-level, election-year dummy for electoral malfeasance that takes on the value of "1" if at least one complaint about electoral malfeasance in a given election year had been submitted to the national election committee in a district. This data is taken from Asenschek and Ziblatt (2008, 2010; https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/43). The electoral law of Germany allowed each individual to submit a complaint about a perceived electoral irregularity to the electoral commission ("Wahlprüfungskommission") (Mares 2015: 95). Whereas vote buying was a rare phenomenon due to its severe punishment, the intimidation of voters through employers or their political representatives was commonplace (Ibid.: 19f.). Mares notes that 19% of all district-election years witnessed at least one malfeasance petition (Ibid.: 95). While no coding has been done of which party the complaint was directed at, all major publications on the subject assume that malfeasance was an instrument of the conservative forces against the rising Social Democrats (Ziblatt 2008, 2009; Mares 2015)

Monetary contributions: The outcome of interest are the monthly district-level monetary contributions to the national SPD measured in *Goldmarks*, the data for which is taken from the annual party records between 1891 and 1913. Conceptually, monetary contributions consist of donations as well as membership fees as a form of voluntary commitments. The extent to which the party formalized membership fees increased over the period of observation. As the unit of analysis for the raw data is below the district level (village/city level) for most of the period under observation, the units are aggregated to the district-level where necessary. Overall, this gives me 246 monthly observations for each district (October 1891 – March 1913). For the period after June 1910, however, the raw data contains information only on a quarterly basis, which means that an equal distribution over the months of a quarter is assumed to arrive at monthly data points.

Economic Controls

Land inequality in 1895: This measure captures the district-level Gini coefficient for landholding inequality in 1895 taken from Ziblatt (2009), who digitized the data from the 1898 German agriculture census which was "based on data from surveys of over five million farms that were collected at what might be called the 'county' level for 1,004 small county units (Kreise) in Germany" (Ziblatt 2009: 4).

% non-agricultural employment: District-level share of individuals employed in non-agricultural sectors, taken from Mares (2015) who intrapolates the original data from Reibel (2007).

Skilled/unskilled workers: District-level share of "workers who had experienced some training" as opposed to "manual workers, handymen, and other workers in services" (Mares 2015: 108) that did not receive training, as a share of all workers. Taken from Mares (2015) who digitalized the census records

for the years 1895 and 1905. For the period between the two census years, a linear interpolation is conducted. For the pre-1895 and post-1905 period, the closest observation is repeated.

Occupational heterogeneity: Logged Herfindahl-Hirschman index of employment concentration (logged "sum of the squares of employment shares of all occupations in a particular district" (Mares 2015: 105)). Taken from Mares (2015) who digitalized the census records for the years 1895 and 1905. For the period between the two census years, a linear interpolation is conducted. For the pre-1895 and post-1905 period, the closest observation is repeated.

Socio-demographic controls

Population size: District-level population size – taken from ICPSR (2006; https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/43/version/1) which provides data for all five year-intervals between 1890 and 1910. Linear intrapolation between two datapoints for annual estimates. For the post-1910 period, the 1910 observation is repeated.

% Catholic: District-level share of individuals identifying as Catholic – taken from ICPSR (2006; https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/43/version/1) which provides data for all five year-intervals between 1890 and 1910. Linear intrapolation between two datapoints for annual estimates. For the post-1910 period, the 1910 observation is repeated.

% Protestants: District-level share of individuals identifying as Protestant – taken from ICPSR (2006; https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/43/version/1) which provides data for all five year-intervals between 1890 and 1910. Linear intrapolation between two datapoints for annual estimates. For the post-1910 period, the 1910 observation is repeated.

Political controls

Secret ballot: State-level introduction of the secret ballot, the data for which is taken from Ziblatt (2017).

Effective number of right wing parties: This measures the district-level fragmentation of right-wing parties and takes on higher values where fewer parties represent the conservative side of the political spectrum. The data is taken from Mares (2015).

Margin of victory: The margin of victory in the last round of the previous election is a measure of a district's electoral competitiveness. It captures "the difference in electoral victory between the winner and runner-up in the decisive electoral round" (Mares 2015: 104). The data is taken from the "Reichstag Election Data Set" (ICPSR 1984).

SPD Core district: A district in which the SPD received the highest vote share in at least three of the seven elections between 1871 and 1887. By only looking at those elections having occurred before the start of my period of observation, I ensure that I am not introducing post-treatment bias. The data is taken from the "Reichstag Election Data Set" (ICPSR 1984).

Non-SPD Core district: A district in which a single conservative party received the highest vote share in at least three of the seven elections between 1871 and 1887 – and, at the same time, the SPD did not receive the largest vote share once. The data is taken from the "Reichstag Election Data Set" (ICPSR 1984).

SPD victory: Dummy that takes on the value of "1" if a SPD candidate won the mandate in the respective district in the previous election. The data is taken from the "Reichstag Election Data Set" (ICPSR 1984).

Pre-1890 malfeasance: District-level number of elections between 1871 and 1887 that witnessed at least one malfeasance complaint. Given that there were seven national elections in this time period (1871, 1874, 1877, 1878, 1881, 1884, 1887), this measure is bound between "0" and "7". The raw data is taken from Ziblatt (2008, 2010) and cumulated over election years.

Malfeasance in previous election: District-level dummy that takes on the value of "1" if the district experienced at least one malfeasance complaint in the previous election (Ziblatt 2008, 2010).

Cumulated prior malfeasance: District-level number of elections between 1871 and the election year previous to the treatment year (up to 1907 given that 1912 is the last treatment year) in which a district experienced at least one malfeasance complaint. Given that there were 13 elections between 1871 and 1912, this measure is bound between "0" and "12". The raw data is taken from Ziblatt (2008, 2010) and cumulated over election years.

4. Variable Construction

The unit of analysis in this study is the electoral-district level which divides Imperial Germany into 397 districts between 1890 and 1913 that remained unchanged throughout this period (Mares 2015: 105). As the SPD reported donations at a lower unit of analysis for most years, these city- and village-level donations need to be aggregated to the electoral district. This requires me to hand-code the longitude and latitude for each site in which a contribution had been made. At times, this process is made more difficult by name changes of sites that are no longer part of Germany (sites in Schlesien that now belong to Poland or Russia; units in Elsass-Lothringen that now belong to France). Units that used to be independent but were incorporated into larger cities pose an additional challenge. Matching locations to districts for the years between 1891 and 1894 has shown that less than 10% of the observations needed to be dropped because the village name did not uniquely identify a village or because the village could not be matched to a district. At a later stage of the project, I hope to employ a RA to establish the intercoder reliability of my coordinates and district-matches.

Geocoding in R

The following code takes the location of the monthly village/city-level contributions as an input, maps the units onto the electoral districts in the shapefile provided by Ziblatt (2010), and returns the district-level matches for the time periods of interest:

```
library(sf) // loading the SF library

obj1 <- read_sf("SDE2_GERMAN1895ELECTORALDISTRICTS.shp") // reading in the shapefile

st_crs(obj1) // examining the coordinate reference system (crs) of the shapefile

wgs84 <- "+proj=longlat +ellps=WGS84 +datum=WGS84 +no_defs" //defining the crs

obj1a <- st_transform(obj1, crs=wgs84) // assigning the coordinate reference system

coord <- st_as_sf(spd3, coords = c("Longitude", "Latitude"), crs = 4326) // turning the latitude and longitude information into geographic points under the same crs

devtools::install_github("tidyverse/ggplot2") //need the latest ggplot2 version for the geom_sf command

require(ggplot2)

ggplot() +

  geom_sf(data=obj1, color = "gray30", lwd=.2, fill=NA) +

  geom_sf(data=coord, show.legend = F, color="red", lwd=0.7) +

  geom_label(data=coord, aes(label=Unit)) // returns a graph of all contributions over the 397 districts

joint <- st_within(coord, obj1, sparse = T) // creates a variable that matches locations to districts
```

5. Empirical Analysis

As malfeasance complaints do not vary as-if randomly, we need to create a balance between treatment and control units in terms of all confounders that predict both treatment and monetary donations. In different words, the identification strategy employed here is selection on observables. This allows me to calculate the Covariate Balancing Propensity Score which operates under the assumptions of (1) common support and (2) conditional ignorability (Imai and Ratkovic 2014; Li et al. 2018). The assumption of common support requires that for each combination of covariates, the likelihood of receiving treatment is positive. To establish this empirically, I will plot the propensity score weights where extremely large values (close to 1) indicate that only a very small number of units share the same covariate combination given a certain treatment status. Conditional ignorability means that after conditioning on observables, treatment status is independent of the amount of money individuals would have given to the SPD in a district under both treatment and control conditions (potential outcomes). This estimation technique weighs observations in a way so that treatment and control units are on average balanced over all covariates that predict treatment uptake.

Common support

$$p(T_i = t \mid \mathbf{X}_i) > 0$$

Conditional ignorability

$$T_i \perp\!\!\!\perp Y_i(t) \mid \mathbf{X}_i$$

where T refers to treatment status, X is the vector of covariates, and Y of T if the potential outcome under the treatment status for an individual i.

As the district's covariate histories change as time progresses, the weighting exercises described in the following will be repeated for each electoral cycle (1893, 1898, 1903, 1907, 1912). Since the weights vary depending on which covariates we are controlling for, I will run three different specifications: The first only contains key predictors of malfeasance complaints, whereas all predictors will enter the second model. To test whether the first specification really contains all relevant variables, we can regress treatment uptake on the excluded controls using the weights obtained from the first model: If the results are insignificant, we should be more willing to believe that the key variables are sufficient for explaining treatment uptake. If this is not the case, the significant formerly excluded predictors should be included in the first specification. In the third specification, I will only include those predictors that are post-treatment for each election year. As data for variables such as land inequality, the percentage of skilled workers and occupational heterogeneity are only available from 1895 onwards, balancing on such observations for the election year of 1893 may induce post-treatment bias. This would be the case if we believe that malfeasance reports in 1893 influence the value on these covariates in 1895. Therefore, it is worth establishing the robustness of my findings by including only those weights that cannot be post-treatment. Importantly, this also implies that those predictors will be excluded whose values in 1893 are generated through linear interpolation between 1890 and 1895.

Estimation model to determine weights as a function of key predictors

(1) Malfeasance report in district j in election year k = constant + SPD Core$_{jk}$ + margin of victory$_{jk-1}$ + secret ballot in state m in year k + % Catholic$_{jk}$ + % non-agricultural employment$_{jk}$ + error term

Estimation model to determine weights as a function of all predictors

(2) Malfeasance report in district j in election year k = constant + SPD Core$_{jk}$ + non-SPD core$_{jk}$ + margin of victory$_{jk}$ + secret ballot in state m in year k + # right-wing parties$_{jk}$ + SPD victory$_{jk}$ + pre-1890 malfesance$_{jk}$ + malfeasance in previous election$_{jk}$ + cumulated prior malfeasance$_{jk}$ + population size$_{jk}$ + % Protestant$_{jk}$ + % Catholic$_{jk}$ + % non-agricultural employment$_{jk}$ + land inequality$_{jk}$ + share skilled workers$_{jk}$ + occupational heterogeneity$_{jk.}$ + error term

Estimation model to determine weights as a function of clearly pre-treatment predictors

(3) Malfeasance report in district j in election year k = constant + SPD $Core_{jk}$ + non-SPD $core_{jk}$ + margin of $victory_{jk}$ + secret ballot in state m in year k + # $right\text{-}wing\ parties_{jk}$ + SPD $victory_{jk}$ + pre-1890 $malfesance_{jk}$ + $malfeasance\ in\ previous\ election_{jk}$ + cumulated prior $malfeasance_{jk}$.. + error term

Code for the first equation

cb <- CBPS(malfeasance ~ s_core + margin + sballot + catholic + nagriculturalempl, data=final, ATT=0, iterations = 1000) // estimating the covariate balancing propensity score

balance(cb) // reports balance statistics for all covariates pre- and post balancing

plot(cb) // plots distribution of propensity scores

After having obtained the weights to balance control and treatment units, I will run a panel regression with district-level, state-level, and year fixed effects to estimate how electoral malfeasance complaints are related to subsequent monetary spending to the SPD. One challenge here is how to deal with the fact that the data point for the month of the election contains both pre-treatment and post-treatment information. If we could demonstrate that the balanced (weighted) treatment and control units displayed parallel trends in terms of contributions up to the election, we would be more willing to believe that the pre-treatment share of the election month data point would also be similar for both treatment conditions. Therefore, I will provide a graph for the contribution trends in the 24 months prior and after the election to examine whether a malfeasance complaint is associated with a discontinuity in contribution patterns. If trends are not parallel, this may indicate that the model is misspecified or that the weights did not sufficiently balance key covariates. To assess the latter, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests and t-tests (two sample, unequal variances) will be conducted.

(4) monetary donation in district j in month z = constant + malfeasance report in district j in month z-1 + district fixed effects + state fixed effects + year fixed effects + error term

Code for the estimation of the ATE

Mod1 <- felm (contr ~ malfeasance | district, state, year | 0 | weights = weights, data=final) // Fixed effects linear model of the magnitude of contributions as a function of malfeasance reports, with observations weighted according to the CBPS results above; three types of fixed effects. I didn't try whether this actually works so as not to glimpse at results before submitting the PAP.

In order to test the effect of malfeasance complaints conditional on the type of district (core SPD, core conservative, swing), we can repeat the procedure described above with subsetted samples of (1) core SPD districts, (2) core conservative districts, and (3) once with all swing districts.

6. Looking Ahead

The empirical strategy outlined in this pre-analysis plan will be extended in the following ways conditional (1) on the results of my archival research over the summer as well as (2) on receiving data for a continuous measure of malfeasance and additional covariates:

First, an implicit assumption underlying the identification strategy is that individuals are aware of the electoral malfeasance in their district and alter their monetary contribution patterns accordingly. By analyzing election coverage in local newspapers for a stratified subsample of electoral districts, I intend to shed light on the extent to which those instances of electoral malfeasance that gave rise to a complaint to the national election commission entered political debates on the ground. With respect to the selection of newspapers, I will draw a random sample of newspapers available between 1890 and 1913 and ensure variation over the extent of malfeasance, urban/rural, and the electoral competitiveness of the district. If this exercise leads to the conclusion that malfeasance complaints were relatively unrelated to political debate on the ground, we should be less willing to believe that contributions to the SPD were related to electoral malfeasance in the way stipulated above.

Second, it needs to be established what type of entity is contributing to the national SPD. Throughout this PAP it was assumed that individuals as opposed to firms were funding the party. While the SPD gives information on its own economic activities and revenue (newspapers) and other firms allegedly only started contributing in 1910, more qualitative evidence is needed to show what generative process is at work when the SPD states that it received a monetary contribution. Most importantly, the role of local party chapters needs to be illuminated: Is it just a different level of party organization that individuals could give money to? Or are there settings in which contributions to the national party are filtered through local party chapters? Furthermore, the degree of formalization of party membership changed quite profoundly in my period of observation: Local party chapters proliferated and the party began to collect membership fees. The issue here is that the SPD in their annual records conflated membership fees and additional contributions in the category of "district level monetary contributions". If membership fees are supposed to be excluded, I could use information on the district level number of party members and the local membership fee available for the year 1912 to isolate non-membership fee contributions.

Third, the SPD was only one of two major intermediary organizations mobilizing workers. The SPD and major unions started a formal cooperation only in 1905 (Kuo and Jusko 2012: 6). While the spending patterns, mobilizational success, and internal finances of labor unions in Imperial Germany are an extremely interesting subject of scientific inquiry in their own right, the success of unions to attract monetary contributions may crowd out – or, if unions mobilized not only for themselves but also the party they were associated with, amplify – spending to the SPD. Therefore, union activity is an unmeasured confounder that warrants its own data collection effort.

Fourth, my argument implies a district-level calculation on the side of voters. As national-level variation in the accommodation of the SPD by the conservative elites, the electoral success of the SPD, and the ability to attract funds from sources other than domestic individuals should influence the size of individual contributions to the SPD, these factors need to be controlled for more explicitly. While I do have the data to control for the SPD's national success and its alternative funding sources (donations form abroad, loans, newspaper revenue), it may be necessary to include a dummy variable for periods in which the conservative elite was less hostile towards the Social Democrats. Looking at local newspapers may allow me to code when national-level as opposed to district-level post-election coverage dominated the political discourse in the districts.

Fifth, employing a dichotomous measure of district-level malfeasance complaints is suboptimal due to the information loss incurred by dichotomization. If I get access to the continuous malfeasance complaint data, it would be possible to use the covariate balancing generalized propensity score technique (Imai et al. 2018a) to estimate whether larger numbers of complaints have a stronger influence on contributions. This technique has been developed very recently and constitutes the methodological cutting edge of how to conduct causal inference with observational data where the treatment is continuous.

Finally, the temporality of the estimated effect could be addressed by checking for lagged treatment effects/ carryover effects (Imai et al. 2018b). Intuitively, contribution patterns can be affected not only by malfeasance in the most recent election. While I do control for the amount of previous elections with a malfeasance complaint in a district, I could balance more explicitly on the sequence of election year treatments (Blackwell 2013). This would allow me to treat districts that experienced malfeasance, for instance, in the last three elections different from those that witnessed it in the first three ones.

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