

Pre-Analysis/ Data Collection-Plan: Electoral Malfeasance, the Secret Ballot, and Political Mobilization by the Social Democratic Party of Germany between 1890 and 1914

Motivation and Research Question

Between the end of the anti-socialist laws in 1890 and the beginning of WWI., the Social Democratic Party of Germany turned from a fairly 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 how incidences of district-level electoral malfeasance and variation in the timing of the adoption of the secret ballot between German states are related to the amount of private monetary contributions to the 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. For these reasons, every account of how this party 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 have something to say about the funding sources of the party. Yet, this topic is noticeably absent in 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).

Hypotheses

In addition, there is an ongoing debate about the mobilizational effects of low-intensity repression such as the skewing of the electoral playing-field. It is theoretically ambiguous whether electoral malfeasance makes individuals less willing to support a party that was the object of such 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 often is 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 at intermediate levels of SPD strength (as measured by prior vote shares). I argue that the effect of malfeasance is conditional on whose stronghold a district is: Malfeasance should have a negative effect on monetary contributions to the SPD in districts that were strongholds of other parties as the malfeasance signaled the dominance of the (conservative) incumbents. In strongholds of the SPD that experienced malfeasance, I would expect to see an increase in monetary contributions. The same holds for 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.

My second independent variable – the adoption of the secret ballot on the state-level – provides variation for my period of analysis (introduction of the secret ballot in Baden 1904, Württemberg 1906, Bavaria 1906; opposite developments in Saxony in 1896, Lübeck 1902, and so on). The secret ballot allows individuals to vote more independently of the interests of their employers and local patrons. Therefore, it is usually a crucial milestone to fair and free elections. However, as the electoral malfeasance data suggests, electoral fairness continued to be compromised even when the secret ballot was in place. My hypothesis is that the introduction of the secret ballot led to higher district contributions to the SPD in those districts in which the secret ballot was associated with a decline in electoral malfeasance.

To summarize my hypotheses:

H1: The effect of electoral malfeasance on monetary contributions to the SPD is conditional on whether the district is a core district of the SPD, a core district of another party, or a swing district. I expect to find larger increases in contributions in those swing and core districts of the SPD that experienced electoral irregularities in the most recent election relative to swing and core districts that did not. For core districts of other parties, I expect malfeasance to be associated with lower monetary contributions relative to such districts in which electoral fraud was not observed.

H2: The introduction of the secret ballot led to larger monetary contributions where the secret ballot was associated with a decline in electoral malfeasance.

### Estimation Strategy

To justify the assumptions required for employing a difference-in-difference estimator (“parallel trends”) or one of the techniques operating with a conditional independence assumption, one needs to have a very detailed contextual knowledge. While there has been a profound amount of research by historians and political scientists on the SPD and the political systems of each state for the pre-war period (see bibliography), I won’t be able to review the majority of this literature until the end of the quarter. For this reason, I will refrain from making strong identifying assumptions in this pre-analysis plan.

In the absence of a neat identification strategy, I would estimate a panel regression model for H1 with the following equation:

H1: Monetary contribution (district, year) = electoral malfeasance (district, last national election) + core district (district, last national election) + electoral malfeasance \* core district + covariates (district, year) (see list below) + fixed effects + intercept + error term

Three statements/ questions about this equation: (1) I can’t utilize the monthly variation in the DV as there is no single explanatory variable that varies month by month. (2) I want to differentiate between core districts of the SPD, core districts of other parties, and swing districts. This probably means that I will have to include three different dummy variables – or rather one dummy for three different

specifications to prevent perfect multicollinearity. (3) Which fixed effects structure should be employed?

H2: Monetary contribution (district, month) = electoral malfeasance (district, last national election) + secret ballot dummy (district, month) + electoral malfeasance \* secret ballot dummy + core district (district, last national election) + covariates (district, year) (see list below) + fixed effects + intercept + error term

Statements/ questions: (1) Does it make sense to look at monthly variation if only one independent variable (a dummy) varies month-by-month once per district?, (2) Fixed effects structure?

### Variables and Data Sources

#### Dependent Variable

- Monetary contributions to the SPD: absolute monthly district-level voluntary contributions to the SPD between 1890-1914 taken from the records of the annual national party meetings; would need to be corrected for inflation and, in some cases, aggregated to reflect the electoral district level; does not include contributions to the local SPD chapters that were not reported to the national SPD

#### Main Independent Variables

- Electoral malfeasance: district-level number of complaints about electoral irregularities that were submitted to the electoral commission per election year; complaints could be filed by single individuals, data taken from Arsenschek and Ziblatt 2008, 2010 (<https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/43>)
- Secret ballot: introduction of the secret ballot on the state level (Ziblatt 2017)
- Core district: a district in which the vote share of a party was larger than a theoretically informed threshold (potentially: 30% ?)

#### Control Variables

- % Catholic: district level share of individuals identifying as Catholic, taken from ICPSR 1984 and Mares 2014
- Rural inequality: Landholding inequality on the district level in 1895, taken from Ziblatt 2009
- % non-agricultural employment: district level share of individuals employed in the non-agricultural sectors (Mares 2015)
- Ratio of skilled to unskilled workers: district level data for the census years of 1895 and 1905 taken from Mares 2015; “skilled workers are those workers who had experienced some training. By contrast, unskilled workers – in other words manual workers, handymen, and other workers in services – do not have training” (cited in Mares 2015: 108)

- 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)); available for the census years of 1895 and 1905
- Population size: district level population size in 1895 and 1905 (ICPSR 1984)
- District contested by the SPD: dummy variable that takes on the value of 1 if the SPD contested a district in the national elections (“Reichstagswahlen”)
- Effective number of right-wing parties

#### Other Variables for which I have data

- Seat share of the SPD: seat share obtained by the SPD in the national elections of a given year
- Number of SPD members (national level): available only for selected years

#### Next steps that I would like to work on over the summer

- Increasing my contextual knowledge of why German states introduced the secret ballot by reading more of the publications listed in the bibliography
- Reading the work on secret ballot reform, electoral malfeasance, and party financing in other countries to see what kind of identification claims are made in the literature
- Archival research in Germany to see whether I find data on union membership, mobilization, and finance to be able to say more about how monetary contributions to the SPD may be crowded out or increased in districts with a strong union presence
- Mares (2015) only provides data on Prussia even though the census surveys she utilized were conducted in all of Germany – the data is available in Berlin (not digitalized). I will collect this data and will also have to take some time to code the monetary contributions data from the reports of the annual meetings of the SPD.

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