BOWLING FOR FASCISM:
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY*

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Abstract: Using newly collected data on association density in 229 towns and cities in interwar Germany, we show that denser social networks were associated with faster entry into the Nazi Party. The effect is large – one standard deviation higher association density is associated with at least 15% faster Nazi Party entry. Party membership, in turn, predicts electoral success. Social networks thus aided the rise of the Nazis that destroyed Germany's first democracy. The effects of social capital depended on the political context – in federal states with more stable governments, higher association density was not correlated with faster Nazi Party entry.

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Hitler's seemingly mysterious mass appeal could hardly have been so extensive without the unplanned propaganda of daily social life ...

-Rudy Koshar (1986, p. 202)

1 Introduction

Social capital is typically associated with the emergence and persistence of good institutions and favorable economic outcomes.[1] Tocqueville argued that American democracy thrived because of a vibrant civic society; conversely, Putnam (2000) concluded that a decline in social capital threatened it. On the other hand, social capital can also be associated with negative outcomes such as organized crime (Durlauf and Fafchamps 2005; Field 2003), and it can serve as a means of control, thereby entrenching the power of autocratic rulers (Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson 2014).

In this paper, we study the role of social capital during one of the key discontinuities of the 20th century – the Nazi Party's (NSDAP's) rise to power. In 1933, Germany went from a pluralistic, tolerant democracy to one of the most repressive dictatorships in history. A vast literature has sought to explain the Nazi "seizure of power." Answers currently range from a history of deep-rooted anti-Semitism (Goldhagen 1996) to the social changes engendered by German industrialization, hyperinflation, and the structural flaws of the Weimar constitution interacting with weak political leadership before 1933 (Bracher 1978). We emphasize a different channel – that Germany's vibrant "civic society," its dense network of social clubs and associations, facilitated the rise of Hitler by bringing more people into contact with his party's message (Berman 1997).

Mass membership was crucial for the Nazi rise to power. Long before it became a force at the polls, the Nazi Party developed a mass following of often fanatically devoted members. The electoral success of the NSDAP after 1930 would have been impossible without massive organizational support by thousands of local chapters and hundreds of thousands of dedicated members who campaigned for the party all over Germany, paid dues, and influenced friends and family (Brustein 1998). The party's vast size was also essential in bargaining for power after 1930 – thanks to its mass appeal, the party controlled a huge paramilitary force of storm troopers (SA). By 1932, it had grown so strong that,

[1] Knack and Keefer (1997), Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002), Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2008).

according to a war game conducted by the German Army, the SA had a good chance of defeating the regular armed forces in the case of civil war (Winkler 1987).[2]

Our empirical analysis focuses on one aspect of social capital – dense networks of clubs and associations. We combine individual-level records of Nazi Party membership from Falter and Brustein (2015) with newly collected information on civic associations from a cross-section of 229 towns and cities from all over Germany in the 1920s. We demonstrate that the Nazi Party grew more quickly where association density – measured by number of civic associations per capita – was higher. Figure 1 summarizes the basic pattern in the data: in towns and cities with above-median association density, Germans were substantially more likely to enter the Nazi Party than in towns with below-median club density. The effect is quantitatively important, corresponding to a 27% difference in Nazi Party entry rates over the period January 1925-January 1933. All types of associations – civic and military clubs, "bridging" and "bonding" associations – positively predict Nazi Party entry. The historical record suggests that associations facilitated Nazi recruitment by helping to spread the party's message, and by increasing trust in its intentions and officials. Party membership, in turn, predicts electoral success.

Our results are robust to a wide range of alternative specifications and group definitions. In a panel analysis, we exploit membership growth over time and include city fixed effects to capture local unobservables that may be related to both association density and Nazi Party entry. We show that the marginal effect of existing party members on subsequent membership growth was significantly larger in cities with higher association density. This is in line with historical evidence that existing Nazi Party members successfully exploited local associations to proselytize.

An obvious concern with our analysis is that the drivers of association density could directly affect NSDAP penetration. We therefore use the historical record to guide our empirical analysis. Nazi party success correlated with religion, the share of industrial workers (Childers 1983, Falter 1991), and city size. These also predict association density – bigger cities offered more clubs and associations, and sociability was more likely to become formalized; Catholics organized many social activities through the Church; and

[2] The regular armed forces were limited to 100,000 as a result of the Versailles Treaty. The head of the army, General Streicher, realized that the NSDAP could not be repressed by violent means. This led him to seek out the party's moderates in a bid to forge a compromise in December 1932. This was one of the first steps in a process of mutual accommodation between Germany's traditional right-wing parties and the Nazis Party that culminated in the latter's entry into government in 1933.

workers often had their own associations and clubs, making them less likely to participate in "bourgeois" activities. In all of our analysis we control directly for these factors. However, and crucially, we also argue that some drivers of association density are unlikely to be related to factors affecting the rise of the NSDAP. Associational life was partly defined in the run-up and aftermath of 1848, and its vigor in the interwar period still reflected this earlier period's opportunities and restrictions. All German states heavily restricted the formation of clubs and societies prior to 1848. These restrictions were dismantled as a result of citizens demanding the right of free assembly during the 1848 revolution. The way restrictions were abolished varied by location, depending on local conditions and individual officials. Despite the revolution's ultimate failure, the freedom of assembly was never again curtailed on the same scale; as a result, early clubs and associations persisted. Crucially, the revolutionaries of 1848 – Germany's only attempt at a democratic, "bourgeois" revolution – shared none of the Nazis' racist, militaristic, expansionist ideology. We show that these democratic associations predict the density of local associations, both in the 1860s and in the 1920s. Based on this fact, we use 1860s associations in an IV exercise that shows a strong link between historical club density and Nazi Party entry.

We also examine where and *when* local club density was particularly strongly associated with Nazi Party entry, and thereby shed light on the conditions under which social capital can become corrosive. To this end, we exploit variation in the stability of government across Germany's federal states. Unstable governance and higher association density combined were particularly conducive to Nazi Party entry. Our results also indicate that only the Nazi Party benefitted from social capital in Weimar Germany, and it did so to a greater extent during early stages of its development – local contact through social networks counted the most when the Nazi Party itself still had few members.

Our paper is the first to show – on the basis of detailed cross-sectional data – that social capital can undermine and help to destroy a democratic system. Our findings complement and extend the results by Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson (2014), who conclude that powerful chiefs in Sierra Leone "build social capital as a way to control and monitor society" [p.363]. In addition to entrenching autocratic rulers, social capital may also contribute to the rise of autocratic regimes in the first place, by providing a pathway

for radical parties to spread and garner support.[3] These findings modify our understanding of the relationship between the rise of dictatorships and social capital. Theories of "mass society" and the origins of totalitarianism in the spirit of Ortega y Gasset (1993), Arendt (1973), and Bendix (1952) argued that economic modernization uprooted individuals and dissolved traditional social ties. Confronted with a major economic crisis, the faceless masses could then be easily swayed by demagogic agitators like Hitler, or by dreams of a Communist utopia. In line with the predictions of mass society theory, Shirer (1960) saw marginal loners as the core group of NSDAP supporters; Stern (1972) claimed that interwar German civic society was weaker than in other European countries, and that the country lacked "the kind of voluntary, civic activity that attracted their English and American counterparts" [p.xxix]. In other words, an important strand of the literature on the rise of totalitarianism has argued that the *weakness* of German civic society facilitated the rise of the Nazis. Our results demonstrate that the opposite is closer to the truth. In this way, we reinforce evidence by Riley (2005) for Italy (discussed in more detail in Section 2.2).[4] We also corroborate the conjecture by Berman (1997), who had argued that Weimar Germany as a whole actually had comparatively dense networks of clubs and associations, and that the NSDAP successfully exploited these structures. In contrast to our study, neither Riley nor Berman used detailed quantitative data to test for a systematic link between association density and the rise of fascism.

We connect with work on social dynamics and network effects in politics. Recent work has emphasized the importance of influential individuals shaping beliefs in networks (Acemoglu and Jackson 2015).[5] Madestam et al. (2013) analyze the rise of the Tea Party in the US. They find evidence for a "social multiplier," with many more people favoring a radical movement if they see support in large numbers.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses the historical context. Section 3 presents our data, and Section 4, our main empirical results. Section 5 asks under what conditions social capital was more beneficial for the Nazi Party's rise, and Section 6 offers robustness checks and demonstrates the plausibility of our findings. Section 7 concludes.

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[3] In this sense, adverse political consequences need to be added to the list of negative aspects of high social capital in social settings, such as social exclusion and its enabling role for organized crime (Durlauf and Fafchamps 2005; Portes and Landolt 1996; Field 2003).

[4] Note that there is also an ongoing re-evaluation of the Italian evidence in Putnam's work (Tarrow 1996, Goldberg 1996).

[5] More generally, Zuckerman (2005) and Lohmann (1993) emphasize the role of group interactions in spreading new political ideas.

2 Historical Context

In this section, we first argue why, for historical reasons, variation in association density is arguably exogenous to the rise of the Nazi Party, conditional on some key controls. We then describe our key dependent variable – Nazi Party entry – and discuss the party's social origins. We also summarize related research on the link between association membership and Nazi Party entry.

2.1 Associations in Germany after 1815 and the Source of Identifying Variation

What are the origins of associations in Weimar Germany – and thus of the spatial differences that we exploit in our empirical analysis? A close reading of the historical literature suggests that political and social conditions at a "critical juncture" played a key role in determining the strength of associational life in any one location – and once clubs and associations were established, they tended to last a long time. A confluence of largely accidental factors allowed clubs and associations to form after the restoration of 1815 until the early 1850s, with the 1848 revolution as a particular turning point.

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, associations grew in number and scope all over Germany, but were often repressed by the authorities; political associations were banned altogether. Both associations and larger gatherings needed government approval, which was routinely denied. For example, gymnast associations – inspired by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, and often a focal point for liberal nationalists – were outlawed from 1820 until 1848. Singers' associations never suffered a blanket ban, but were closely watched by the police. Student fraternities (*Burschenschaften*) also grew after 1815. They agitated in favor of German unification. Following a political murder, most of the student fraternities were suppressed.[6]

Over time, restrictions on the formation of associations were repealed or ignored in most German states, and many clubs and associations played a role in 1848 (Botzenhart 1977). The way restrictions were abolished varied by location, and partly reflected differences in attitudes of local and state officials. We argue that the state- and city-level factors driving variation in the repeal of restrictions are plausibly exogenous to NSDAP entry in the 1920s and early 1930s. Germany's early associations were often both liberal and nationalist in character. They mostly favored the formation of a unified fatherland and

[6] The fraternity movement split into a political and a non-political branch, and never recovered its wider political significance (Wentzcke 1965).

an end to the rule by princes over often tiny territories, as well as parliamentary representation, a bill of rights, and freedom of assembly, speech, and religion. Importantly, the liberal nationalist part of this agenda was neither militaristic nor xenophobic; it differed substantially from the later nationalism under Bismarck in 1871, and especially from the ideology of the Nazi Party (Eley 1980). Instead, *Vereinsnationalismus* (nationalism of the associations) mainly emphasized the need to unify all Germans in a nation state similar to France and England, where all could interact as equals (Dunn 1979). After the failure of the 1848 revolution, many associations became increasingly apolitical, focusing on folklore and local traditions (Düding 1984). In addition to the original associations, new ones brought together pigeon breeders, rabbit owners, stamp collectors, and supporters of a plethora of other causes. Student associations, on the other hand, became increasingly nationalistic and militarist, and several of them adopted xenophobic and anti-Semitic ideas in the late 19th century (Haupt 1925).

Despite the revolution's ultimate failure, earlier prohibitions never returned with full force. Once formed, clubs and associations were sticky – as reflected in the fact that many integrated their date of founding into their name. A local culture of associational life persisted, and it influenced the extent to which people continued to gather and pursue like-minded activities into the interwar period (Bösch 2005, Hardtwig 1984). One way to illustrate this argument is to show that involvement of democratic associations in the 1848 revolution is a strong predictor of association density in the 1920s. In 1848, associations in part acted as precursors of modern parties in many German states, organizing the collective expression of political beliefs for the first time (Langewiesche 1978). Good examples are the Democratic Congresses in 1848, representing the left-wing of the revolution. Where local associations had formed, their delegates participated in these gatherings, which included the first promulgations of universal human rights in Germany. Sending local delegates to the Congresses required three things – a sufficient number of people interested in a distinctly left-wing agenda, the ability to organize locally, and the ability and right to do so. We find that – for the limited subset of towns and cities with available data on delegates – involvement with Democratic Congresses is strongly positively correlated with both the vigor of associational life in 1860s Germany and in the 1920s (see Appendix F.1). In other words, our main explanatory variable – association density in the 1920s – is strongly predicted by clubs that represented the political left during the 1848 revolution. This makes it unlikely that the historical origins of associational life in Germany reflect

local, unobserved Nazi-compatible ideology – few supporters of universal human rights admired Adolf Hitler.[7]

During the interwar period, membership in associations soared. The main singers' association's membership tripled, to 1.2 million; the German gymnasts' association registered a 50% rise in membership. Most associations saw themselves as apolitical, and did not support particular parties. In the Catholic Rhineland, all ranks of societies often joined Carnival associations, organizing revelry during the annual "silly season." While some organizations were explicitly Catholic or Protestant, almost every town and city also had a large number of non-denominational associations (Reichardt 2004). Associations reflected the views and biases of German civic society in general; where politics were not deliberately kept out of the club, there was a society for every political grouping. Workers gathered in workmen's singing associations; Communists reminisced about their frontline experiences together; and members of the nobility and rich industrialists conferred in gentlemen's and equestrian clubs (Zeiss-Horbach 2008; Koshar 1986). While many clubs and societies catered to a particular social group, others transcended divisions of class and education – such as the many sports and hiking clubs, chess clubs, and associations for the preservation of local customs and culture. In our later analysis, we will explicitly distinguish between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital (Putnam 2000).

2.2 Historical Correlates of Association Density and Nazi Party Appeal

In the following, we discuss historical factors that may confound our empirical analysis – variables that arguably influenced both association density and the recruitment success of the Nazi Party. These include the share of Catholics, the share of blue-collar workers, and city size.

Catholics in Germany were initially less inclined to support the Nazi Party. This is not because Catholics, or the Catholic Church, were not immune to the appeal of fascism. The Catholic Church built amiable relationships with fascist regimes in Italy and Spain (and eventually in Germany). Before 1934, the situation in Germany was different.

[7] One could alternatively argue that what persisted was a local tendency to go against the established system. This is difficult to examine empirically. The only truly anti-regime party of the pre-1914 period, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), was the political home of the worker movement. It was outlawed under Bismarck for 12 years (1878-90), and persecuted by the authorities as 'rabble without a fatherland' (Rovan 1980). Unsurprisingly, areas with an "anti-regime" bias in this regard before 1914 were not more likely to support the Nazi Party. We show in Section E.7 in the online appendix that SPD votes in 1890-1912 do not predict Nazi Party entry or NSDAP votes; they are also not correlated with association density in Weimar Germany.

Catholics were traditionally in a minority in Germany in its pre-WWII borders, and their loyalty to the German state was historically suspect. There was an important political tradition on the political right of the spectrum (including under Chancellor Bismarck) of pursuing an anti-Catholic agenda (Wehler 1994). Hence, Catholics had a historically rooted distrust of far-right nationalist parties. The Nazi Party was thus less appealing to Catholics – especially since they also had their own party, the Zentrum. The formal organization of social life in independent clubs and societies was also less common among Catholics; the Catholic Church provided a natural focal point and offered many activities under its own aegis. We do not include religious clubs and associations in our dataset.[8] Consequently, cities with more Catholics tend to have lower measured association density in our sample.

The situation for workers was similar to Catholics in some ways. Long suspected of a lack of patriotism, the Communist Party was the main party of protest (rather than the Nazi Party) for those workers disenchanted by the Weimar regime (Winkler 1987). At the same time, the inclination of workers to form clubs and associations was lower than amongst the rest of the population. While they often had their own sports associations and the like, most workers lived in large cities, where association density tended to be lower; also, forming clubs and societies is a prototypical "bourgeois" activity, performed by those with higher educational attainment and broad networks of contacts.

Finally, we also need to control for population size. Larger cities had lower association densities, arguably because of both economies of scale and because bigger cities contained more workers. We also know that rural areas and smaller towns were particularly given to supporting the Nazi movement (Brustein 1998, pp. 102-08). For this reason, we also include city size in our baseline controls. After controlling for city size, the share of Catholics, and the proportion of workers, we believe that differences in the density of associations are reasonably exogenous for the purpose of our study (i.e., driven by deep historical factors that have no direct link with Nazi Party entry).

2.3 The Rise of the Nazi Party and Fascism in Europe

There is a large literature analyzing the Nazi Party's success at the polls and as a mass movement (e.g. Childers 1983, Hamilton 1982, Falter 1991, King et al. 2008). Initial theorizing focused on isolated members of the masses – marginal loners for whom the party

[8] This is because we are interested in the "bottom-up" characteristic of grassroot organizations, not in ready-made sociality created by members of the Church hierarchy.

represented a group where they finally belonged (Shirer 1960). An alternative literature interpreted the rise of the Nazi Party as a form of class conflict (Winkler 1987). Recent research on voting behavior emphasizes "ordinary economic voting" – with the working poor particularly susceptible to the Nazi message (King et al. 2008).

Our paper is closely related to research emphasizing group membership as a pathway to Nazi involvement, which gained wider currency from the 1970s onwards (Linz 1976). This strand of the literature assigns crucial importance to the "conquest of the bourgeois infrastructure" (Mommsen 1978, p. 186), i.e., the infiltration of existing high-level national and regional lobbying groups (*Verbände*) representing farmers and other special interests. Berman (1997) points out that Weimar Germany as a whole had many civic associations. She argues that "… had German civil society been weaker, the Nazis would never have been able to capture so many citizens for their cause ..." (Berman 1997, p. 402). Koshar (1986), in a detailed study of Marburg, demonstrates that NSDAP members were active in many local groups. Anheier (2003) shows how well-connected individuals acted as political entrepreneurs. Using their social connections and professional standing, they attracted new members for the party, leading to the founding of new local chapters.

Our work also follows earlier historical research on interwar politics in Europe. Riley (2010; 2005) analyzes the role of civic associations and the rise of fascism in Italy and Spain. Based on evidence from 20 Italian regions, he argues that associations fostered the rise of fascism. In Spain, associational life was dominated by the Catholic church, and was largely compatible with a more traditionalist form of fascism. Riley contends that in countries without strong hegemonic organizations – i.e., well-established parties – social capital can undermine the development of democracy. In a similar spirit, Wellhofer (2003) examines the rise of fascism in Italy, focusing on election results. In contrast to Riley, he finds that civic society blunted the rise of fascism, but only in certain elections.

2.4 Nazi Party Membership

The Nazi Party deliberately competed with leftwing parties for mass support, replacing their class-based ideology with nationalist and racist ideals (Shirer 1960). From the party's early days, Hitler and his associates viewed organization-building as crucial for the rise to power. The party's initial growth was slow. Eventually, membership grew to 850,000 members in January 1933 – on par with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and nearly three times higher than Communist membership (Childers 1983).

Local chapters (*Ortsgruppen*) served as the Nazi Party's organizational foundation in more than one thousand locations all over Germany. Local leaders were in charge of coordinating member activities, recruiting new members, collecting dues, and organizing social, cultural, and political activities. In towns without a local NSDAP chapter, individual members could also join. These "single members" often formed the nucleus of newly founded local chapters.

Who joined the Nazi Party and for what reasons has been the subject of a major research effort. Initial theories emphasized the party's appeal for marginalized groups such as unemployed workers; Marxists argued that the petty bourgeoisie – threatened by a possible slide into the proletariat – gave overwhelming support to the Nazis (Heiden 1935; Stephan 1931). From the 1970s onwards, when the NSDAP membership files were partly computerized, these predictions were tested with detailed micro-data (Falter 1991; Brustein 1998): in the early years, the party drew a disproportionate share of its members from the upper ranks of the *Mittelstand*.[9] Blue-collar workers were substantially underrepresented relative to the population.[10] The over-representation of white-collar workers was common to most parties; even in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communists (KPD), the educated middle classes constituted a much higher proportion than in the population at large. In terms of the class composition of its members, the Nazi Party was therefore similar to other large parties (*Volksparteien* - people's parties) such as the SPD.

2.5 Associations and Party Entry

Several regionally-based case studies have analyzed the relationship between the Nazi Party and local clubs and associations. One thesis holds that Nazi activists deliberately targeted clubs and associations to hollow them out ("*Unterwanderung*").[11] A second, related view is that local chairmen and other opinion leaders increasingly converted to the Nazi creed, and induced other members to follow (Zofka 1979). Finally, some scholars have argued that it was not the strength of Weimar's civic society, but its increasing weakness after 1930 that provided an opening for the Nazi Party's message (Heilbronner

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[9] University students were amongst the first groups to sign up. This contradicts the hypothesis of the petty bourgeoisie being the first to be drawn to the party. Lower-middle class Germans did however join in increasing numbers in later years (Kater 1983).

[10] In 1919-23, for example, only 22.8% were laborers. This compares with a proportion of 42% in the Reich as a whole (Madden and Mühlberger 2007). As the depression wore on, the share of workers among Nazi Party members increased, reaching 31.5% in January 1933 (Mühlberger 2003).

[11] See Noakes (1971). It is interesting that the NSDAP, once in power, used similar tactics when trying to garner support amongst German immigrants to the US (Wilhelm 1998).

and Schmidt 1993). We examine empirically whether the Nazi Party had higher entry rates in towns and cities with denser social networks.

The historical record provides a plethora of cases illustrating a tight relationship between associations and Nazi Party entry. For example, Koshar (1986) describes the case of Emil Wissner, a salesman in Marburg. He was a member of a white-collar employee association (from 1921), and active in two gymnastics clubs (from 1904). He joined the Nazi Party in 1929, and actively used his position in these clubs to proselytize for the party, winning many new members. Koshar's work shows that new Nazi Party members in Marburg had on average more association and club memberships than non-joiners. Similarly, Anheier (2003) analyzes single members – entrepreneurial Nazi Party members who did not join through a local chapter, and often established a bridgehead for the movement. They succeeded on a vastly greater scale in founding new party chapters where they had numerous pre-existing affiliations.[12]

Abel's (1938) classic analysis of NSDAP member autobiographies underlines that recruitment often succeeded in a context of pre-existing affiliations. A bank clerk was a member of the youth movement that emphasized outdoor activities, music, and hiking (*Wandervogel*);[13] he called it his "personal preparatory school for National Socialism" (Abel 1938, p. 278). After drifting into an anti-Semitic association, he eventually joined the NSDAP. A soldier recounts how after WWI, he joined a variety of associations, including the *Jungdo*[14], an "Association of Nationally Minded Soldiers," and the *Stahlhelm* (Abel 1938, p. 256).[15] Eventually, he joined the Nazi Party. Personal interaction with Party members often worked wonders in convincing skeptics. One member recounts how he

> "…became acquainted with a colleague of my own age with whom I had frequent conversations. He was a calm, quiet person whom I esteemed very highly. When I found that he was one of the local leaders of the National Socialist party, my opinion of it as a group of criminals changed completely…" (Abel 1938, p. 116)

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[12] Single members with four or more civic society connections were 18 times more likely to successfully establish a local branch of the Nazi Party than those with no connections at all – and still three times more likely than party members with only one association membership (Anheier 2003).

[13] The *Wandervogel* (German for migratory bird) had a strong romanticist and anti-authoritarian bend. While nationalistic in some aspects, it is seen by some as a precursor of the hippie movement. It was outlawed after 1933 (Stachura 1981).

[14] A national-liberal youth group, it was anti-monarchist and favored reconciliation with France. The association was also anti-Semitic and elitist (Wolf 1972).

[15] Literally, "steel helmet" – a veterans' association with mostly nationalist aims (but not affiliated or allied with the Nazi Party until the very end of the Weimar Republic).

Zofka (1979) describes how in small-town Bavaria, the NSDAP succeeded in recruiting two local "opinion leaders" from the BVP (Bavarian People's Party) in 1931/32. They were active in the local firefighting brigade, the gymnast association, and the theatre club – and the local NSDAP received a major boost. Social interactions not only helped to spread the party message; they also allowed the Nazis to get feedback on policy ideas in something akin to a focus group setting (Berman 1997). As Koshar (1986, p. 202) argued, the "party was attractive in part because of its positive image in conversations in the marketplace, local stores, university classrooms, fraternity houses, meeting halls, soccer fields, and homes." Reflecting the importance of membership contacts and personal connections, the Nazi *Gauleiter* (regional leader) for Hannover, Bernhard Rust, thought that

> "personal canvassing is the movement's most effective weapon. Branch leaders must ... examine the relationship of individual members to relations and colleagues ... and set them suitable canvassing tasks." (Noakes 1971, p. 206).

While not every party member was recruited via clubs, the Nazi Party successfully targeted pre-existing social networks to spread its message. Where the strategy succeeded, the importance of personal connections and trust is readily apparent.

3 Data

In this section, we describe our newly collected data on association density in Weimar Germany as well as our main outcome variable, NSDAP membership, and various control variables.

3.1 Associations

We hand-collected data on association density for 229 German towns and cities located on the territory of modern-day Germany.[16] As our source, we use city directories – lists of "useful contacts" from bank branches and doctors to local clubs and associations. Printed and distributed in a small area, city directories often only survived in the local city library or archive. We contacted all 547 towns and cities that had more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925, as well as some smaller towns whose local archives were listed in central directories.[17] We use any surviving directory from the 1920s; where several are available,

[16] Towns and cities in the formerly German areas of Eastern Europe rarely preserved marginal library holdings such as city directories. We therefore focus on the territory of modern-day Germany.

[17] In order to contact local archives, we followed two steps. First, we contacted all archives from central directories of city and county archives (see the appendix at the end of this paper, as well as Online Appendix B.1 for further detail and the main sources). From these archives, city directories listing associations in the

we take the directory nearest in time to 1925. In total, we collected data on 22,127 associations. Of these, more than 45 percent were sports clubs, choirs, animal breeding associations, or gymnastics clubs. Military associations accounted for another 13.5 percent of the total. We do not include political or religious associations in our dataset. All associations and their frequencies are listed in Appendix B.2.

Association density is not a perfect measure of civic capital; we use it because it is the best measure available. Several prior studies of social capital use association density as a measure (Buonanno, Montolio and Vanin 2009; Schofer and Longhofer 2011). Where we happen to have detailed data on *membership* – such as in the case of sports clubs for a subset of towns during the 1920s – we find a high correlation between the number and members of clubs per capita (0.47, with a p-value of 0.002). Second, Putnam's (2000) data also show a tight relationship between association density in US states and individual membership rates (correlation coefficient 0.66, p-value<0.001). Appendix B.3 provides further detail and scatterplots.

3.2 Representativeness of the sample

Next, we examine the spatial distribution of cities and associations in our sample. The left panel of Figure 2 shows that the sample covers all of modern-day Germany – cities as far north as Kiel and as far south as Konstanz are included; the figure also shows that towns and cities with high vs. low association density are relatively evenly distributed. The same is true for Nazi Party entry rates – there are no regional clusters of high vs. low Nazi Party entry rates (right panel of Figure 2).

To examine the representativeness of our sample, we use socio-economic measures from the 1925 and 1933 censuses. These provide data on occupational composition, religious affiliation, and (for 1933) unemployment rates. In addition, we draw on voting results from King et al. (2008), and on a host of socio-economic data including the number of welfare recipients, war veterans, average tax payments, and the number of Hitler speeches in the early 1930s from Adena et al. (2015). Table 1 compares our sample to the

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1920s were available for 110 towns and cities. Second, we contacted local archives that were not listed in central directories: we called the local administration of all remaining towns and cities within modern-day German borders that had more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925 and inquired about the existence of city directories from the 1920s. This led to an additional 119 towns and cities with available directories listing associations. For towns and cities without coverage, this information was lost, destroyed during the war, or it did not exist in the first place. Appendix B.1 discusses our data collection in more detail and lists all towns and cities in our sample.

national averages of all towns and cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants, and to Weimar Germany overall. Since archives and directories are more likely to exist in larger cities, our sample is more urban than the national average. Average population size in our sample is 72,356, as compared to 32,063 in the country as a whole. The employment structure is broadly in line with the aggregate: both the percentage of employees in blue-collar jobs and unemployment (measured in 1933) in our sample are similar to the numbers for the Reich overall. The same is true for religious composition: the proportion of Catholics and Jews are about 33% and 0.8%, respectively, in both our sample and the Reich as a whole. Our city sample is also broadly representative in terms of political preferences. NSDAP votes in March '33 were 40% of the total in our sample; in the Reich as a whole, the number is 43.8%, and 41.6% in urban areas. The vote shares for social democrats (SPD), conservatives (Zentrum), and communists (KPD) are very similar in our sample and the Reich – especially when compared to the urban averages.

3.3 Nazi Party entry

To calculate rates of entry per location, we use the Falter-Brustein sample of Nazi Party members (Falter and Brustein 2015). The universe of membership cards is 11.6 million strong.[18] The Falter-Brustein sample contains information on 38,752 membership cards drawn randomly in 1989. We matched our city-level association data to the city of residence and administrative region (Gau) of each NSDAP member, as recorded in the Falter-Brustein sample. This identifies 9,169 Nazi Party members who joined between 1925 and January 1933, or 23% of all digitized cards – a proportion that is similar to the population share of cities in our sample, 25%.[19]

Rates of Nazi Party entry varied over time. They were stable or declining between 1925 and 1927, before rebounding sharply and rising after 1928. After January 1933 – when the Nazi Party entered into government – entry rates jumped. As the party feared it would be overwhelmed by an influx of opportunistic members, it banned new entry from April 1933. To avoid that unrepresentative entries confound our results, we only count new members until January 1933. In the Falter-Brustein dataset, the sampling method changes for entrants in 1930 (earlier entries were oversampled deliberately to raise the sample size

[18] This includes party entries after 1933. The party kept two cards for every member – one for the central register originally ordered by name, the other initially ordered by geographical area (but later organized alphabetically, too, by the US authorities).

[19] The 229 towns in our sample had about 16 million inhabitants in 1925, compared with a total population in Weimar Germany of 62.4 million.

when the party was still small). We correct for this by first standardizing entry rates in each year (with mean zero and unit standard deviation).[20] Then, we compute the average of these standardized entry rates for each location over the period 1925-33.[21] The standardization ensures that i) the change in sampling method in the Falter-Brustein- data does not affect our results and ii) later (more frequent) entries do not dominate the average. In our robustness checks, we also examine results for using the unadjusted Falter-Brustein data, as well as adjusted entry rates that match membership growth in our sample to that in the Nazi membership overall (see Appendix C. for a detailed description).

3.4 Balancedness of the sample

One important concern is balancedness: did association density vary systematically with other city characteristics? In Table 2, we examine the correlation between a list of control variables with association density (cols 1 and 2), and with NSDAP entry rates (cols 3 and 4). We begin with our three baseline controls: city population as well as the shares of Catholics and of blue-collar workers. Following our historical discussion in Section 2.2, we expect these to be correlated with both association density and Nazi Party entry. This is confirmed by the results in Table 2, so that not controlling for these variables may stack the odds in favor of finding a link between social capital and NSDAP entry. In the remainder of Table 2, we examine the partial correlation coefficients for socio-economic and political controls with club density and NSDAP entry, conditional on our set of baseline controls. This allows us to identify other potentially confounding variables that are associated with both our main explanatory variable and our main outcome variable.

The share of Jews is negatively correlated with association density, and it is also (insignificantly) correlated with Nazi entry. The share of unemployed exhibits a similar pattern – unemployment was lower in places with higher association density – but there is a mild positive correlation with membership entry. While the share of welfare recipients – a measure of economic distress – is not correlated with associations, it exhibits a positive and significant (but small) correlation with Nazi membership. Other socio-economic controls show few clear-cut patterns. Neither the representation of war veterans nor of

[20] The change in sampling affects each location in the same way, and hence does not affect cross-sectional differences within any *given* year.

[21] Throughout, the cross-sectional dispersion is high, with many towns and cities showing almost no entry into the Nazi Party, and others recording fairly high rates of entry. In addition, early and late party entry are strongly correlated (see Figure A.2 in the appendix). Descriptive statistics for our explanatory variables and outcomes are reported in Table A.1 in the appendix.

social insurance recipients is strongly correlated with either association density or Nazi Party entry. However, measures of income and wealth (based on tax assessments) show positive correlations with Nazi Party entry. Turning to political controls, we find few reasons for concern. Hitler speeches were actually less frequent in places with plentiful associations, and not significantly associated with Nazi Party entry. Among the political parties (from the DNVP at the right end of the political spectrum to the KPD at the left), there are no statistically significant correlations with association density, and Nazi entry shows the expected pattern – areas with many DNVP voters saw higher party entry, while those with DVP (German People's Party) and KPD voters saw lower rates. The F-tests reported at the bottom of Table 2 show that all controls together are highly significant in explaining association density and NSDAP entry. Overall, in terms of *individual* covariates, our sample thus falls short of full balancedness. However, the F-tests decline markedly in significance when we condition on our baseline controls, supporting our historical argument from Section 2.2.

To assess if the lack of balancedness might potentially skew results in our favor, we perform an omnibus test.[22] The test exploits the fact that, in order to bias our results, covariates would need to be systematically correlated with both association density and Nazi Party entry. We first use the full set of controls from Table 2 to predict Nazi Party entry. Then, we regress this variable, *predicted* Nazi Party entry, on actual association density. In this manner, we check if the variation in party entry that reflects differences in *all controls jointly* is associated with club density. The results of the omnibus test are presented at the bottom of Table 2. We find that predicted party entry – based on the whole set of controls – is not significantly correlated with association density. This is true without controls (with coefficient on association density of 0.027, p-value 0.20, standardized beta coefficient 0.088,) and especially after including our set of baseline controls (coefficient 0.003, p-value 0.80, beta coefficient 0.011). These estimates are small compared to our baseline results (Table 3, column 4), where we find a highly significant coefficient of 0.160 on association density (and a standardized beta coefficient of 0.25). To curtail the magnitude of a possible bias, we use the 95% confidence intervals of the coefficients on association density in the omnibus test. These are [-0.014, 0.067] without, and [-0.023, 0.030] with conditioning on our set of baseline controls. Thus, the omnibus test allows us

[22] We are grateful to the editor, Jesse Shapiro, for suggesting this exercise.

to rule out – with reasonable certainty – a bias that is larger than one-third of our main result in the unconditional specification, and a bias that is larger than one-fifth of our main result when including the set of baseline controls. In combination with our discussion in Section 2.1, we are thus confident that historical drivers of association formation are unlikely to severely confound our analysis of the rise of the Nazi Party.

4 Main Results

Our main results show that higher association density spelled more NSDAP entry, even after controlling for a host of socio-economic variables. Association density – both of military clubs and civic societies – predicts not only party entry, but also electoral success.

4.1 Baseline Results

Table 3 presents our baseline results, examining the link between association density (*ASSOC*) and Nazi Party entry. To compare magnitudes across different specifications and definitions of club density, we report beta coefficients in square brackets. These reflect by how many standard deviations (sd) the dependent variables changes due to a one-sd increase in club density. We begin with the simplest specification in column 1, using the log of total NSDAP member entries from the Falter-Brustein sample for the period 1925-January 1933 as the dependent variable, and the log of total associations as the main explanatory variable. We control for population size, the share of blue-collar workers, and the share of Catholics. This yields a sizeable effect – doubling the number of clubs is associated with a 15.6% increase in party entry (and the standardized beta coefficient is 0.11). The average city in our sample saw 40 entries in 1925-33. Since the Falter-Brustein sample captured about 2% of overall entries, the total effect of doubling association density is 0.15×50×40=312 additional entries, relative to total entry of 2,000 in an average city with 70,000 inhabitants. In terms of standard deviations, lowering club density by one sd (0.942) would have moved a city from the position of Guben (the city with median Nazi entry in our sample, ranked 114th out of 229) down by 65 ranks to the position of Göppingen (ranked 179th).

Next, we correct for changes in the Falter-Brustein sampling procedure after 1930 (see Section 3.3 and Appendix C.), ensuring that total annual membership growth in the adjusted sample mirrors the trend in national Nazi membership. Again, we find strong and significant results (col 2). In the remainder of Table 3, we use per-capita measures of both club density and party entry. Here, and in the rest of our analysis, we use the average of

standardized NSDAP entry rates over the period 1925 – January '33 as described in Section 3.3. Column 3 shows the coefficient on association density without controls; a one sd increase in club density is associated with 0.20 sd higher NSDAP entry. When adding our baseline controls, this effect increases to 0.25 (col 4). In the following, we use the specification from column 4 as our baseline. The corresponding partial scatterplot in Figure 3 demonstrates that the strong positive link between association density and Nazi Party entry is not driven by outliers.

To examine if this relationship merely reflects underlying affinities with Nazi ideology, we define the subcategory of "civic clubs," including only associations with a clearly non-militaristic/nationalist outlook (see Appendix B.2). These include chess, hiking, music, women's, citizens' and homeland clubs, as well as animal breeders and other clubs (which largely comprise civic activities such as gardening, theater, or photography). We find strong positive coefficients for civic clubs (col 5); these are of the same order of magnitude as for our baseline measure that counts all clubs.[23] Finally, in column 6, we use only military clubs and again find similar effects.

So far, we have only used our baseline controls – the share of population that is Catholic, the proportion of blue-collar workers, and population size. In Panel B of Table 3 we add the further socio-economic and political controls discussed in Table 2. In addition, we cluster standard errors at the Weimar state level to allow for potential spatial patterns in Nazi Party entry.[24] These specifications (cols 1-3 in Panel B) confirm both magnitude and significance of our main results. Socio-economic indicators are generally poor predictors of party entry (see full results in Table A.9 in the appendix).[25] Our main specifications do not include state fixed effects. This is because some of the historical

[23] In terms of number of observations, among the 229 towns and cities in our sample, all baseline controls are available for 227 cities (col 4). The number of observations falls to 226 in cols 5 and 6 because for one city, Passau, only the total count of associations is available. The reason is that for Passau, the counting of associations was performed by archival staff in-situ. Since we could not guarantee a consistent counting of association *types*, we requested the total count only. When excluding Passau from our baseline specification (col 4), we obtain a coefficient of 0.156 on association density, significant at the 1% level.

[24] Comparing our baseline specification from column 4 in Panel A (with robust standard errors) to column 1 in Panel B (with clustered standard errors) shows that clustering only makes a very minor difference. In the following, we cluster standard errors at the Weimar state level as a part of robustness checks in specifications that include the extended set of controls. When running our baseline specification with Weimar-state-level random effects, we find that the share of the residual variance at the state-level is less than 3%. This further suggests that spatial dependence (at least at the state level) is not a major issue in our analysis.

[25] The individual coefficients on unemployment (reported in Table A.9) show that the depth of the economic downturn in 1933 – which may reflect underlying economic vulnerabilities in the 1920s already – is not significantly associated with party entry. The same is true for most of the other socioeconomic variables, for the share of Jews, and for the political controls listed in Table 2.

sources of variation in association density – such as the manner in which police control of clubs and associations declined in 1848 – operated at the state level (and many post-1918 states heavily overlapped with German states before 1848). We thus think of the results with state fixed effects, presented in the following, as a conservative specification. When adding state fixed effects to our baseline specification (col 4), the coefficient on club density drops by about one-half but remains marginally statistically significant. Results for civic and military associations (cols 5 and 6) remain highly significant, but smaller in magnitude, when we include state fixed effects.

4.2 Election Results

In the 1928, 1930, and 1933 parliamentary elections, the NSDAP won more votes where association density was higher (cols 1-3 in Panel A, Table 4; see also the scatterplots in Figure 4).[26] The coefficients on association density are all significant and positive, and suggest an effect of 0.15-0.19 sd of voting results for every sd increase in association density. For the 1928 election, for example, this means 0.88 percentage points extra relative to a sample mean of 3.4%.[27] Columns 4-6 present a modified version of our earlier analysis, regressing average (standardized) party entry rates up to each election year (1928, 1930, and January 1933) on association density. We find a strong relationship throughout.

In panel B of Table 4, we examine the extent to which association density affected votes for the NSDAP *via* party entry. If an intervening variable (party entry) is an important pathway for an explanatory variable's (club density's) influence, the former has to be both strongly predicted by the latter, and including party entry should reduce the coefficient on club density. This is the idea behind the Sobel-Goodman mediation test. As a first step, we show that the estimated effect of club density on voting indeed becomes weaker once we control for Nazi Party entry (cols 1-3 in Panel B). Second, in columns 4-6 in Panel B, we compute what proportion of the total effect of club density on voting results was transmitted by party entry. The Sobel-Goodman test implies a large share: for the period up to the 1928 election, the mediated part is 86%; it declines thereafter, but even by 1933, the test still suggests a share of 46%.

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[26] We focus on the elections in 1928, 1930, and 1933 because these are the years for which NSDAP election results are available at the city level.

[27] For 1930, the gain is 1.4% relative to a mean of 18.4%; and for 1933, 1.4% relative to 40%. While the relative contribution of associations to the party's overall success declines over time, it made a sizeable difference during the 1928 and 1930 elections. Note also that there may have been indirect consequences of earlier voting through social multiplier effects (Zuckerman 2005).

5 When did social capital matter most?

In this section, we show that associations mattered most for the Nazi Party's early rise. We also exploit the time-series of entry in detail, showing how entry in a location at one point in time triggered later entry. Finally, we examine interactions with the political context, showing that associations mattered most for Nazi Party entry in politically unstable federal states; in contrast, in more stable political environments, the effect of club density was muted.

5.1 Early vs. Late NSDAP Entry

Associations matter because they increase interactions with the local population; this should have a greater effect during the early phases of the party's rise, when the membership itself was small and the chances of meeting Nazi members was limited.

After the party's ban was lifted in 1925, entry rates were initially high, but then drifted downward. During the Great Depression, however, the trickle of entry became a torrent. In Table 5, we first use early entry rates (1/1925-12/1928) as the dependent variable (cols 1 and 2). Results are large and highly significant, with beta coefficients of 0.26-0.28. In columns 3 and 4, we use late entry (1/1929-1/1933) as the dependent variable. This also yields significant but quantitatively smaller results – the beta coefficient declines by more than one third. A test on whether the beta coefficients on $ASSOC_{all}$ in cols 2 and 4 are significantly different yields a p-value of 0.18.[28] In columns 5 and 6, we control for early entry rates, which further reduces the coefficient on association density (the p-value for the difference in the beta coefficients in cols 4 and 6 is 0.11). On the other hand, early party entry is a strong predictor of later entry, with a beta coefficient of 0.25. According to the Sobel-Goodman ratios reported in columns 5 and 6, about 40% of the relationship between club density and *late* party entry is mediated by *early* entry. This suggests that in later years, the existing (early) Nazi membership base played an important role in attracting new members; dense local social capital affected late entry indirectly, having fostered early party entry. These results suggest that association density mattered more in the early stages of the party's rise. Later, when the party became a mass movement, and many party members were already in touch with friends and family who had joined, social networks

[28] Table A.11 in the appendix also shows that the results from Table 5 hold qualitatively in the presence of state fixed effects.

predict less of the variation in entry decisions.[29]

5.2 Panel Estimation and Fixed Effects

Next, we analyze the evolution of party entry over time. Since we do not have annual data on associations, we treat association density as a time-invariant feature of a location.[30] We then examine how the growth of the party depends on the existing stock of members on the one hand, and the density of clubs and associations on the other. One added benefit is that, by using a panel structure, we can add city fixed effects. We estimate the following specification:

$$Mgrowth_{it} = \beta \ \ln\left(M_{i,t-1}\right) \times ASSOC_{all,i} + \gamma \ ln\left(M_{i,t-1}\right) + \eta_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

where $Mgrowth_{i,t}$ is calculated as the (log) growth of NSDAP membership (M_i) between year t and t-1 in city i; $ASSOC_{all,i}$ is association density; and η_i and δ_i denote city and year fixed effects, respectively. Our main interest is in the coefficient β, which reflects the degree to which existing members and associations complement each other in fostering subsequent party growth.

The results in Table 6 show that as the membership stock grew, the rate of membership growth typically declined ($\gamma < 0$), which suggests convergence of entry rates across cities. Crucially, in all specifications there is a positive interaction between last year's stock of members and association density ($\beta > 0$). This suggests that existing members were more successful at recruiting new members in locations with higher club density. Results remain strong when we control for interactions of $ln(M_{i,t-1})$ with the extended set of control variables (col 2). In the remaining columns, we examine early and later party membership growth separately. The interaction effect between existing members and association density is particularly strong during the early years 1925-28 (cols 3 and 4), where a one-sd increase in club density is associated with 18% faster membership growth (relative to an average membership growth rate of 34.2%). During the later period (cols 5 and 6), the interaction term is weaker, with a standardized effect of approximately 5.6% (relative to average entry growth of 63%). This is in line with our results above, showing that associations played a particularly important role during the early rise of the

[29] In Appendix E.8 we provide evidence for a similar relationship in the context of pre-existing sympathies for the Nazi agenda: in cities where the NSDAP could build on a larger pool of (potential) supporters, association density mattered less in promoting party entry.
[30] Too few towns and cities have multiple directories to permit a meaningful analysis.

Nazi Party. In later years, with a broad membership base to build on in most locations, the role of associations in promoting further entry became proportionately weaker. Note, however, that this does not mean that associations were unimportant for the Nazi Party's eventual rise to power. To the contrary – promoting early entry laid the cornerstone for the subsequent rise because early party entry is a strong predictor for later per-capita entry levels (with a correlation coefficient of 0.51; see also Figure A.2 in the appendix).

5.3 Political Instability and Party Entry

Why was social capital a double-edged sword for Germany's first democracy, when it is mostly associated with positive outcomes elsewhere? In our view, the institutional context is key. The Weimar Republic in general was highly unstable: governments changed with alarming frequency; democracy was unable to defend itself against extremists because democratic parties were often unwilling to shoulder responsibility (Bracher 1978).

At the level of individual states, however, the situation could be quite different. In Prussia, for example, democratic institutions were more resilient. The so-called "Weimar Coalition" – composed of the Social Democrat Party (SPD), the Center Party (Zentrum), and the German Democratic Party (DDP) – ruled Prussia from 1919 to 1932. For almost the entire time, Otto Braun served as Prime Minister. Prussia instituted several important constitutional reforms, such as the need for a new government to be formed simultaneously with the old one losing power.[31] This allowed the democratic coalition to rule despite losing its parliamentary majority early on (in parallel with developments in the Reich). Also, the Prussian Interior Ministry vigorously cracked down on paramilitary units of the right and the left (the SA and the Red Front associations), regularly banned public demonstrations and assemblies planned by both the Communists and the Nazis, forbid the use of uniforms in public, and for extended periods stopped Hitler from speaking on Prussian territory.[32] For all these reasons – and despite Prussia's traditional reputation for militarism – the regional state was a stronghold of democracy (Orlow 1986).[33]

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[31] Prussia pioneered this so-called "constructive vote of no confidence;" this feature was later adopted by the Federal Republic of Germany (Skach 2005).

[32] In one (in)famous episode, the SPD-appointed police chief of Berlin banned all assemblies for May Day 1929. When the Communist Party organized demonstrations regardless, violent clashes resulted in 19 workers being killed (Kurz 1988).

[33] It is for the same reasons that the Prussian government under Prime Minister Otto Braun was eventually removed in July 1932, when the increasingly right-wing national government under Chancellor von Papen seized power in Prussia in a coup d'état (*Preußenschlag*).

Other federal states such as Hesse, Anhalt, and Lippe also had broadly stable governments for extended periods. While upheaval at the federal level affected all citizens, those living in more stable states had more reasons to trust the democratic process: strong institutions ultimately require both pluralism and political centralization (Acemoglu 2013; Acemoglu 2005), and effective leadership can help to align beliefs (Acemoglu and Jackson 2015). Weimar on the whole erred on the side of excessive pluralism, allowing the enemies of an open society to abuse the rights of free assembly, free speech, and freedom of association (Bracher 1978). A number of strong and stable federal states, however, balanced the demands of pluralism and state capacity.

To examine if association density became corrosive under general conditions of political chaos, we compile a proxy for government stability in Weimar Germany. We use three indicators that capture political stability at the federal state level over the period 1918-July 1932 (ending with the Prussian coup d'etat, which is often considered the beginning of the end of the Weimar democracy – Bracher 1978): the percentage of time that i) the longest-serving state government was in office, ii) the longest-serving party was in office (possibly in different coalitions), and iii) a state was governed by at least one party from the "Weimar coalition." We then extract the first principal component of these measures. As expected, Prussia scores highly on this indicator, in third position, with Anhalt and Hesse leading the stability ranking. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Württemberg and Mecklenburg-Schwerin showed low levels of stability (see Appendix D. for detail, sources, and the full list of states).[34]

Importantly, our stability measure does not simply reflect voter preferences – for example, voting results for the Weimar coalition of middle-of-the-road democrats have no predictive power for our stability measure (beta coefficient 0.026; p-value 0.86). The reason is that features of state constitutions – such as Prussia's rule on "constructive votes of no confidence" – created stability in some states even where voter preferences were anti-democratic or unstable.

[34] Anhalt, which leads the ranking, was governed almost exclusively by the SPD (97% of the time between Nov 1918 and June 1932), and almost continuously by Heinrich Deist as governor (92%). Since the SPD was a member of the Weimar coalition, the third indicator for stability is also very high (97%). For Württemberg, the state with lowest stability, the three indicators are 30%, 30%, and 39%, respectively.

In Table 7, we investigate interactions between the effect of associations and state stability systematically. Since Prussia accounts for roughly half of all observations in our sample, it could easily dominate results. We therefore treat it separately. In column 1, we show that within Prussia, there is only a small and insignificant link between association density and Nazi Party entry; outside Prussia, the standardized coefficient is two times larger, and significant (col 2). However, the coefficients in columns 1 and 2 are not significantly different, with a p-value of 0.38. Next, we split the *non-Prussian* part of Weimar Germany into a stable and an unstable half (with above- and below-median stability, respectively). Within unstable states, we find a strong and highly significant relationship between club density and Nazi Party entry (col 3); within stable states, there is a small, negative, and insignificant effect (col 4). The two coefficients are significantly different with a p-value of 0.008. None of these findings in the subsamples are driven by outliers, as shown in Figure 5. In columns 5 and 6 of Table 7, we use the full sample, pooling all observations and interacting association density with a dummy for Prussia, as well as with a dummy for above-median stability for non-Prussian states. Both interaction terms are negative and highly significant: in states with higher political stability, denser networks of clubs and associations spelled markedly fewer Nazi Party entrants than in the less stable Weimar states. This is true whether we control for state fixed effects (col 6) or not (col 5).[35]

Our findings suggest an important interaction effect between social capital and political stability. In the presence of a functional, strong, and stable democratic regional government, social capital's "dark side" was much weaker – with functional institutions, the potentially malign effects of a vibrant civic society can be kept in check.

6 Robustness and Plausibility

In this section, we examine the robustness of our findings, and we argue that they are

[35] In Figure A.7 in the appendix, we present an additional analysis to illustrate the magnitude of effects. We pool all observations and estimate a version of the specification in Table 7, col 5, but using an interaction between the *continuous* measure of state-level stability and association density (in this analysis, Prussia is one of many Weimar states and is not controlled for with a separate dummy). Based on these estimates, we can compute the net effect of association density on Nazi Party entry. We find a strong negative effect of associations for low and medium levels of political stability, but for higher values, the effect becomes first insignificant before becoming negative (in expectations).

plausibly causal. We already showed that results are strong for both early and late entry, and after controlling for a host of socio-economic and political characteristics as well. Here, we present results for different types of associations, and we test the strength of the main effect in different subsamples. Finally, we use an IV strategy that allows us to sidestep potential concerns about omitted variable bias.

6.1 Subsamples

We begin by analyzing whether our results hold within a number of subsamples, defined by our baseline controls – city population as well as the share of Catholics and blue-collar workers, for which historical evidence has documented a lower inclination to support the Nazi Party. Table 8 presents the results for these subsamples – in Panel A for association density based on all clubs, and in Panel B, for civic clubs only. We compare standardized beta coefficients across subsamples and report the p-values for equality of beta coefficients. Columns 1 and 2 show that the effect of associations on party entry is very similar in smaller and larger cities, and highly significant. The same is true for predominantly Catholic or Protestant areas (cols 3 and 4). Finally, in columns 5 and 6, we find that localities with above-median blue-collar shares saw a smaller effect of association density when we use all associations (Panel A). However, when using only civic associations, the beta coefficient is significant and again very similar for both subsamples (Panel B).

6.2 Different Association Types

Social capital comes in different types. Putnam distinguishes between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. The former cements pre-existing social cleavages; the latter brings people from different backgrounds together. According to Putnam, bonding social capital may have adverse effects; bridging social capital should always have benign consequences. To analyze if this distinction can affect our results, we classify the associations in our sample accordingly (see Appendix B.2). For example, a chess club is a typical bridging club – only enthusiasm for chess is needed, and there were no monetary, social, or gender barriers to entry. In contrast, *Herrenclubs* such as the Berlin Unionclub were bonding associations – broadly similar to London gentlemen’s clubs, their principal purpose was social exclusivity, serving the old land-owning elite and the new wealthy upper class (c.f. Schoeps 1974).

Table 9 reports the results of regressing Nazi Party entry rates on the density of bridging and bonding associations. Both are strongly associated with Nazi Party entry, yielding positive, significant, and quantitatively meaningful coefficients. These results

hold when using our baseline controls (cols 1-2) and extended controls (cols 3-4). This suggests that *both* types of associations were important pathways for the spread of the Nazi Party. At the same time, the standardized beta coefficients show a somewhat larger effect of bonding than of bridging associations (the difference in standardized coefficients itself, however, is only marginally significant in cols 3 vs. 4, and insignificant in all other specifications). When including both types simultaneously, none of them dominates but bridging clubs are more robust (see Table A.19, which also shows that when including civic and military associations simultaneously, the former dominate).[36] When including state fixed effects (cols 5 and 6), the magnitude of both the bridging and bonding coefficients decline, but both remain at least marginally statistically significant.

6.3 Matching estimates

Table 10 shows the results of several matching estimators for the effect of having above-median association density. To provide a benchmark for comparison, the OLS coefficient on the indicator for above-median association density (with baseline controls) is 0.259, with a standard error of 0.125, and p-value 0.04. We begin the matching estimations with the simplest specification, matching based on city size alone and with only one nearest neighbor (col 1). The result is both statistically and quantitatively significant, indicating that cities with above-median club density saw entry rates that were about 0.45 standard deviations higher than in cities of similar size with below-median club density. In columns 2-4 of the table, we use the three nearest neighbors and gradually add additional controls (blue-collar, Catholic, and geographic location). The effect of above-median club density falls somewhat in magnitude, but it remains statistically significant throughout. Our most demanding specification in column 5 uses exact matching: it compares only cities within the same quintile of city size and within the same federal state, using our baseline controls and each city's geographic location to find the three nearest neighbors under these constraints. This restrictive approach yields a similar point estimate to column (4), but with a larger standard error. Finally, in column 6, we use entropy weighting instead of propensity score matching to create a balanced sample, following Hainmueller (2012). This method reweights the 'control group' data (cities with below-median club density) to match the mean and variance of covariates in the 'treatment group' (above-median club density).

[36] Appendix E.5 shows that different types of associations are highly correlated – this holds for civic and military, bridging and bonding, as well as for worker associations and those not related to workers (see Figure A.8).

Again, we find a large and significant effect, suggesting an increase of the NSDAP entry rate by about 0.5 standard deviations when a city is above the median in terms of association density.

6.4 Omitted Variable Bias – Altonji/Oster and IV

In appendix G we use the approaches suggested by Altonji, Elder and Taber (2005) and Oster (2014) to estimate the degree of selection on unobservables, relative to the selection on observables, necessary to overturn our results. For all associations and civic associations, these methods imply that our main estimates are if anything biased downwards. For military associations, once we condition on our baseline controls, selection on unobservables either works against us or would need to be much greater than selection on observables to explain our results.

As an additional sensitivity analysis, we present instrumental variables estimates using historical variation in association activity as an excluded instrument. We exploit data on association membership and activity level in the 1860s, combining the spatial variation from two types of clubs with available information. First, detailed information on *Turnverein* (gymnast) members exists for 1863, covering more than 150 cities in our sample. Second, we use participation of town delegates in the 1861 Nuremberg Singers' Festival (*Sängerfest*). Some 283 singing associations participated; the number of singers was between 6,000 and 20,000 (Klenke 1998). We normalize both variables by city population in 1863 and then extract their joint variation by computing their first principal components.[37]

The exclusion restriction is as follows: For 1860 association membership rates to be valid instruments, we have to believe that towns with relatively higher values in the 1860s only had higher entry rates to the Nazi Party because association density in the 1920s was still higher there. In other words, there is no direct effect of gymnast membership and singer festival participation on Nazi entry 60-70 years later, and both instruments must also be uncorrelated with other factors that drove NSDAP membership.

One possible threat to the exclusion restriction is that participation in the singer festival or in gymnast associations may potentially reflect aggressive nationalist tendencies. However, 19th century nationalism was typically liberal, not militarist nor

[37] In Table A.25 in the appendix we show that results are similar when we instead use both variables as excluded instruments.

aggressive: "Germany and other modernizing nations became real to people because many thousands traveled around … meeting their fellow countrymen and singing together" (Applegate 2013, p. 82). The liberal, folk-based nationalism of the 19th century is not to be confused with the political agitation and xenophobia that the Nazis and other right-wing parties represented in Weimar Germany. We provide evidence for this argument in Appendix F.3, where we show that our instrument is not correlated with votes for nationalist or xenophobic parties in elections in Imperial Germany (1890-1912). In sum, while our IV strategy has to be interpreted with caution, we believe that the exclusion restriction is broadly plausible.

Table 11 presents our IV results, with the second stage in panel A, and the first stage in panel B. Our instrument – association membership in the 1860s – is a strong and significant predictor of association density in the 1920s. In the second stage, we obtain large and statistically significant coefficients on association density. While the F-test for excluded instruments is above the rule-of-thumb threshold of 10 in most specifications, it falls short of the more stringent criterion of 16.38 for maximal 10% bias (Stock and Yogo 2005). We thus report p-values based on the Anderson-Rubin test of statistical significance in square brackets, which are robust to weak instruments (Andrews and Stock 2005). Our second-stage results are statistically highly significant throughout, with the exception of column 4, where we include state fixed effects. Note that we also obtain strong results when using only civic clubs in the 1920s in column 5 – the fact that our sub-category of civic clubs excludes gymnasts and choirs (among others) is a further indication that any potential nationalist sentiment is unlikely to confound our results.

The IV coefficients are between two and four times larger than their OLS counterparts. Measurement error is a likely explanation for the difference: In the main analysis, we use association density per city, i.e., the number of associations per 1,000 inhabitants in the 1920s. The number of *members* – which would be a more precise measure – is not available. Our instrumental variable, on the other hand, relies on the number of members/participants. Thus, our instrument may capture both the intensive and extensive margin of association participation. It is plausible that this reduces noise in the estimation, yielding higher coefficients in the second stage. In Appendix F, we provide further robustness checks of our IV results, report reduced-form results, and perform the Conley, Hansen and Rossi (2012) analysis of "plausible exogeneity." The latter suggests that to render our IV results insignificant, more than two-thirds of the overall effect of our

instrument would have to come through some omitted third variable that is also captured by 19th century associations. Finally, in Appendix F.6, we also explore delegates to the Democratic Congress as an alternative IV. We obtain results of the same magnitude as in our main IV analysis, but with p-values of around 0.2 due to the small sample size with available data on delegates in 1848.

6.5 Deeply-rooted anti-Semitism

Could hatred of minorities be a confounding factor in our analysis – with Germans in more xenophobic places forming tighter communities that are impenetrable to outsiders? If this was the case, such communities would tend to have a denser network of associations and also be more likely to vote for the Nazis. To shed light on this issue, we use the data on historical persecution of Jews (the most significant group of 'outsiders' in pre-WWII Germany) during the Black Death from Voigtländer and Voth (2012). The variable POG_{1349} indicates whether a city saw a pogrom against its Jewish community in 1348-50. As discussed in Voigtländer and Voth (2012), using medieval anti-Jewish pogroms is only meaningful for locations where there was a Jewish settlement. Out of the 229 cities in our sample, 92 have a documented medieval Jewish community. In cols 1-4 of Table 12, we show that even within this relatively small sample, medieval pogroms strongly predict anti-Semitic attitudes in the 1920s (i.e., before the Nazis' rise to power), as captured by attacks on Jews (cols 1-2) and by NSDAP votes in 1928 (cols 3-4).[38] This holds both when running OLS (cols 1 and 3), and when using propensity score matching that includes geographic location in addi7tion to our baseline controls (cols 2 and 4). These results – in line with those reported in Voigtländer and Voth (2012) – validate the use of POG_{1349} as a proxy for deeply-rooted anti-Semitism in our sample. In columns 5 and 6, we use this variable to show that there is no evidence for a relationship between historical anti-Semitism and association density. The coefficients are small, insignificant, and change signs between OLS and matching estimations.

6.6 Other Parties and Worker Associations

Were people in towns and cities with more civic associations simply more social, joining

[38] Among the elections in which the NSDAP participated, votes in 1928 are the closest proxy for anti-Semitism. As Voigtländer and Voth (2012) show, the relationship between Nazi Party votes and medieval pogroms becomes weaker in later elections, when the Nazi Party (temporarily) toned down its anti-Semitism in order to appeal also to moderate voters.

all manners of clubs, societies and parties to a greater extent? Ideally, we would like to test if entry rates for all parties (including, at the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Communist party), were higher in places with more associations. Unfortunately, membership records for other parties are not readily available for the period. Instead, we examine two aspects. First, we test if the reduced-form relationship of association density and electoral results that we found for the Nazi Party also held for other parties. Second, we examine the effects of worker associations. Here, our prior should be that these have only limited effects because workers in general were not enthusiastic joiners and supporters of the Nazi Party (Falter 1991).

In Table A.20, we examine the link between association density and election outcomes at both ends of the political spectrum, using vote shares for the Communist Party (KPD), as well as for the DNVP, a far-right, bourgeois party that shared many of the NSDAP's extremist views. Both parties won about 10% of the votes in 1928. For the communists, we find negative coefficients on association density – the higher social capital in any one location, the lower on average the vote share that went to the KPD. For the DNVP, we obtain both positive and negative coefficients; all are statistically insignificant.

Table A.19 (cols 5-8) shows that worker associations, which were an unlikely recruiting ground for the NSDAP, have smaller and less statistically robust effects on NSDAP entry than non-worker associations (although the standardized effects are not statistically different, with a p-value of 0.24). These findings indicate that not all types of associations were automatically correlated with NSDAP entry rates, lending further credence to our preferred interpretation of the evidence.

7 Conclusion

Tocqueville pioneered the argument that social capital is crucial for democracy. He also pointed out that "the liberty of association is only a source of advantage and prosperity to some nations, it may be perverted …and … changed into a cause of destruction" (Tocqueville 1835, Vol. I, Ch. 12). Using the case of interwar Germany, we show that a vigorous civic society can indeed help to undermine the existing democratic order. There, vibrant networks of clubs and associations facilitated the rise of the Nazi Party. New data on associations and clubs in 229 German cities from the interwar period show that where there were more grass-root social and civic organizations, the Nazi Party grew markedly faster. This is true both for the party's early years and during its final ascendancy to power,

after the start of the Great Depression. Association density also predicts the NSDAP's electoral success – in part because a strong organizational base with hundreds of thousands of members facilitated canvassing during the elections. Our findings highlight the importance of personal, face-to-face interactions for the rise of a radical new movement. In this way, dense networks of associations contributed directly to the eventual collapse of democracy, leading to one of history's most destructive regimes.

Our main finding is in stark contrast to an earlier literature that blamed Germany's path to totalitarian rule on a "civic non-age" of low social capital (Stern 1972), and Nazi entry on rootless, isolated individuals in a modernized society (Arendt 1973; Shirer 1960).[39] Our study also extends the findings of Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014) by showing that social capital can not only be built by autocratic leaders to entrench their rule – but that *pre-existing* social capital can foster the rise of undemocratic regimes.

We examine differences in political stability at the state level. Overall, Weimar Germany's institutions did not work well – governments were weak and short-lived, economic policy often failed, and extremist parties blossomed (Bracher 1978). At the same time, some states (including Prussia) were bastions of well-functioning republican institutions. We show that where government was more stable, the link between association density and Nazi Party entry was weaker. Therefore, the effects of social capital depend crucially on the political and institutional context. Rather than being an unambiguous force for good, our results suggest that social capital itself is neutral – a tool that can be used for both good or ill.

[39] We are not aware of any data that would allow a systematic comparison of association density across countries in the interwar period. Nonetheless, it is clear that the range, variety and scope of associational life in interwar Germany was high (Berman 1997).

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APPENDIX

Construction of the sample

This appendix describes the construction of our sample. It provides a summary of the more detailed description in Appendix B, which is part of the online appendix that accompanies the paper.

As mentioned in footnote 17 in the paper, we followed two steps to contact local archives.

Step 1: First, we used the contact details listed in two main directories:

- http://home.bawue.de/~hanacek/info/darchive.htm#AA and
- http://archivschule.de/DE/service/archive-im-internet/archive-in-deutschland/kommunalarchive/kommunalarchive.html

From these lists, we identified local contacts and inquired about the existence of city directories from the 1920s. This led to the collection of association data from the 1920s for 110 towns and cities. Among these, 23 cities had fewer than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925, and six cities, fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.

Step 2: Second, we contacted the administration of all (remaining) cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925 for which an archive was not listed in the central directories above. In many cases, the local administration pointed us to available (often small) archives, and we checked whether these contained city directories from the 1920s. This process led to an additional 119 towns and cities with available data on associations. In a few cases, the local archives also revealed city directories for neighboring towns, which we included as "associated finds" in our sample. As a result, out of the 119 cities added to our sample in the second step, nine had fewer than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925, and five had fewer than 5,000. Combined with the 23 smaller (below 10,000) cities from the first step, our sample thus includes 32 "associated finds." Our results hold whether or not these are included (see Table A.16 in the online appendix).

Figure A below shows what determined our sample size. Out of the 547 cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1925, 65 lay in former German territories in the East (now Poland or Russia), and we cannot obtain city directories for these. When contacting the remaining cities (or those with archives listed in central directories), we also identified 32 "associated finds" with below 10,000 inhabitants, as described above. Among the cities we contacted, in 170 the city archives or administrations failed to reply to our inquiries; and

among those that replied, in 115 no directories existed or survived. This determines our overall sample size of 229 locations.

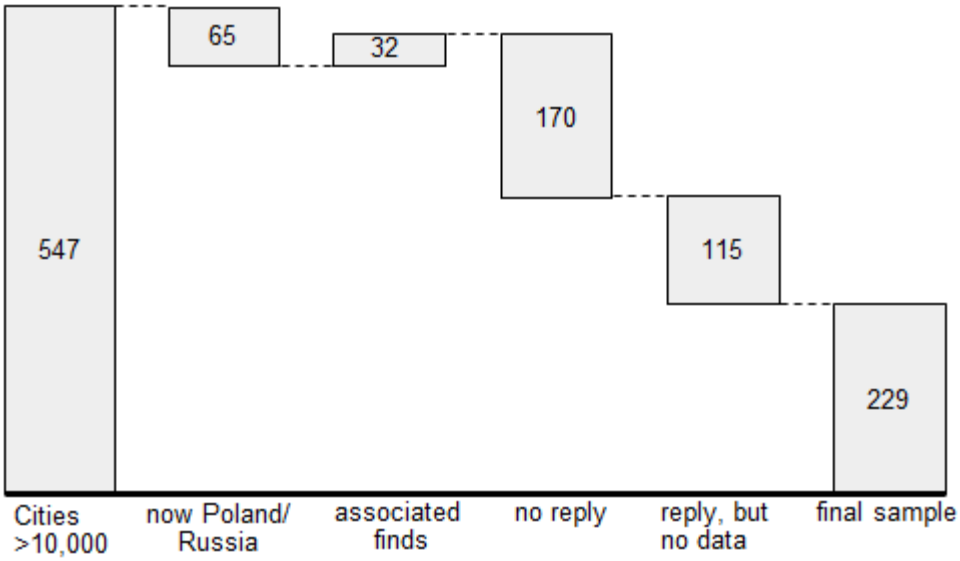

Figure A: Cities considered, contacted, and included in our sample

Note: See text above for description.

In the online appendix, we show that the strong relationship between association density and Nazi Party entry holds for both the 110 towns and cities obtained in Step 1, and for the 119 towns and cities from Step 2.

TABLES

Table 1: Data representativeness: Sample vs. German Reich

	Sample		Reich - Urban[a]		Reich - All[b]
Variable	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean
Socio-economic variables					
population (1925)	72,356	140,211	32,063	82,260	-
blue collar (1925)	43.9%	10.7%	46.9%	12.0%	42.0%
Catholic (1925)	33.1%	32.2%	33.8%	34.4%	31.9%
Jewish (1925)	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.1%	0.9%
unemployment (1933)	21.2%	7.4%	20.6%	7.9%	18.8%
Largest parties in elections of March 1933					
NSDAP (Nazi party)	40.0%	9.8%	41.6%	11.8%	43.8%
SPD (social democrats)	19.1%	9.0%	19.2%	10.1%	18.4%
Zentrum (conservative)	15.6%	16.6%	15.0%	18.1%	13.8%
KPD (communists)	12.8%	6.7%	12.9%	8.2%	12.5%

Notes: The construction of our sample is described in Section 2.
a) Excludes towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants.
b) Averages for German population overall – based on county-level (*Landkreis* and *Stadtkreis*) data from the 1925 census.

Table 2: Correlates of association density and NSDAP entry rates

	Dependent variable:	(1) Clubs per 1,000	(2)	(3) NSDAP entry rate	(4)
year		coeff	std error	coeff	Std error
Baseline controls					
1925	ln(population)	-0.747***	(0.0638)	0.0157	(0.0546)
1925	Share Catholics	-0.487	(0.328)	-0.972***	(0.181)
1925	Share blue collar	-1.830**	(0.918)	-2.512***	(0.562)
Socio-economic controls [a]					
1925	Share of Jews	-24.34**	(10.93)	-1.892	(9.172)
1933	Share unemployed	-3.747**	(1.815)	0.228	(1.213)
1933	Welfare recipients per 1,000	-0.00175	(0.0057)	0.00778**	(0.00337)
1933	War participants per 1,000	0.0127	(0.0345)	0.00269	(0.0126)
1933	Social insurance pensioners per 1,000	-0.00241	(0.0199)	0.0126	(0.0101)
1933	ln(Average income tax payment)	0.146	(0.211)	0.226*	(0.120)
1933	ln(Average property tax payment)	0.0827	(0.145)	0.134*	(0.0705)
Political controls [a]					
1932	Hitler speeches per 1,000	-1.323***	(0.378)	-0.281	(0.465)
1920-28	Average DNVP votes	0.00064	(0.0147)	0.0211*	(0.0113)
1920-28	Average DVP votes	-0.0102	(0.0185)	-0.0258*	(0.0137)
1920-28	Average SPD votes	0.0131	(0.0104)	0.00571	(0.00641)
1920-28	Average KPD votes	-0.0245	(0.0176)	-0.0121	(0.0151)
F-test of joint significance		Clubs per 1,000		NSDAP entry rate	
		F-test	p-value	F-test	p-value
all controls		10.07	0.000	5.16	0.000
conditional on baseline controls		2.06	0.021	1.11	0.357
Omnibus test [b]		Dep. variable: predicted NSDAP entry rate			
Statistics for coefficient on Clubs per 1,000:		coeff	std error	p-value	beta coeff
all controls		0.0266	0.0207	0.199	0.0876
conditional on baseline controls		0.0034	0.0136	0.801	0.0112

Notes: The table reports the results of regressing the dependent variable (clubs per 1,000 inhabitants in cols 1 and 2; average (standardized) NSDAP (Nazi party) entry rates in cols 3 and 4) on a number of control variables, one-by-one. Robust standard errors in parentheses * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

a) Regressions include baseline controls. The four political parties range from the right-wing (DNVP – German National People's Party), to the center-right (DVP – German People's Party), the center-left (SPD – Social Democratic Party), and the left (KPD – Communist Party).

b) The omnibus test first uses the full set of controls listed in this table to predict Nazi Party entry. It then regresses predicted Nazi Party entry on actual association density. This procedure checks if the variation in Nazi Party entry that reflects differences in all controls jointly is associated with club density.

Table 3: Association density and Nazi Party entry (1925-Jan.'33)

Dependent variable: Nazi Party entry, 1925-Jan'33

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PANEL A: Baseline Results						
Dep. variable:	ln(total NSDAP entry)		Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita			
Falter sample	original	adjusted	based on original Brustein-Falter data			
ASSOC measure	all	all	all	all	civic	military
ln(ASSOC$_{total}$)	0.156***	0.140***				
	(0.0583)	(0.0513)				
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.11]*	*[0.09]*				
ASSOC			0.126**	0.160***	0.429***	0.829***
			(0.0507)	(0.0538)	(0.132)	(0.268)
[beta coeff] [a]			*[0.20]*	*[0.25]*	*[0.24]*	*[0.29]*
ln(population)	0.901***	1.043***		0.175***	0.144***	0.149***
	(0.0483)	(0.0446)		(0.0542)	(0.0503)	(0.0493)
Share Catholics	-0.830***	-1.157***		-0.934***	-1.006***	-0.839***
	(0.121)	(0.153)		(0.164)	(0.172)	(0.163)
Share blue collar	-2.475***	-1.881***		-2.774***	-2.923***	-2.533***
	(0.355)	(0.463)		(0.477)	(0.475)	(0.467)
Observations	227	227	229	227	226	226
Adjusted R^2	0.828	0.818	0.035	0.214	0.223	0.241
PANEL B: Alternative specifications						
Dep. variable: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita (based on original Brustein-Falter data)						
ASSOC measure	all	all	all	all	civic	military
ASSOC	0.160**	0.165***	0.172***	0.0869*	0.284***	0.613***
	(0.0605)	(0.0548)	(0.0469)	(0.0420)	(0.0621)	(0.135)
[beta coeff] [b]	*[0.25]*	*[0.26]*	*[0.28]*	*[0.14]*	*[0.16]*	*[0.22]*
Controls:						
Baseline	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socio-economic		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political			✓	✓	✓	✓
State FE				✓	✓	✓
Observations	227	219	216	216	215	215
Adjusted R^2	0.214	0.223	0.231	0.368	0.374	0.390

Notes: Standard errors in parenthesis (robust in Panel A; clustered at the Weimar state level in Panel B) * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *ASSOC$_{total}$* is the total number of associations in the 1920s in each city. *ASSOC* is the number of associations per 1,000 inhabitants, counting the types of associations indicated in the table header: all, civic, or military (see Table A.4 in the appendix for the type of associations included in these categories). Baseline, socio-economic, and political control variables are listed in Table 2.

a) The beta coefficient reports by how many standard deviations the dependent variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

Table 4: Association density, Nazi Party entry, and election results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PANEL A: Regressions on association density						
Dep. Variable:	NSDAP votes (%) in:			Average (standardized) NSDAP entry rates in:		
	May 1928	September 1930	March 1933	1925-28	1925-30	1925-1/33
$ASSOC_{all}$	0.562**	0.920**	0.915**	0.164***	0.172***	0.160***
	(0.268)	(0.394)	(0.367)	(0.060)	(0.057)	(0.054)
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.19]*	*[0.17]*	*[0.15]*	*[0.26]*	*[0.27]*	*[0.25]*
Baseline controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	227	227	227	227	227	227
Adjusted R^2	0.112	0.278	0.546	0.116	0.168	0.228
PANEL B: Mediation						
Dep. Variable:	NSDAP votes (%) in:			Sobel-Goodman mediation test		
	May 1928	September 1930	March 1933			
Notes:	NSDAP entry rates measured in:			NSDAP election results in:		
	1925-28	1925-30	1925-1/33	May 1928	September 1930	March 1933
$ASSOC_{all}$	0.079	0.190	0.492	Effect of $ASSOC_{all}$ on NSDAP votes via party entry (beta coeff):		
	(0.146)	(0.346)	(0.359)			
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.026]*	*[0.034]*	*[0.079]*	*0.160****	*0.132****	*0.068****
NSDAP entry	2.944***	4.251***	2.639***	Prop. of total effect of $ASSOC_{all}$ that is mediated by NSDAP entry		
	(0.388)	(0.589)	(0.531)			
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.621]*	*[0.490]*	*[0.269]*	*0.860*	*0.793*	*0.462*
Baseline Controls	✓	✓	✓			
Observations	227	227	227			
Adjusted R^2	0.452	0.478	0.602			

Notes: The table presents the individual steps of the Sobel-Goodman mediation test, which examines whether a mediator (NSDAP entry) carries the influence of an explanatory variable ($ASSOC_{all}$) to a dependent variable (NSDAP votes). $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants. Robust standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Baseline controls and additional (socio-economic and political) controls are listed in Table 2.
a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

Table 5: Early and late Nazi Party entry

Dependent variable: Nazi Party entry rates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Early Party entry (1925-28)		Late Nazi Party entry (1929-1/1933)			
$ASSOC_{all}$	0.164***	0.176**	0.0965**	0.104***	0.0609	0.0617*
	(0.0600)	(0.0627)	(0.0448)	(0.0333)	(0.0413)	(0.0331)
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.26]*	*[0.28]*	*[0.15]*	*[0.17]*	*[0.10]*	*[0.10]*
Early NSDAP Entry					0.217*	0.240**
					(0.117)	(0.105)
[beta coeff] [a]					*[0.22]*	*[0.25]*
Base controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional Controls		✓		✓		✓
Sobel-Goodman mediation [b]					0.37	0.41
Observations	227	216	227	216	227	216
Adjusted R^2	0.101	0.128	0.216	0.302	0.256	0.354

Notes: In cols 1 and 2, the dependent variable is the average (standardized) rate of Nazi Party entry (per 1,000 inhabitants) in each city over the period 1925-28 ("early entries"); cols 3-6 use "late entries" between 1929-Jan'33. $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants. Standard errors (robust in odd columns; clustered at the state level in even columns) in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Baseline controls and additional (socio-economic and political) controls are listed in Table 2.

a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

b) The Sobel-Goodman mediation test computes the proportion of the total effect of $ASSOC_{all}$ on late Nazi Party entry that is mediated by early party entry.

Table 6: Panel results: Growth of Nazi Party entry

Dependent variable: (log) Nazi Party entry growth per year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample period:	Entries in 1925-32		Entries in 1925-28		Entries in 1929-32	
lnNSmembers(t-1)	-0.611***	-1.149**	-4.235***	4.878	-0.693***	-0.897
	(0.0863)	(0.496)	(1.189)	(9.348)	(0.0989)	(0.613)
lnNSmembers(t-1)	0.0355*	0.0417*	0.611***	0.613*	0.0511***	0.0547**
×$ASSOC_{all}$	(0.0183)	(0.0226)	(0.198)	(0.324)	(0.0193)	(0.0266)
[std coeff] [a]	*[0.029]*	*[0.035]*	*[0.179]*	*[0.181]*	*[0.055]*	*[0.060]*
rel. to avg. growth	*0.055*	*0.066*	*0.523*	*0.526*	*0.088*	*0.097*
City FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls × *lnNSmembers(t-1)*		✓		✓		✓
Observations	1,200	1,146	404	389	796	757
Adjusted R^2	0.338	0.354	0.206	0.234	0.320	0.347

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the city level) * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants, Controls include all baseline, socio-economic, and political control variables that are listed in Table 2.

a) The standardized coefficient reports the change in the growth rate of Nazi Party entry due to a one-standard deviation increase in association density in cities with average *lnNSmembers(t-1)*. The row below ("*rel. to avg. growth*") shows the ratio of these coefficients relative to average Nazi Party entry growth over the corresponding period.

Table 7: The role of institutions: Government stability and Nazi Party entry

Dep. var: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita 1925-July'32

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:		non-	Non-Prussia, govt:			
	Prussia	Prussia	unstable	stable [b]	all states	all states
$ASSOC_{all}$	0.0792	0.180**	0.349***	-0.0116	0.311***	0.219***
	(0.0770)	(0.0870)	(0.1285)	(0.0619)	(0.0266)	(0.0495)
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.14]*	*[0.27]*	*[0.44]*	*[-0.023]*	*[0.49]*	*[0.34]*
test that beta coeff are equal:	col 1 = col 2: p-value: 0.429		col 3 = col 4: p-value: 0.017			
$I_{Stable\ Govt}$ [b]					-0.643	
					(1.367)	
$I_{Stable\ Govt} \times ASSOC_{all}$					-0.322***	-0.217***
					(0.0422)	(0.0610)
Prussia					0.160	
					(0.456)	
$Prussia \times ASSOC_{all}$					-0.210***	-0.171**
					(0.0532)	(0.0633)
Baseline controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baseline controls × $I_{Stable\ Govt}$					✓	✓
State FE						✓
Observations	119	108	58	48	225	225
Adjusted R^2	0.308	0.040	0.108	0.033	0.255	0.377

Notes: Dependent variable is the average (standardized) rate of Nazi Party entry (per 1,000 inhabitants) in each city over the period 1925-July '32 (when the Prussian government was replaced by a *coup d'etat*). Standard errors in parentheses (robust in cols 1-4, clustered at the state level in cols 5-6) * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants. Baseline controls are listed in Table 2.

a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

b) $I_{Stable\ Govt}$ is a dummy variable for Weimar states with above-median government stability, measured by the first principal component of a three indicators over the period 1918-July 32 (ending with the Prussian *coup d'etat*): i) the percentage of time that the longest-serving government was in office, ii) the percentage of time that the longest-serving party was in office (possibly in different coalitions), and iii) the percentage of time that a state was governed by the "Weimar coalition" of SPD, DDP, and Zentrum. See Appendix D. for detail.

Table 8: Sample splits

Dep. var: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita 1925-1/'33

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Pop 25 rel. to median		Share Catholics		Blue-collar rel. to median	
	below	above	<50%	>50%	below	above
PANEL A: Association density based on all clubs						
$ASSOC_{all}$	0.175**	0.123**	0.161**	0.168**	0.243***	0.0972
	(0.0810)	(0.0553)	(0.0692)	(0.0753)	(0.0909)	(0.0655)
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.23]*	*[0.19]*	*[0.26]*	*[0.29]*	*[0.32]*	*[0.19]*
test that beta coeff are equal:	col 1 = col 2: p-value: 0.788		col 3 = col 4: p-value: 0.843		col 5 = col 6: p-value: 0.421	
Base controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	114	113	157	70	114	113
Adjusted R^2	0.224	0.239	0.150	0.201	0.197	0.174
PANEL B: Association density based on civic clubs only						
$ASSOC_{civic}$	0.511**	0.324**	0.492***	0.405*	0.573**	0.361**
	(0.198)	(0.138)	(0.155)	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.165)
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.25]*	*[0.20]*	*[0.28]*	*[0.27]*	*[0.25]*	*[0.26]*
test that beta coeff are equal:	col 1 = col 2: p-value: 0.683		col 3 = col 4: p-value: 0.951		col 5 = col 6: p-value: 0.929	
Base controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	114	112	157	69	113	113
Adjusted R^2	0.240	0.243	0.172	0.199	0.185	0.208

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Baseline controls are listed in Table 2. $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants, counting all types of associations, and $ASSOC_{civic}$ counts only those with a civic agenda (see Table A.4 in the appendix for the type of associations included in this category). a) The standardized coefficient reports the change in the dependent variable due to a one-standard deviation (sd) increase in the explanatory variable.

Table 9: Bridging and bonding social capital
Dep. var: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita 1925-1/'33

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
$ASSOC_{bridging}$	0.141**		0.151**		0.0733**	
	(0.0655)		(0.0676)		(0.0320)	
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.17]*		*[0.18]*		*[0.09]*	
$ASSOC_{bonding}$		0.719***		0.755***		0.518*
		(0.226)		(0.144)		(0.270)
[beta coeff] [a]		*[0.29]*		*[0.32]*		*[0.22]*
test that beta coeff are equal:	col 1 = col 2: p-value: 0.189		col 3 = col 4: p-value: 0.082		col 5 = col 6: p-value: 0.180	
Baseline controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
State FE					✓	✓
Observations	226	226	215	215	215	215
Adjusted R^2	0.193	0.247	0.205	0.270	0.358	0.392

Notes: The types of associations included in the "bridging" and "bonding" categories are listed in Table A.5 in the appendix. Standard errors in parenthesis (robust in cols 1-2; clustered at the state level in cols 3-6) * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Baseline controls are listed in Table 2. Additional controls include the socio-economic and political controls listed in Table 2.

a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

Table 10: Matching estimation
Dep. var: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita 1925-1/'33

Notes:	(1) only 1 neighbor	(2) Nearest 3 neighbors	(3)	(4)	(5) Exact Matching [a]	(6) Entropy reweighting [b]
I(ASSOC$_{all}$>median)	0.452***	0.339*	0.288**	0.257**	0.275*	0.484**
	(0.142)	(0.199)	(0.141)	(0.131)	(0.164)	(0.244)
Matching variables						
ln(population 25)	✓	✓				
All baseline controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Latitude, longitude				✓	✓	✓
Observations	229	229	227	227	227	227

Notes: *I(ASSOC$_{all}$>median)* is an indicator variable that takes on value one whenever *ASSOC$_{all}$* is above the median. Cols 1-5 present average treatment effects on the treated (ATT), based on propensity score matching using one nearest neighbor in col 1, and using the three nearest neighbors in cols 2-5. Baseline controls are listed in Table 2.
a) Exact matching assigns the three nearest neighbors from the same Weimar state and from the same city population size quintile.
b) Entropy weighting creates balanced samples by reweighting the control group data (below-median *ASSOC$_{all}$*) to match the first and second moment of covariates in the treatment group (above-median *ASSOC$_{all}$*). See Hainmueller and Xu (2013) for details.

Table 11: IV results

Dependent variable: Average (standardized) NSDAP entry per capita 1925-1/'33

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ASSOC measure	all	all	all	all	civic
PANEL A: Second Stage					
ASSOC	0.419**	0.649**	0.565***	0.421	1.479***
	[0. 015]	[0. 023]	[0. 007]	[0. 164]	[0. 008]
[beta coeff] [a]	*[0.70]*	*[1.08]*	*[0. 98]*	*[0.73]*	*[0.88]*
Baseline controls		✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional controls			✓	✓	✓
State FE				✓	
PANEL B: First stage. Dep var: ASSOC					
Club members p.c.	0.496***	0.313***	0.412***	0.263**	0.154***
in 1860s	(0.116)	(0.101)	(0.107)	(0.110)	(0.044)
Controls: See Panel A.					
Kleibergen-Paap	18.4	9.7	14.7	5.7	12.6
First stage F-stat					
N	156	155	147	147	146
adj. R^2	0.088	0.379	0.405	0.453	0.364

Notes: Dependent variable in the second stage is the average rate of Nazi Party entry (per 1,000 inhabitants) in each city over the period 1925-1/33. *ASSOC* is the number of associations per 1,000 inhabitants in each city counting all in cols 1-4, and only civic associations in col 5. Second stage results report the p-values [in square brackets] for the Anderson-Rubin (Chi-square) test of statistical significance (heteroskedasticity-robust); * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. This test is robust to weak instruments (see Andrews and Stock, 2005 for a detailed review). Baseline controls are listed in Table 2. Additional controls include the socio-economic and political controls listed in Table 2. The instrument in the first stage (*Club members p.c. in 1860*) is the first principal component of gymnast association members in 1863 (per 1,000 inhabitants), and participants from each city in the 1861 *Sängerfest* (singer festival) in Nuremberg (per 1,000 inhabitants).

a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

Table 12: Historical anti-Semitism

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Indicators for anti-Semitism in the 1920s				Association density	
Dep. Var.:	Pogroms in 1920s		NSDAP votes 1928		$ASSOC_{all}$	
Estimation	OLS	Matching[b]	OLS	Matching[b]	OLS	Matching[b]
POG_{1349}	0.216***	0.175***	1.969**	1.845***	0.109	-0.225
	(0.0741)	(0.0397)	(0.959)	(0.619)	(0.408)	(0.554)
[beta coeff][a]	*[0.20]*		*[0.15]*		*[0.03]*	
Baseline controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Latitude, longitude		✓		✓		✓
N	91	91	92	92	92	92
adj. R^2	0.040		0.039		0.344	

Notes: POG_{1349} is an indicator variable that takes on value one for cities that saw pogroms against their Jewish communities during the Black Death in 1348-50. The sample only includes cities with a documented medieval Jewish community. The results in col. (1) to (4) replicate the findings in Voigtländer and Voth (2012), but for the subset of cities with information on both association density and medieval Jewish settlement. Baseline controls are listed in Table 2. Dependent variables: Pogroms in 1920s is an indicator variable that takes on value one if a city saw anti-Jewish attacks during the 1920s. NSDAP votes in 1928 is the share of votes for the Nazi Party in the May 1928 election. $ASSOC_{all}$ is the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants, counting all types of associations.

a) Standardized beta coefficients report by how many standard deviations (sd) the outcome variable changes due to a one-sd increase in the explanatory variable.

b) Coefficients present average treatment effects on the treated (ATT), based on propensity score matching using the three nearest neighbors. Matching variables are baseline controls, as well as geographical latitude and longitude.

FIGURES

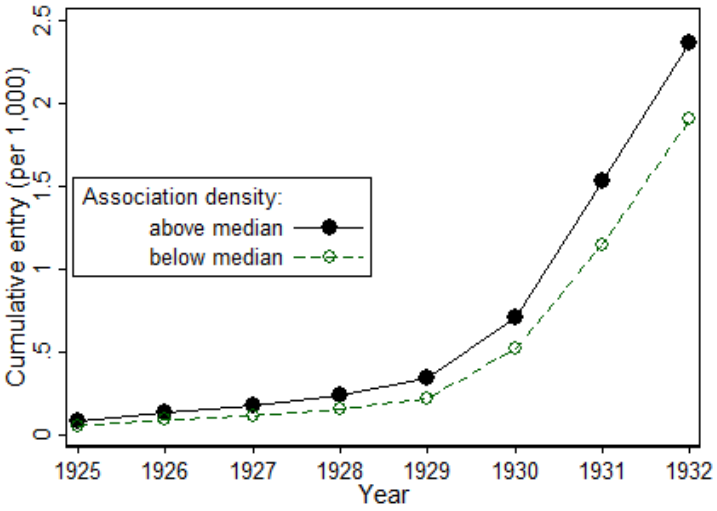

Figure 1: Cumulative NSDAP membership, by association density

Note: Each data point shows the cumulative NSDAP entry rate (per 1,000 inhabitants), starting in 1925 and averaged across the cities with above- and below-median association density. The data are described in Section 3. NSDAP entries are from the Falter-Brustein sample (Falter and Brustein 2015); starting in 1930, we correct aggregate entry rates for a change in sampling methodology, as described in Appendix C. For cities with below-median association density, the cumulative entry rate per 1,000 over the period 1925-1/1933 was 0.55; for those above the median, it was 0.70 – 27 percent higher. Since the Falter-Brustein sample comprises approximately 2% of all Nazi Party entries, the party had 27.7 vs. 35.2 entrants (per 1,000 inhabitants) in cities with below- vs. above-median association density.

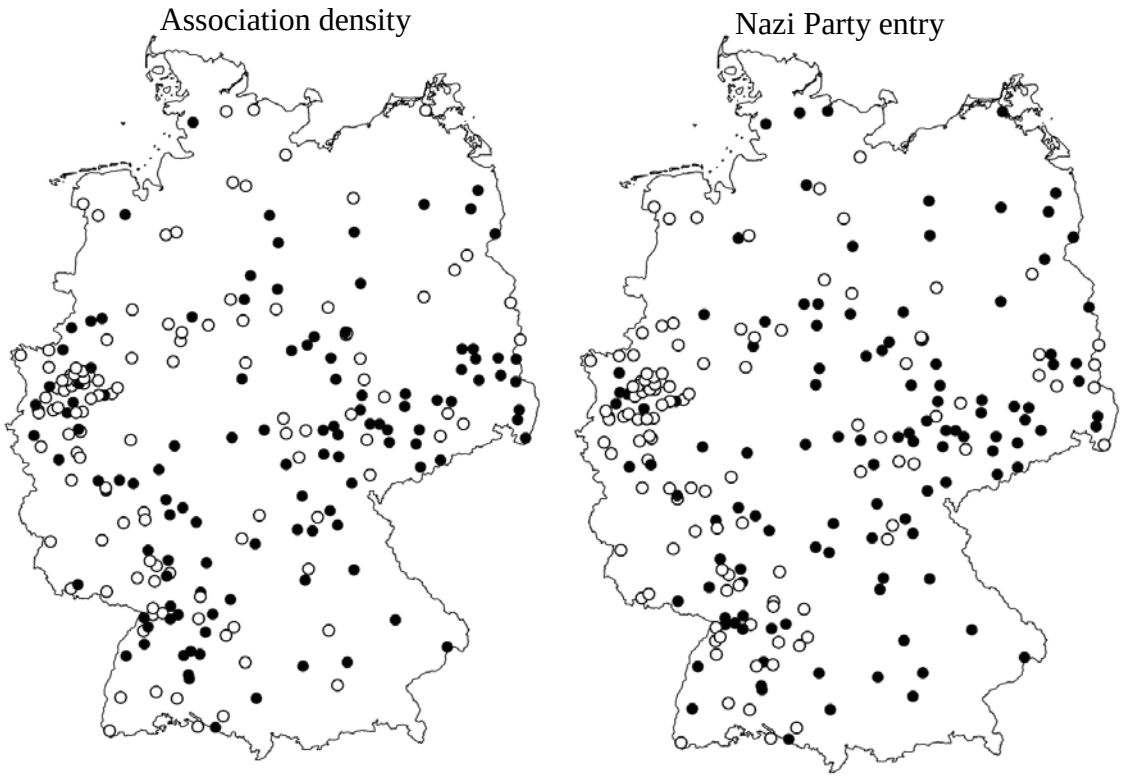

Figure 2: Towns and cities in the sample, by association density and NSDAP entry

Note: Full dots = above median; empty dots = below median. Association density measures the number of associations per 1,000 city inhabitants; Nazi Party entry is the average rate of new members joining the NSDAP between 1925 and January 1933. The figure shows that the sample covers all of modern-day Germany; it also shows that towns and cities with high vs. low association density and NSDAP entry are relatively evenly distributed.

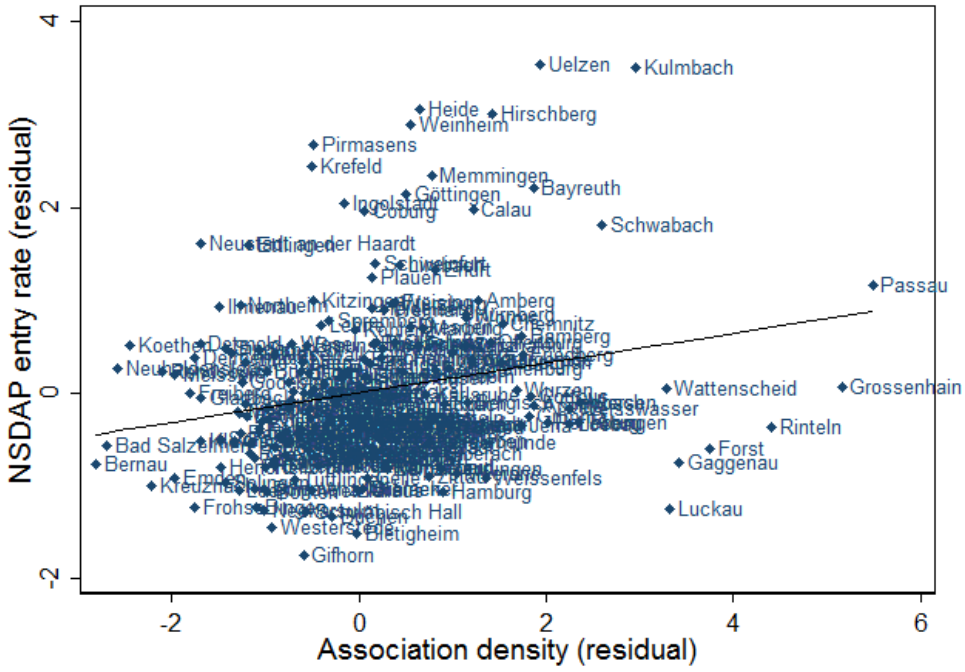

Figure 3: Conditional scatter, NSDAP entry rate and association density

Note: The figure shows the partial scatterplot corresponding to our baseline specification in Table 3, col 4. The x-axis plots the residual variation in association density, and the y-axis plots the residual variation in NSDAP entry rates between 1925 and 1/1933 (per 1,000 inhabitants), after controlling for the baseline controls listed in Table 2.

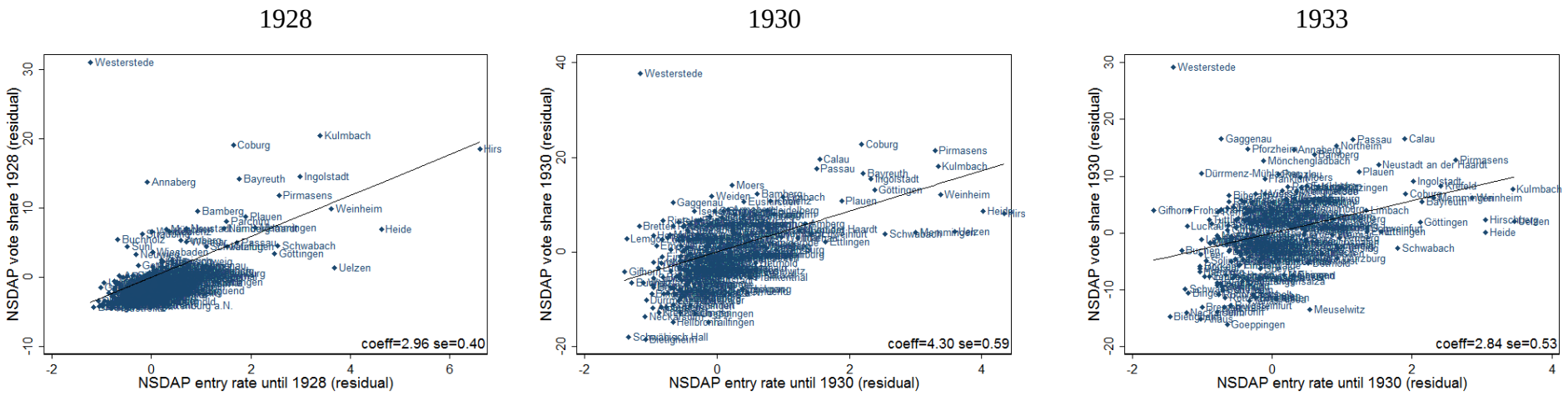

Figure 4: Nazi Party membership and election results, 1928-33

Note: Each dot indicates a city in our sample. The y-axis in the three panels plots the residual variation of NSDAP votes in national elections in 1928 (left panel), 1930 (middle panel), and 1933 (right panel), after controlling for the baseline controls listed in Table 2. The x-axis plots the residual variation in average NSDAP entry rates between 1925 and the respective years (1928, 30, 33), conditional on our baseline controls.

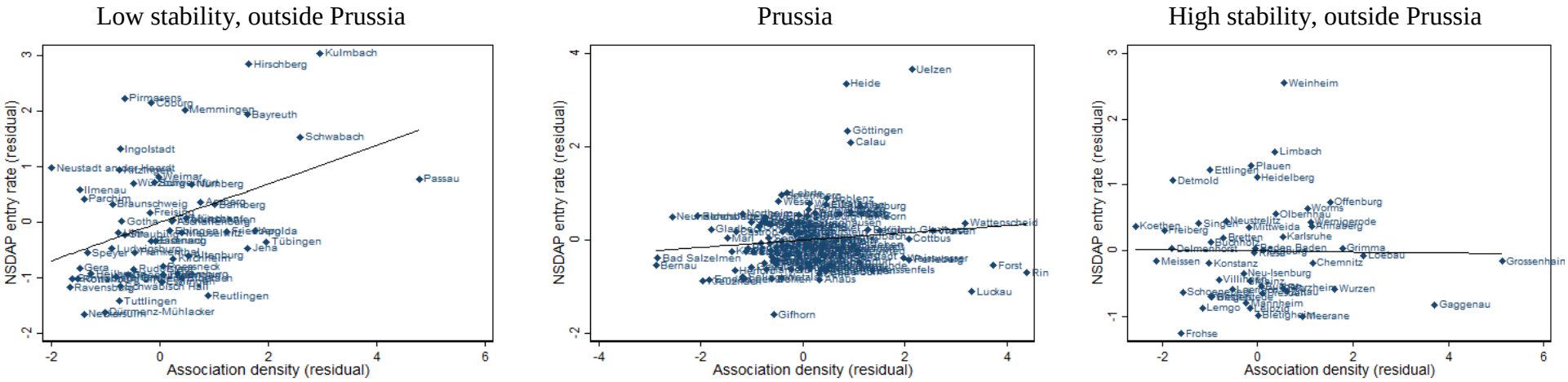

Figure 5: Relationship between association density and Nazi Party entry, by political stability

Note: The figure shows the relationship between association density and Nazi Party entry for cities in federal states with low government stability (left panel), Prussia (which had relatively high government stability, middle panel), and non-Prussian states with high stability (right panel). Government stability by state is reported in Table A.8 in the appendix. The x-axis in the three panels plots the residual variation of association density, and the y-axis, the residual variation in NSDAP entry rates (per 1,000 city inhabitant) between 1925 and 1/1933, after controlling for the baseline controls listed in Table 2 in the paper.