Coordination and Selection in the Rise of Fascism: The 'Ordinary Men' of the Nazi Party

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Abstract

We digitize and analyze the near-universe of National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) membership records and link them to population and industrial censuses. We use these data to document the geography of party membership, the selection of members, and the dynamics of entry. We find that ninety percent of the variation in membership arises between neighboring villages within counties, with one-quarter recording no members. Early party members were socially selected, but these differences disappeared as the party grew. SS members remained distinct: younger, more educated, and more likely to exhibit Nazi insignia in membership portraits. Entry occurred in discrete waves, with later members disproportionately following earlier members from the same communities, workplaces, and families. These patterns suggest that social interaction and coordination transformed a selective political organization into a mass movement. Consistent with this interpretation, while selection of members diminished over time, local membership levels diverged after the arrival of an early joiner across otherwise similar matched municipalities. Finally, this variation in party membership is associated with subsequent deportations of Germany's Jews.

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JEL Classification: D74, N44, P16, Z13

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At the same time, however, the collective behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101 has deeply disturbing implications. There are many societies afflicted by traditions of racism and caught in the siege mentality of war or threat of war. [. . .] Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?

Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men* (1992)

1 Introduction

Whether members of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) were "ordinary men" or selected in some way from the German population has been a central question across the historical, psychological, and social sciences. For example, Arendt (1963) famously analyzed Adolf Eichmann's trial and advanced the thesis of the "banality of evil," arguing that mass atrocities can be sustained by ordinary "joiners" rather than radical ideologues. This question has implications for several broader debates across the social sciences. First, as the central example of fascism, NSDAP membership has been studied across geography to understand the rise of fascism in early twentieth-century Europe (Falter, 2020). Second, the selection of its members has been hypothesized to be an important determinant of its electoral success and of the implementation of the Holocaust (Browning, 1992; Goldhagen, 1996; Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, 2007). Third, and more speculatively, ever since the Holocaust, scholars have hypothesized that if members were 'ordinary' then fascism is more likely to rise again than if there was something distinctive about Germany in the first half of the twentieth century (Waller, 2002). These questions are largely unresolved — scholars continue to contest, for instance, whether Eichmann was a committed antisemite (Arendt, 1963; Cesarani, 2006; Stangneth, 2014).

In this project, we digitize and analyze the near-universe of NSDAP and SS (*Schutzstaffel*) membership records, expanding the available evidence from 50,000 individuals to roughly 10 million, to make progress on these debates. We extract each member's name, date of birth, occupation, residence, and dates of entry and exit. We then link these records to newly digitized population and industrial censuses. The resulting data allow us to observe the patterns of geography ('where do members come from'), who joined ('selection') and joiner dynamics, as well as the consequences of membership at the municipal level.[1] As in the existing literature, we cannot directly observe

[1]Relative to prior work, our data increase geographic resolution from roughly 1,000 counties to the universe of

individuals' underlying beliefs or psychological dispositions.

We begin by documenting the spatial distribution of party membership. The new data reveal substantial differences in party penetration across municipalities within the same county. We find that around 90% of the variation in municipal membership shares lay *within* counties, the finest administrative unit available in prior research. Interestingly, around a *quarter of municipalities did not record a member in 1937*. Municipalities in the same county shared administration, institutions, local culture, and regional conditions, but had widely different membership shares. These patterns suggest that explanations operating only at the national, regional, or county level omit most of the relevant geographic variation.

We next examine the characteristics of members, distinguishing regular NSDAP members from members of the SS. We find limited evidence of selection across counties, but substantial initial selection within counties. Within counties, early NSDAP entrants differed markedly from the local population. They were disproportionately middle class, overwhelmingly male, and less likely to work in agriculture. These differences, however, narrowed over time, and by the outbreak of the Second World War the Nazi Party had become a mass movement representative of the broader population. The SS remained more selected: its members were younger, better educated, and more likely to come from professional occupations. They also appear to have been more ideologically committed than regular NSDAP members. We proxy this using the display of National Socialist insignia in membership portraits taken at entry.

We then trace the dynamics of party entry over time. We find that entry into the NSDAP occurred in discontinuous waves, most notably in 1933, following the seizure of power, and in 1937, after a membership ban was lifted. We ask how early joiners shaped the wave-like and spatially concentrated pattern of membership. We find persistence in party entry: municipalities with early joiners subsequently attracted more members, and within municipalities, early entry by members of a particular occupation or family was followed by further entry from the same occupation or family. In a sample of matched municipalities, otherwise similar places began to diverge following the arrival of an early joiner. We then document a stronger acceleration during the post-March 1933 surge in municipalities where the preexisting party base included more women, a paramil-

municipalities and allow us to trace membership at the monthly level, including around major events such as the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

itary presence, and groups central to the diffusion of local norms, including doctors, policemen, and especially teachers.

We finally turn from party growth to its consequences. We relate membership to the Holocaust. We find that higher rates of party entry are associated with more deportations and emigration. Taken together, we find that the growth of the Nazi Party into a mass movement was temporally discontinuous and exhibited considerable spatial variation. Initial joiners were different from the population; central figures in the community were more likely to be early joiners and inspired subsequent membership. These patterns help explain why a significant share of municipalities did not record a member.

The objective of our study is to provide descriptive insight into the membership of the NSDAP. In doing so, our paper makes three contributions. First, we assemble the near-universe of NSDAP membership records and link them to census data. This moves the unit of analysis from county aggregates and small samples to individual joining decisions. A simple variance decomposition demonstrates why this resolution matters: around 90% of the total variation in municipal NSDAP membership shares arises *within* counties, not between them. The existing literature, constrained to county-level data, has by construction studied only the smaller, between-county component. Second, we document facts about selection into the Nazi movement that cannot be recovered from aggregate data. Early NSDAP members were socially distinctive, but new entrants increasingly resembled the populations of their counties as the party expanded. The SS, by contrast, remained more selective. Third, we document highly localized and persistent growth within communities, workplaces, and families. Entry occurred in discontinuous waves and was concentrated where members were already present. These findings are consistent with a process in which social interaction and coordination transformed a selective political organization into a mass party.

The question of how the Nazi Party rose to power has generated interest like few others in the social sciences. We contribute to the vast literature spanning history, political science, sociology, philosophy, and economics that investigates the origins of Nazism. One influential line of research emphasizes Germany's distinctive historical trajectory. This is often summarized under the *Sonderweg* thesis, according to which Germany followed a distinctive path that increased the likelihood of authoritarian outcomes (Steinmetz, 1997). Within this view, some scholars emphasize persistent antisemitism and elements of political culture that made parts of the German population

receptive to fascism (Pulzer, 1988; Goldhagen, 1996; Evans, 2003). Others argue that Germany's path to modernity was distinctive in ways that made democratic consolidation fragile (Rosenberg, 1958; Kocka, 1980; Moore, 1966). An alternative view stresses that Nazism reflected broader crises of industrial modernity rather than uniquely German predispositions, consistent with the rise of nationalist and antisemitic movements across interwar Europe (Evans, 2003). In this perspective, mass authoritarian movements can arise under general conditions through coordination rather than deep-rooted ideological commitment (Blackbourn and Eley, 1984; Peukert, 1992).

Within this broader debate, historians have examined whether participants were radical ideologues or ordinary men swept up by circumstance (Browning, 1992; Goldhagen, 1996; Arendt, 1951; Boehnert, 1977). Political scientists have shown that the NSDAP drew disproportionately from Protestant, rural, and middle-class constituencies (Falter, 1991; Childers, 1983), with Kater (1983) providing the foundational social profile of party members with Falter (2020) offering the first large-scale quantitative analysis based on approximately 50,000 membership records. In economics, research on electoral support for the NSDAP has emphasized the role of economic shocks (King et al., 2008; Doerr et al., 2022; Galofré-Vilà et al., 2021), cultural persistence (Voigtländer and Voth, 2012; Becker and Voth, 2023), media and propaganda (Adena et al., 2015; Caprettini et al., 2026; Voigtländer and Voth, 2026), and social capital (Satyanath et al., 2017; Ferguson and Voth, 2008). A common limitation of this literature is its reliance on aggregate voting data or small, potentially nonrandom samples of party members. Our data overcome this limitation by providing near-universal individual-level records of NSDAP and SS membership.[2]

The paper also contributes to the study of political change and mobilization in violent movements. Marchais et al. (2021) study selection into violence and find that joiners exhibit parochial altruism (Bowles and Gintis, 2011). Viterna (2006) documents heterogeneous pathways into insurgent mobilization. We study a complementary process in which the decision to join is related to

[2]The descriptive patterns we document also recast several structural accounts of the Nazi rise to power. Previous work links NSDAP electoral support to unemployment, the 1923 hyperinflation, the 1931 banking crisis, and Brüning's austerity program (King et al., 2008; Doerr et al., 2022; Galofré-Vilà et al., 2021). Much of this evidence is reduced form and does not specify the transmission channel (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022). Economic shocks may have influenced the timing of mass entry. To account for our findings, however, their effects must vary sharply within otherwise similar municipalities within the same counties, generate persistent municipal zeros, and produce discontinuous entry clustered within local social groups. An unemployed worker may matter not only because of his own economic circumstances, but also because his decision to join is followed by coworkers, relatives, and neighbors. This places important functional form restrictions on potential explanations. Our descriptive patterns are consistent with herd behavior and threshold models of social interaction (Granovetter, 1978; Schelling, 1971; Kuran, 1991; Lohmann, 1994), although they do not by themselves identify these mechanisms.

the prior decisions of others. More broadly, our analysis provides micro-level evidence on the coordination process through which citizens come to support a new regime, a mechanism central to models of political change, (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Olson, 1965; Granovetter, 1978; Kuran, 1991; Lohmann, 1994), but rarely observed at the level of individual participation. Relative to this work, we observe membership of a single movement at near-universal scale.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides institutional and historical context on the rise of the NSDAP and the organization of the party. Section 3 describes the construction of the individual-level dataset and the additional sources used in the analysis. Section 4 presents descriptive evidence on the geographic distribution and demographic composition of party membership. Section 5 examines coordination dynamics in municipal entry and how the 1933 wave varied with the preexisting local party base. Section 6 examines the consequences of local party strength. The Appendix provides additional details on the data, measurement, and robustness.

2 Historical Background

We study the rise of fascism by analyzing the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). The party grew from a fringe movement of a few thousand members in 1920 to a mass organization of roughly 10 million by 1945, encompassing about one in six German adults. It is one of the most consequential political movements in history, transforming institutions and organizing state violence on an unprecedented scale. This rise took place in a broader interwar context of political instability, ideological polarization, and intense competition between liberal, socialist, and nationalist projects (Nolte, 1966).[3]

2.1 The Growth of NSDAP Membership

We plot the evolution of party membership in Figure 1, showing both the stock of members and the flow of new entrants over time.[4] The Figure starts in the year 1920, when the NSDAP was founded in Munich on February 24 as the successor to the far-right German Workers' Party (DAP). Initially, it was a marginal party with very few members. Following the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the NSDAP gained traction electorally and in terms of membership numbers. While the party received less than 3 percent of the vote in the Reichstag election of May 1928, its vote share rose to 18.3 percent in September 1930 and reached 37.3 percent by July 1932. This electoral success was accompanied by a substantial increase in party membership, which expanded to just under one million by the end of 1932 (Kater, 1983).

There was considerable uncertainty about the political equilibrium that would emerge from the instability of the Weimar Republic and the role the NSDAP would come to play in it. Joining the NSDAP early was therefore perceived as a signal of ideological commitment (Bracher, 1955; 1969). This uncertainty persisted into late 1932, when the party was in visible decline: it lost roughly two million votes across two elections, and its chief organizer, Gregor Strasser, defected. The first months of 1933 marked a decisive break. Hitler's appointment as chancellor on January 30 was followed by the Reichstag fire on February 27, which provided the pretext for the rapid suppression of political opposition. Paramilitary organizations, particularly the SA and SS, carried out much of

[3] We provide a detailed discussion in Appendix C, covering admission rules and their changes, the local organization of the party, and evidence on entry dynamics from local case studies.

[4] Because not all membership cards survived, our data provide a lower bound on total party entry after accounting for duplicate records. We discuss patterns of missingness in Section 3.

this repression. Communist officials were arrested en masse, opposition newspapers were banned, and organized resistance failed to materialize. Approximately 100,000 individuals were arrested in 1933. The concentration camps initially established during the regime's consolidation to suppress political opposition, in particular communists (see also Bielefeld and Mohr, 2023), later became central institutions of the Holocaust. In the Reichstag election of March 5, the NSDAP won 44 percent of the vote. By the end of the month, the government had dismantled the principal checks imposed by parliament and the presidency, completing Germany's transition to autocratic rule. No further multiparty Reichstag elections were held, and the NSDAP remained in power until Germany's defeat in World War II.

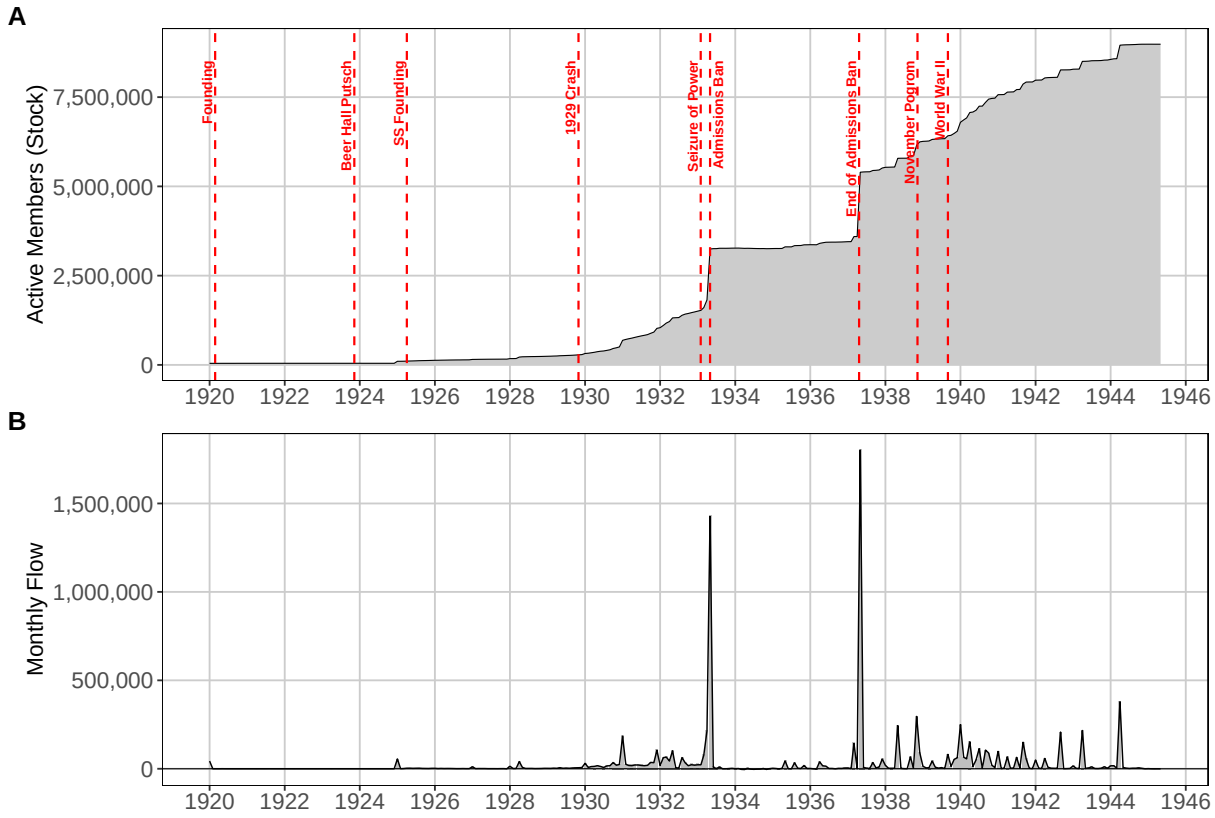
Party entry rose sharply during this political transition. Membership more than doubled following the March 1933 election. The surge was so large that the party suspended most new admissions in May 1933. A second period of rapid expansion began when these restrictions were relaxed starting in 1937. Thus, the two largest waves of party entry occurred under very different political conditions: the first around the seizure of power in 1933, and the second after the party had consolidated its monopoly on political power.

Our membership records also document exits, consisting of voluntary departures, expulsions, and deaths (see Panel A of Figure 3). Some members did leave, particularly before regime consolidation, and expulsion rates were non-trivial. At its peak in mid-1931, there were more than 6,000 monthly leavers. These exits should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of widespread public opposition to the regime. Compared to the stock of members, exit rates were small. Organized resistance was rare and exacted extreme personal costs. Most opposition took the form of what Broszat (1981) termed *Resistenz*, passive non-compliance, foot-dragging, and cultural dissent, rather than active resistance (Peukert, 1987; Kershaw, 2000).

2.2 Party Organization and Admission

The growth of the NSDAP depended on two distinct organizational margins: where the party established a local presence and, conditional on being present, whom it admitted. Establishing a local presence required organizers, who were scarce during much of the 1920s and operated in an often hostile political environment. Before 1933, a group's formal organizational status depended on its local membership: an outpost (*Stützpunkt*) comprised 4 to 14 members, while a local branch

Figure 1: NSDAP Membership Over Time



Note. Panel A shows cumulative active membership stock by month. Panel B shows monthly joiners. Dashed vertical lines mark key events: party founding (1920), Beer Hall Putsch (1923), the founding of the SS (1925), Wall Street Crash (1929), seizure of power (January 1933), the admissions ban (May 1933), the end of the admissions ban (1937), the November Pogrom (1938), and World War II (1939).

(*Ortsgruppe*) began with 15 members, and this threshold was raised to 50 by 1932 (Reibel, 2002, p. 29, p. 36). A limited number of organizers therefore had to choose between building concentrated local strongholds and extending the party's geographic reach at the extensive margin.

Recruitment was therefore decentralized. Until its rise to power, the NSDAP relied extensively on official events and informal word-of-mouth recruitment. Local branches organized rallies, public meetings, and discussion evenings, either in their own municipality or in nearby locations (Grill, 1983, p. 145). The scale of these activities was substantial.[5] The NSDAP's formal hierarchy grouped local branches (*Ortsgruppen*) into regional districts (*Gaue*), but regional and local leaders retained substantial autonomy within the party's fragmented organizational structure (Bracher,

[5] A police report from 1926 recorded approximately 2,370 mass meetings and 3,500 discussion evenings during the preceding 12 months (Grill, 1983, p. 55). In Saxony, the NSDAP held more than 750 public meetings between 1926 and July 1932 (Szejnmann, 1999, p. 53). In September 1931 alone, Gau Hannover-South-Brunswick reportedly organized eleven large rallies, 400 public meetings, 400 indoctrination and discussion evenings, and fifty other functions (Noakes, 1971, p. 203).

1969; Evans, 2003; Broszat, 1981; Mommsen, 1991).

Conditional on local presence, admission rules determined who could formally enter the party. The leadership viewed membership as a resource to be rationed well before taking power. This concern became operationally important after the surge in applications in early 1933. In May 1933, the NSDAP imposed a general ban on new membership. Appendix Table C.1 summarizes who could join in each period.[6]

In 1937, the membership ban was partially lifted. The leadership initially sought to prioritize applicants who had already "proven themselves," particularly members of the SA, SS, and other National Socialist paramilitary organizations (Falter, 2020, p. 45). Certain professional groups, such as doctors, dentists, and pharmacists, were also eligible under specified conditions. In practice, however, these restrictions were applied loosely, making the partial reopening close to a general one. The ban was formally lifted in May 1939. The resulting volume of applications created administrative bottlenecks and prompted temporary restrictions while existing applications were processed. The party imposed another membership ban in 1942, although it is unclear whether this reflected administrative constraints, renewed concerns about the commitment of applicants, or both.[7]

Formal eligibility rules further restricted the pool of potential members. Membership was open to both men and women. Applicants had to be blameless ("unbescholten") Germans of "Aryan" descent, and had to pay their membership fees. Jews, "Colored People," Roma and Sinti, Freemasons, and members of other secret societies were excluded from membership. Applicants who joined after May 1, 1933, were subject to a two-year probationary period ("Anwärterzeit"). From 1939, members of the clergy were no longer allowed to join the party.

[6]The ban contained important exemptions and was gradually relaxed. Members of NSDAP youth organizations remained eligible, and selected groups were admitted before the general reopening. In 1935, for example, 66,000 new members from Gau Bayerische Ostmark were admitted, members from the Saar could join from November 1935, and pre-1933 members of the dissolved Stahlhelm from April 1936. Additional exemptions were introduced over time. In spring 1937, leading members of the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization and organizations representing artisans, retailers, and small business owners could apply. Individuals in territories newly incorporated into the Reich also received special access.

[7]The ban again contained exemptions, including for members of National Socialist youth organizations and some former soldiers. For example, individuals from the NS youth organizations could still apply for membership after turning 18. The same applied to former soldiers who had been honorably discharged from military service, war-disabled veterans, and to individuals who had resettled in the German Reich and acquired German nationality. In 1944, the entry age for members of the youth organizations was lowered from 18 to 17 and active soldiers could apply for membership. At the same time, in order not to weaken the membership ban further, Volksgenossen from newly annexed or incorporated German territories were no longer allowed to apply for NSDAP membership.

Applications were initially processed locally, with the *Ortsgruppenleiter* involved in the admission process. Contemporary accounts indicate that applications could also be rejected because of personal disputes with local party officials or, after 1933, because applicants were regarded as opportunists.[8]

By the late 1930s, the party also sought to influence the scale and, in some cases, the composition of membership. Its broader objective was to bring membership to roughly ten percent of the population, both nationally and within individual *Gaue*. Regional officials sometimes imposed additional priorities. In 1939, for example, Hesse-Nassau sought to favor workers and farmers among new entrants. Such efforts appear to have been regional rather than part of a systematic national policy governing the socioeconomic composition of the membership.[9]

2.3 Party Composition

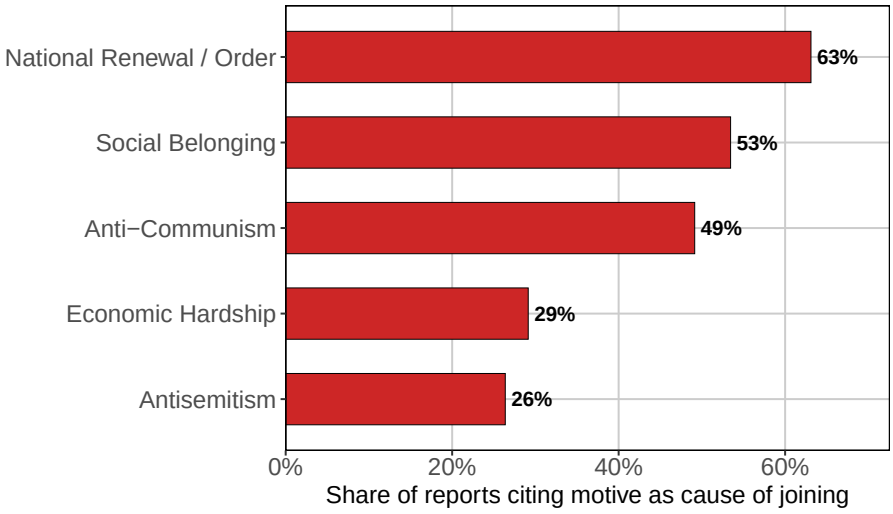
The resulting membership was socially heterogeneous. Work based on early samples of membership records finds that the NSDAP assembled a cross-class coalition (Falter, 1991; Kater, 1983; Childers, 1983). The lower middle class — including artisans, shopkeepers, and independent professionals — was overrepresented, but substantial numbers of civil servants and white-collar employees (*Angestellte*) also joined (Kater, 1983; Kocka, 1980). Aggregate evidence further suggests that membership was disproportionately Protestant and concentrated in rural areas and small towns. Motivations for joining were similarly heterogeneous and changed with the political environment. Contemporary accounts emphasize national renewal, social belonging, anti-communism, economic insecurity, career considerations, and antisemitism, rather than a single common motive (Abel, 1938; Merkl, 1975).

Figure 2 provides quantitative evidence on these motives. We code 580 first-person accounts written in 1934 by party members who entered a prize to explain why they had joined (see Abel, 1938). We classify explicit reasons for joining into five categories: national renewal and order, social belonging, anti-communism, economic hardship, and antisemitism. Appendix A.5.4 details

[8]Because both party admissions and finances were decentralized, local and central party officials faced different incentives. The central leadership sought to limit rapid entry for fear of losing control over the composition and ideological commitment of the membership, while local party organizations had incentives to expand membership because their revenues depended in part on membership dues.

[9]Rationing admission by criteria is not specific to the NSDAP. The Chinese Communist Party, for example, today admits members through quotas and screening criteria (Dickson, 2014).

Figure 2: Motives for Joining in Abel Autobiographies



Note. Share of $N = 580$ Abel autobiographies in which each motive is coded as an explicit causal reason for joining the NSDAP. A report can be coded for multiple motives. Coding via structured-prompt LLM classification (GPT-4o-mini). Appendix A.5.4 describes the coding procedure and reports example passages.

the coding procedure and reports example passages. National renewal appears in 63 percent of accounts, social belonging in 53 percent, and anti-communism in 49 percent. Economic hardship and antisemitism are explicitly cited as reasons for joining in 29 and 26 percent, respectively. These motives frequently overlap: 69 percent of accounts mention at least two, with an average of 2.2 motives per report. The Abel sample is self-selected and disproportionately represents early and committed party members. We therefore interpret these shares as evidence of heterogeneity in stated motivations rather than as estimates of the prevalence of particular motivations among the full NSDAP membership.

Qualitative evidence from prominent cases illustrates the contingent nature of party entry. Arendt (1963), for example, characterizes Eichmann as a "joiner" whose affiliations were shaped less by conviction than by circumstance, or in other words "a leaf in the whirlwind of time":

> "For whatever reasons, the year 1932 marked a turning point of his life. It was in April of this year that he joined the National Socialist Party and entered the S.S., upon an invitation of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, a young lawyer in Linz who later became chief of the Head Office for Reich Security. [...] In court, Eichmann gave the impression of a typical member of the lower middle classes [...]. Before Eichmann entered the Party and the S.S., he had proved that he was a *joiner*, and May 8, 1945, the official date of

> Germany's defeat, was significant for him mainly because it then dawned upon him that thenceforward he would have to live without being a member of something or other. [...] When Kaltenbrunner suggested that he enter the S.S., he was just on the point of becoming a member of an altogether different outfit, the Freemasons' Lodge Schlaraffia, an association of businessmen, physicians, actors, civil servants, etc., who came together to cultivate merriment and gaiety. [...] A leaf in the whirlwind of time." (Arendt, 1963, pp. 31–32)

Consistent with this account, personal connections and social interactions played an important role in decentralized recruitment. Many early joiners had previously belonged to other social and political associations and used these networks to recruit new members into the NSDAP.[10] Beyond formal networks, reputable NSDAP members could use their local networks to spread the ideas of national socialism and thus recruit new members. For example, in a municipality in Günzburg, a local schoolteacher who also served as secretary and treasurer of the fire brigade and held leadership positions in the church and men's choirs, joined the NSDAP in 1929. As a result a number of other (mostly young) members of the municipality also joined the party (Zofka, 1981, p. 409). We return to these social dynamics of entry in Section 5.

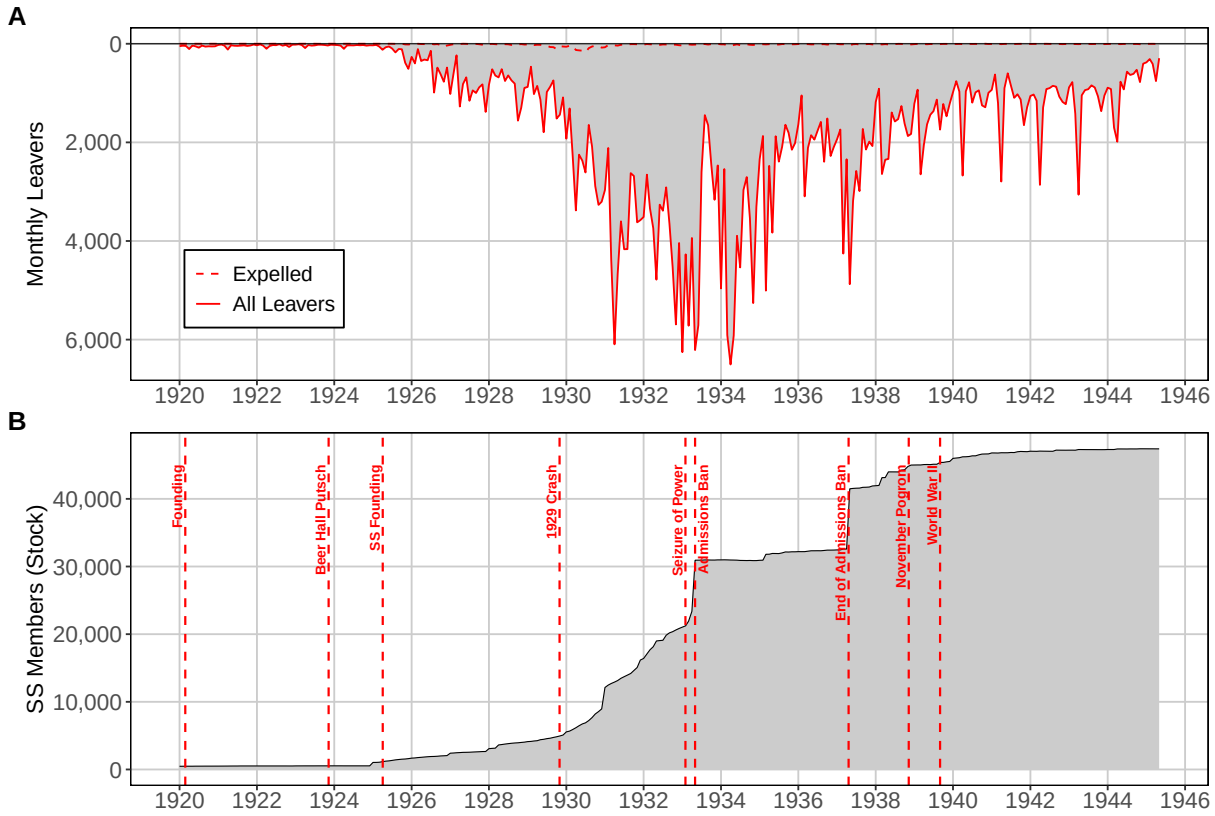
2.4 The Schutzstaffel (SS)

As the NSDAP grew into a mass movement, the party also developed more selective organizations. The *SS*, founded in 1925 as a small personal guard for Hitler, developed into an elite organization with its own command structure, intelligence apparatus, and screening procedures. Admission required proof of racial purity and physical fitness and, for higher ranks, educational qualifications (Boehnert, 1977; Longerich, 2012). Thus, whereas the NSDAP mobilized a broad membership base, the SS recruited more selectively on ideological and individual characteristics.

Figure 3 Panel B, examines NSDAP entry years for eventual SS members. A large share of this group also entered during the two main waves in 1933 and 1937, indicating that even the pool from which the SS was drawn was shaped by the same aggregate entry dynamics.

[10] For example, Bruno Wenzel joined the NSDAP in Hanover in 1921 and "began to proselytize for the NSDAP among the members of the DVSTB" (*Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund*, then Germany's largest antisemitic federation) (Noakes, 1971, p. 14). He subsequently met Gustav Seifert, who also joined the NSDAP, and in July 1921 the two founded the Hanover branch of the party and recruited additional members (Noakes, 1971, pp. 14ff.).

Figure 3: Membership Exits and SS Membership



Note. Panel A shows the monthly flow of membership exits: the gray area gives all leavers and the dashed red line expelled members only. Panel B shows NSDAP entry years for eventual SS members. Dashed vertical lines mark key events.

The effectiveness of the regime's coercive apparatus was dependent on local party organizations. The SS and Gestapo relied heavily on information supplied by ordinary citizens and local NSDAP chapters. In Bremen, for example, one account reports that "90 percent of the reports received by the Gestapo came from the district party leadership" (Marßolek and Ott, 1986, p. 171). More broadly, the Gestapo often acted on information supplied from below rather than initiating investigations independently. Local citizens and party organizations were therefore important inputs into the regime's system of surveillance and repression (Mann, 1979; Gellately, 2001; Gordon, 1984).

3 Data

3.1 Individual-Level Data

We construct an individual-level dataset of NSDAP membership from the near-universe of surviving membership cards held by the U.S. National Archives (Record Group 242) (National Archives and Records Administration, 2026). The collection comprises approximately 16.3 million card images, corresponding to about 10.5 million person records, across two parallel indexes: the *Zentralkartei* (alphabetical, central index) and the *Ortsgruppenkartei* (geographic, by local branch).[11] According to Falter (2020), over 90 percent of all persons who ever joined the NSDAP are traceable across the two indexes. We describe the extraction pipeline in Appendix A.1.[12] We complement the card files with the earliest surviving register of party members, held by the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, 1920).[13] The register includes very early members, including Adolf Hitler, who are not covered by the NARA registries.

We extract structured data from each card image using a vision-language model, which returns approximately 30 fields across cards, including: name, birth date, place of birth, occupation, membership number, entry date, residential address, local branch, regional district, and administrative annotations recording exits, expulsions, re-entries, and deaths.

The occupation field records free-text entries with extensive German abbreviations. We standardize these entries and classify each into the occupational categories of the 1925 census (*Berufszählung*), following the Statistisches Reichsamt classification (Statistisches Reichsamt, 1927–29), described in Appendix A.1.5. We also retain alternative occupation codings based on ISCO-08, NACE Rev. 2, and the census professional groups (*Berufsgruppen*).[14] To assign individuals to local workplace, we combine data on occupational status with data on industry. In the main specifica-

[11] We discuss the exact number of distinct members, and the methodology for their enumeration and validation, in Appendix section A.1.

[12] Allied forces captured these records in 1945 and consolidated them at the Berlin Document Center, where they were microfilmed. The *Zentralkartei* consists of approximately 9.5 million images, organized alphabetically by surname, and the *Ortsgruppenkartei* of approximately 6.7 million images, organized geographically by *Ortsgruppe*. Many members appear in only one index. Records for roughly one million members have been lost: the *Zentralkartei* has gaps in the letter ranges Fa–G and Ka–O; the *Ortsgruppenkartei* lost major holdings from Vienna, Salzburg, and Franconia. The majority of these missing cards, thus, pertain to areas outside of current-day Germany.

[13] The archival file is Bundesarchiv, Bestand NS 1 (Reichsschatzmeister der NSDAP), signature NS 1/3298.

[14] Self-reported occupations may differ from official census records due to social desirability or multiple job-holding. For example, agricultural workers frequently held secondary jobs, which may partly explain the differences between party and census data in agriculture.

tion, workplace cells are defined at the municipality-by-industry-by-occupational-category level. For example, a carpenter employed in shipbuilding. We further map occupations to a hierarchy of state functions following Boberach (1997), identifying members in public administration, police, military, or party organizations.

Extracting structured data from historical handwritten documents introduces measurement error that may not be classical (Carlson and Dell, 2025). Legibility varies with card age, regional handwriting conventions, and the care of the local official who completed the form. Two card formats coexist: small index cards with core biographical data, and larger A5 cards with address histories and administrative annotations. In our initial sample, approximately 2–5% of fields per card contain the model's `[unclear]` annotation. We cannot fully rule out that extraction accuracy varies systematically with card characteristics that correlate with the outcomes we study. Our pipeline takes into account that cards vary in format: some are machine-printed with standardized fields, while others were completed in cursive by local officials (Appendix Figures A.1 and A.2). Extraction is more accurate for machine-printed cards. Fill rates for core analytic variables (name, birth date, address, local branch, membership number) range from 83% to 100%. The occupation field has a fill rate of 86%, reflecting variation in card completeness rather than systematic extraction failure.

To assess the quality of our extraction, we benchmark the extraction against an independently produced expert transcription. The Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives) hand-transcribed a systematic sample of roughly every fiftieth image, yielding 369,709 records; we link 99.7% of these records to our extraction. Agreement exceeds 90% for most fields, including membership number (97%) and the day and month of birth (98% and 99%, respectively). Appendix A.2 describes the linkage procedure and reports agreement by field. We also observe whether each card was handwritten or machine-printed; machine-printed cards are more legible and therefore less prone to extraction error. The majority of cards are machine-printed. Together, these validation exercises indicate that our findings are unlikely to be driven by differential extraction quality. Some record-level error is inevitable in data of this scale. We therefore do not interpret individual records as verified histories. Our analysis instead relies on aggregate variation, such as joining rates across places and over time, for which isolated extraction errors are unlikely to be consequential.

We match the extracted records to historical municipalities using the newly digitized munic-

ipal registers of the 1910, 1933, and 1939 censuses (*Amtliches Gemeindeverzeichnis für das Deutsche Reich*, (Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, 1915; Statistisches Reichsamt, 1936; 1941), which record the name, county, and population of every municipality in the Reich. Because no shapefile of historical municipal boundaries exists, we reconstruct them from the modern cadaster, whose smallest units preserve the municipal geography of the historic period. We geocode each census municipality and assign every cadastral unit to the municipality whose coordinate falls inside it, so each municipality receives a single polygon and its census population (Appendix A.3). We then place each member in a municipality by residence address, using the location of the local branch where the address is missing, and divide member counts by census population to obtain municipal membership shares.

We identify SS membership from two sources. First, we flag all members whose NSDAP card lists an "SS" affiliation. Second, we link our records to approximately 50,000 individuals named in the *SS-Verordnungsblatt*, the SS's official gazette (DWS-XIP, 2025), matching on membership number where available and on name and date of birth otherwise. The gazette records all SS promotions and provides information on entry dates, ranks, and promotion histories. Because it records promotions, this source is more likely to capture members who advanced within the SS hierarchy and thus more senior members of the organization. In total, we conservatively link and identify more than 46,000 SS members in the NSDAP records.

We estimate each member's probability of being Protestant using a Bayesian framework that combines county-level Protestant shares from the 1925 census (Falter and Hänisch, 1990a), municipal-level church counts from the *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon des Deutschen Reichs* (Uetrecht, 1912), a geocoded gazetteer of German place names, and name-specific likelihood ratios estimated from 1.6 million parish register records that provide us with information on the joint distribution of names and religious affiliation (Verein für Computergenealogie e.V., 2025). Appendix A.4 provides details, reports the full name-religion association table, and validates this method using a hold-out sample.

We construct two within-municipality social proximity measures from the address and occupation data. For each member and year, we count existing NSDAP members who share the same surname (family), or workplace cell (coworker). The full set of extracted fields and their fill rates is reported in Appendix Table A.1.

The resulting dataset operates at three levels: individual (member characteristics, entry and exit timing), municipal (annual panels of membership stocks and flows), and county (membership aggregates merged with census and administrative data described below). Appendix Table A.2 reports summary statistics.

3.2 Supplementary Data

We supplement the individual-level panel with a set of variables that capture baseline county- and location-level conditions.

Economic Geography. We digitize the 1925 German industrial census to obtain county-by-industry employment counts for around 1,000 counties. We use the 1925 German occupational census to measure the occupational composition of the population in each county (Statistisches Reichsamt, 1927–29). We obtain county-level data on population, gender, and religious affiliation from Falter and Hänisch (1990a), who compile the 1925 German social and population census. We use these census data to compare NSDAP and SS members with the general population.

We gather municipal population censuses for 1910, 1933, and 1939 (*Amtliches Gemeindeverzeichnis für das Deutsche Reich*, (Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, 1915; Statistisches Reichsamt, 1936; 1941). The 1910 census provides our baseline because it is the only Reich-wide municipal population benchmark that predates the Nazi seizure of power. It covers approximately 75,000 municipalities. We supplement these data with population figures for territories later annexed or occupied by Germany: we use the 1910 census for Alsace-Lorraine; the Memel Territory; and the formerly German regions of western Poland, including Posen and West Prussia, which Germany lost in 1918–20. For Austria, we use the 1937 census, for which census authorities retrospectively tabulated 1933 populations using the later territorial boundaries. For the Sudetenland, we use the 1939 census, the first conducted after its annexation in 1938.

Administrative Geography. For each county, we record its governing district and state. For each location, we compute distances to district, state, and national borders, as well as distances to the respective district, state, and national capitals.

Economic Shocks. We measure local exposure to the 1923 hyperinflation and the 1931 banking crisis. Hyperinflation exposure is the cumulative local inflation between 1920 and 1924, computed from the town-level consumer price indices of Braggion et al. (2023). Banking-crisis exposure is the change in city unemployment during the 1931 crisis year, computed from the city cross-section of Doerr et al. (2022). Each municipality takes the value of the nearest source with data; Appendix A.5.2 describes the construction.

Deportations. We obtain individual-level records on Jewish residents, deportees, and emigrants in the List of Jewish Residents in the German Reich 1933–1945, the 1939 German Minority Census and the German Federal Archives' memorial book (Tracing the Past e.V., 2018; Bundesarchiv, 2026). The database contains approximately 406,000 entries with residential addresses, deportation dates, and emigration records. We geocode each record to a municipality and construct municipal-level counts of Jewish residents, deportees, and emigrants, which serve as outcome variables in Section 6.[15]

Jewish Communities. We compile historical Jewish community population counts from approximately 4,600 localities across Germany, drawing on the *Jüdische Gemeinden* online archive (Alicke, 2026). We match locality names to our municipality coordinates and aggregate to the municipal level.

Electoral Data. We collect county-level Weimar-era election results (Falter and Hänisch, 1990a), including vote shares for the major parties in the Reichstag elections of 1928, 1930, July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933. Of particular interest are the KPD (Communist) and SPD (Social Democratic) vote shares, which measure local exposure to left-wing mobilization. For Baden and Hesse, where returns are available at the municipality level, we additionally collect these results (Falter and Hänisch, 1990b; 1990c) and match them to our municipalities by name and county.

[15] From the same victim records, it is possible to construct a measure of Jewish presence at the address level for each NSDAP member. We parse victim residential addresses into street name and house number, apply the same street-name normalization used for the membership cards, and match to party members at three levels of proximity: same municipality, same street, and same house number.

4 Descriptive Evidence

We organize the descriptive evidence around three questions: where, when, and who joined the Nazi Party. We first show the geography and the timing of party growth. Membership varied sharply even across nearby municipalities, and entry occurred in discrete waves rather than expanding smoothly over time. We then turn to selection into the party. We first ask whether members came disproportionately from counties with particular economic and demographic characteristics, the margin observable in earlier aggregate data. We next use our individual-level records to compare members with the populations of the counties in which they lived. Then we ask how this selection changed as the NSDAP expanded from a narrow political movement to a mass organization. Last, we contrast NSDAP members with SS members, who were more selectively recruited and arguably more ideologically aligned with the goals of the NSDAP.

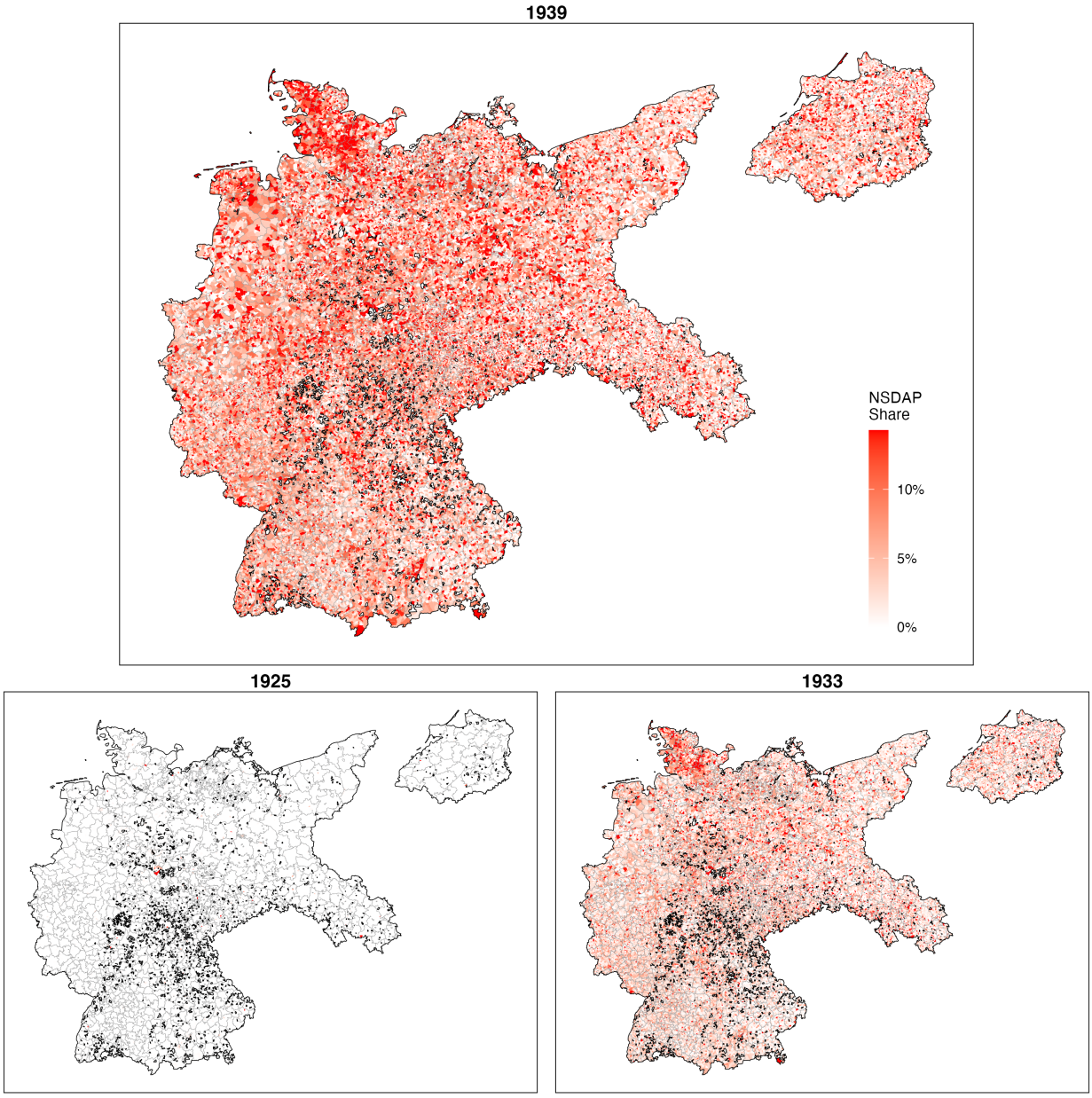
4.1 Fact 1: Granular Geographic Variation

NSDAP membership varied sharply across close municipalities. Figure 4 shows municipal membership shares in 1925, 1933, and 1939. Even within the same county, neighboring municipalities often have markedly different membership shares, with no clear spatial gradient separating areas of high and low membership. These local differences are also persistent: municipalities that were early strongholds tend to remain so throughout the period (see also Appendix Figure B.1). For comparability across dates, the maps use Germany's pre-annexation borders. Appendix Figure B.2 extends the map to the annexed territories: Austria, the Sudetenland, the areas annexed from Poland (including Posen), and Alsace-Lorraine.

Most of the geographic variation in NSDAP membership occurred within rather than across counties. Panel A of Figure 5 decomposes the variance in municipal membership shares into between- and within-county components at three census dates. Around 90% of the total variation occurs *within* counties, and this share is relatively stable over time. Panel B reaches the same conclusion from cross-sectional regressions of municipal membership shares on progressively finer geographic fixed effects in 1933. State fixed effects, for example, explain around 1% of the variation.

This finding has a direct methodological implication. The existing literature on NSDAP sup-

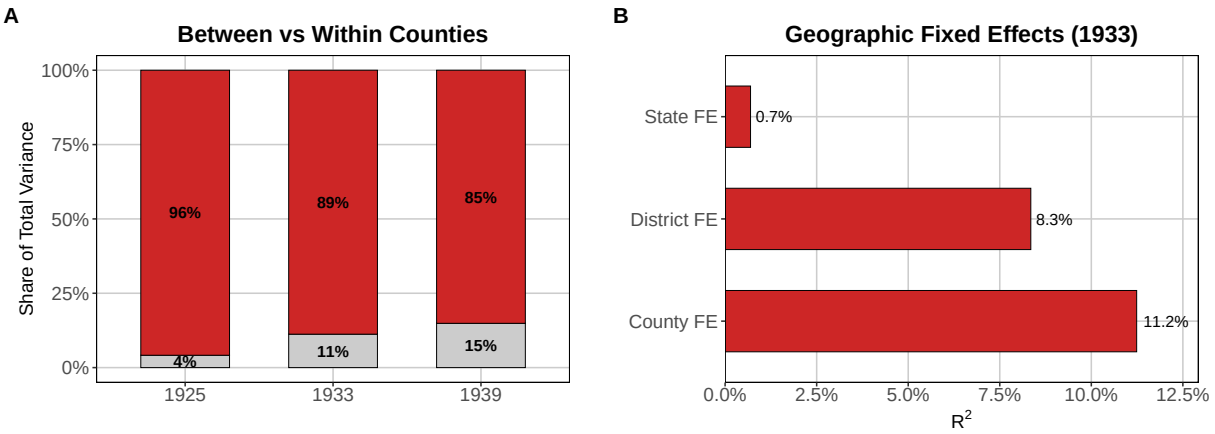
Figure 4: Geographic Distribution of NSDAP Members



Note. This figure shows the share of NSDAP members in each municipality's total population at three census dates in the borders of the German Reich before 1937. Municipal boundaries are reconstructed from the modern cadaster (see Appendix A.3). The color scale ranges from white (zero) to red (maximum share). County borders are overlaid in gray. Municipalities within the same county often exhibit substantial differences in membership shares, a pattern quantified in Figure 5.

port has relied almost exclusively on county-level data (Falter, 1991; King, 1997), which by construction captures only the between-county component. Our results show that this approach misses the majority of the variation in party penetration. Individual-level data are important to study the mechanisms that generated heterogeneous mobilization within the same local institu-

Figure 5: Within-County vs. Between-County Variation in NSDAP Membership



Note. Panel **A** decomposes the variance of municipal NSDAP membership shares into between-county (gray) and within-county (red) components at each of the three census dates. The printed percentages give the share of each component in the total sum of squares. Panel **B** reports the R^2 from regressions of municipal membership shares in 1933 on progressively finer sets of geographic fixed effects.

tional environment.

Membership tracks electoral support. Appendix B.1 compares NSDAP vote shares with party membership across the five Reichstag elections from 1928 to March 1933, at the county level nationwide and at the municipal level.[16] Places with a larger membership stock per 1,000 inhabitants in the month before an election recorded higher NSDAP vote shares in it, and the association holds within states for counties and within counties for municipalities. Membership dynamics precede and predict voting patterns: entries in the year before an election positively predict its vote share at both levels (Appendix Figure B.3). Membership captures a costlier form of support: a vote was secret and temporary, while joining was public and carried dues. Membership is observed monthly for every municipality, while electoral results yield five dates and, for most of the country, only counties.

4.2 Fact 2: Discrete Waves of Entry

Party membership was highly uneven across space, even within narrowly defined local environments. We next study the descriptive patterns of the timing of entry. We find that the party's expansion was similarly uneven over time. NSDAP entry occurred in discrete waves rather than growing smoothly over time. Figure 1 shows NSDAP membership dynamics over time in our

[16]Municipal election returns are available only for Baden and Hesse; the Hessian election results do not include March 1933.

data. Until 1929, membership and its growth remained small. Following the onset of the Great Depression in 1929–1930, membership growth accelerated. The two largest surges in membership, in 1933 and 1937, were sharp and discontinuous.

The 1933 wave coincided with the NSDAP's seizure of power, which marked a resolution of political uncertainty and a decisive shift in the expected costs and benefits of joining. The partial lifting of the *Mitgliedersperre* in 1937 produced a second wave of mass entry and was much more important than the official complete lift of the ban in 1939.[17] In 1942, the party implemented a second membership ban which remained in place until the end of World War II. This ban was less restrictive than the first ban and did not change the rate of membership growth.[18]

The timing of the 1933 and 1937 wave aligns with institutional and social changes in barriers to entry rather than with gradual ideological conversion or economic shocks. By the end of the war, cumulative membership had reached roughly 10 million. Political mobilization intensified after the March election, formal applications accumulated through the late-April rush before the membership freeze, and entries were concentrated on May 1.

Together, these patterns characterize the expansion of the party across space and time. We now turn from the scale and distribution of membership to its composition: who were the Germans who entered the NSDAP?

4.3 Fact 3: Limited Geographical Sorting

We first turn to geographic selection. Previous studies of NSDAP membership, constrained by aggregated data, primarily examined whether party members were disproportionately drawn from areas with particular economic or demographic characteristics. We revisit this question using our more comprehensive membership data before turning to selection among individuals within the same county.

Figure 6 separates this geographic sorting from differences between members and non-members within the same county. For each group $g \in \{N, S\}$, denoting the NSDAP and SS, we use the same set of characteristics $k \in \mathcal{K}$ throughout these comparisons. They cover sector of employment

[17] In 1937, leading members of selected professional NS organizations, members of paramilitary groups, including the SA and the SS, as well as certain professional groups, such as doctors, dentists and pharmacists, could apply for membership.

[18] It for example excluded youths that came of age and were members of the NS youth organizations or soldiers that were honorably discharged from the military service (Falter, 2020).

(agriculture, industry, trade and transport, and administration and services), occupational status (blue-collar and self-employed), and demographics (Protestant and female).

Panel A measures the between-county component by comparing the characteristics of counties in which members were more prevalent with the corresponding national population benchmark. Let $x_{ck} = N_{ck}/D_{ck}$ denote the census share of characteristic k in county c on its natural base D_{ck} (the county workforce for occupational shares; total county population for demographic shares). Let M_c^g denote the number of group-g members from county c. Define group and population county weights $\omega_c^g = M_c^g / \sum_{c'} M_{c'}^g$ and $\omega_c^{\text{pop}} = D_{ck} / \sum_{c'} D_{c'k}$. The between-county component is

$$\Delta_k^{g,\text{between}} = \sum_c \omega_c^g x_{ck} - \sum_c \omega_c^{\text{pop}} x_{ck}, \tag{1}$$

where, by construction, the second term is the aggregate national share of characteristic k over all counties with census data, $\sum_c \omega_c^{\text{pop}} x_{ck} = \sum_c N_{ck} / \sum_c D_{ck}$, i.e. the value an average German on the relevant base would exhibit. The between-county component is therefore positive when group members are disproportionately drawn from counties in which characteristic k is more prevalent than in the national aggregate. Appendix Figure B.4 reports results of an unweighted approach as a robustness exercise.

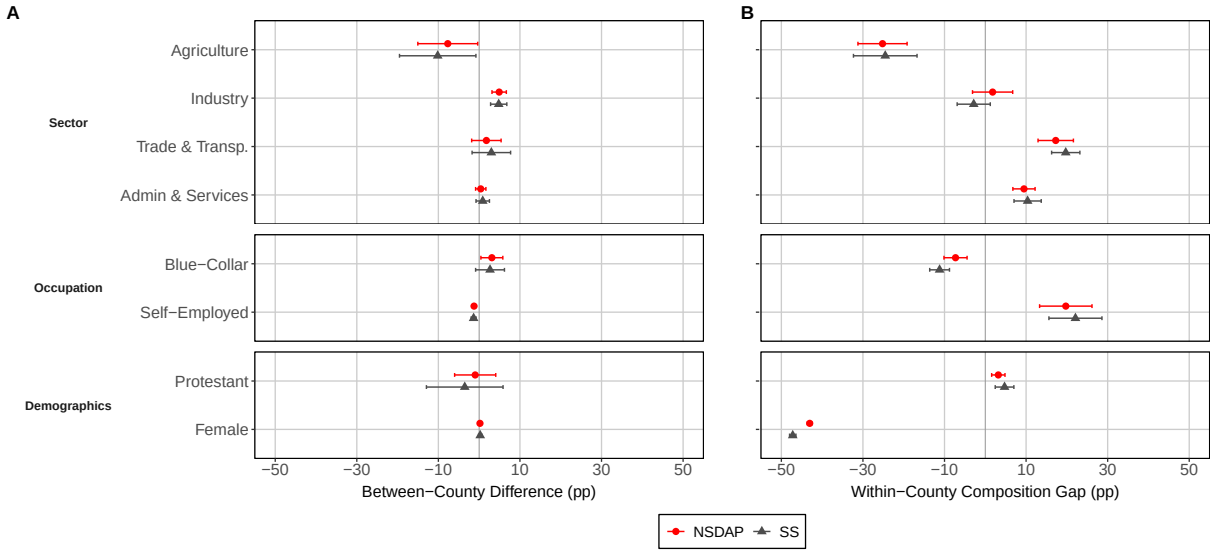
Between-county differences are modest for most characteristics. Panel A of Figure 6 shows that the counties from which NSDAP members were drawn closely resemble the counties in which the average German lived. The modest differences that remain are consistent with Kater's (1983) emphasis on the old *Mittelstand*—small business owners, independent artisans, and farmers.[19] The same holds for SS members.[20]

The same conclusion holds for other salient county characteristics. Figure 7 compares the general population, NSDAP members, and SS members on county Jewish population share, urban sta-

[19] Appendix Figure B.5 validates our coding against the 0.5% membership file compiled by Falter (1991) and Kater (1983): applied to that file, our classifications reproduce the aggregate shares published by Kater (1983). Appendix Table B.2 shows the limitation of a sample of that size: under county-clustered resampling at the 0.5% fraction, the sign of the population-weighted between-county sorting gap is identified for only two of the eight characteristics, while the sign of the unweighted cross-county gap is identified for all eight. The equal-weight comparisons of the earlier literature were thus the estimates its sample could support; the population-weighted gaps require the full membership file. The within-county gaps of Figure 6, Panel B, are an order of magnitude larger and are identified even at the 0.5% scale (Appendix B.2).

[20] Appendix Figure B.4 shows the unweighted-benchmark analogue, in which NSDAP members appear disproportionately drawn from more Protestant and less agricultural counties. This pattern reflects the fact that small rural counties and the counties from which NSDAP members are drawn are both over-represented when counties are weighted equally, rather than a genuine population-share difference.

Figure 6: Community Composition: Between-County and Within-County Differences Before 1933



Note. Panel **A** plots $\Delta_k^{g,\text{between}}$: the group-weighted county average of characteristic k minus the national aggregate share. The national aggregate is computed with denominator-consistent county weights $\omega_c^{\text{pop}} = D_{ck} / \sum_{c'} D_{c'k}$, where D_{ck} is the county workforce for occupational shares and total county population for demographic shares, so that $\sum_c \omega_c^{\text{pop}} x_{ck}$ coincides with the national share $\sum_c N_{ck} / \sum_c D_{ck}$. Panel **B** plots $\Delta_k^{g,\text{within}}$: the group-weighted average gap between group composition (x_{ck}^g) and population composition (x_{ck}) within the same county. NSDAP ($g = N$) is shown in red and SS ($g = S$) in gray. All values are reported in percentage points. Error bars show 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the county level.

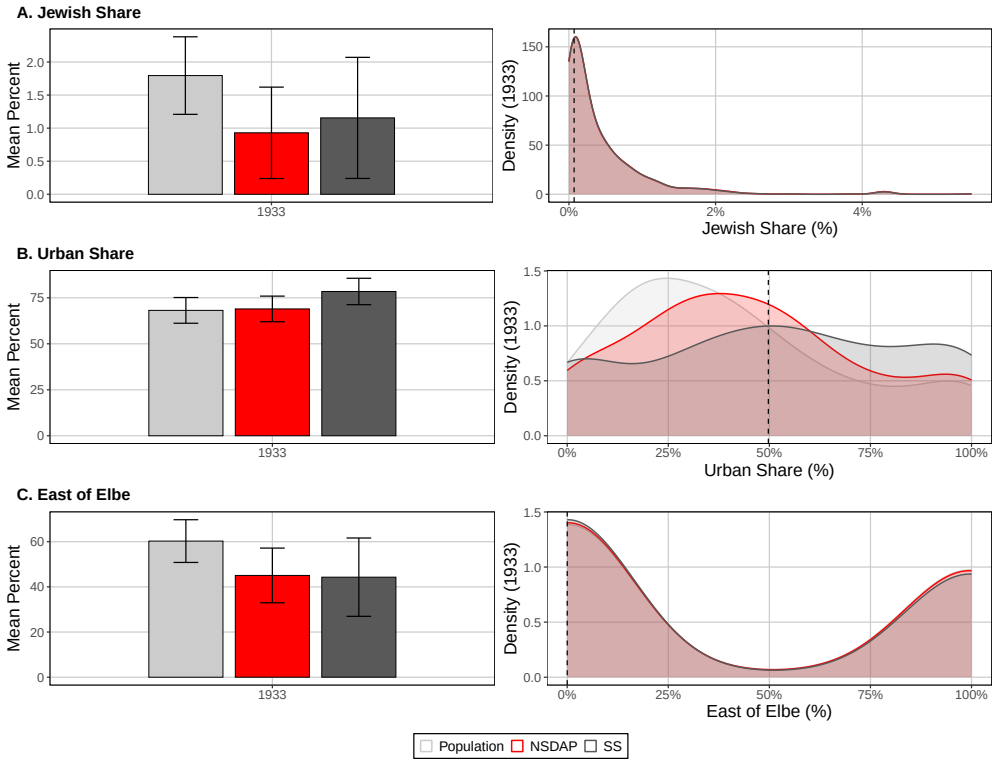
tus, and East-of-Elbe location. The left column reports weighted county-level means in 1933 with 95% confidence intervals clustered at the county level; the right column shows the corresponding county-level distributions. NSDAP and SS members came from counties that were marginally less Jewish than the national population; NSDAP counties were about as urban as the national average, while SS counties were somewhat more urban. Both groups came from counties slightly less likely to lie east of the Elbe. None of these differences is statistically significant.

Thus, the observable characteristics of the counties from which members came differed in limited ways from those of the counties in which the average German lived. This does not imply that party members themselves were representative. Aggregate comparisons cannot distinguish between geographic sorting and selection among individuals living in the same place. We turn to the differences between members and the populations of their own counties next.

4.4 Fact 4: Selection within Counties

We compare the individual characteristics of NSDAP and SS members with the corresponding census characteristics of their own county. This comparison uses the same dimensions as Figure 6

Figure 7: Geographic Differences Between Counties, 1933



Note. Each row reports one county-level geographic feature: Jewish population share (A), urban share (B), and East-of-Elbe location (C). Left panels show weighted county-level means in 1933 for the general population (gray), NSDAP members (red), and SS members (dark gray); error bars show 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the county level. Right panels overlay county-level kernel densities for 1933; the dashed vertical line marks the location of the largest pairwise Kolmogorov–Smirnov gap among the three pairwise group comparisons.

Panel A, but now isolates selection *within* counties rather than sorting *across* them.

Figure 6, Panel B reports within-county differences. Let x_{ck}^{g} denote the share of characteristic k among group-g members in county c, computed from individual membership records. The within-county component is

$$\Delta_k^{g,\text{within}} = \sum_c \omega_c^g \left(x_{ck}^g - x_{ck} \right). \tag{2}$$

This quantity is positive when members are more likely than other residents of the same county to have characteristic k. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. The between- and within-county components together equal the group's total deviation from the national population:

$$\Delta_k^{g,\text{between}} + \Delta_k^{g,\text{within}} = \sum_c \omega_c^g x_{ck}^g - \sum_c \omega_c^{\text{pop}} x_{ck}.$$

Within-county selection is substantially larger than between-county sorting. For most charac-

teristics, the gaps between members and other residents of the same county in Panel B of Figure 6 are much larger than the differences across counties in Panel A. NSDAP and SS members were less likely than their neighbors to work in agriculture or industry and more likely to work in trade and transport and in administration and services. Blue-collar work was less common among members, and self-employment was the largest occupational overrepresentation, consistent with the historical emphasis on the *Mittelstand*. The largest demographic difference is gender: both organizations were overwhelmingly male. Members were also more likely to be Protestant than other residents of the same county.

4.5 Fact 5: Convergence to the Population

The preceding comparisons find limited evidence of selection across counties, but substantial selection within counties. We next ask whether this selection changed over time. This is important, because the NSDAP changed dramatically as it expanded from a small and selective movement into a mass organization. We therefore ask whether the composition of new entrants changed along with the scale of party membership.

For each county c, entry period t, and characteristic k, let x^g_{ctk} denote the share of characteristic k among entrants into group g in period t, and let x_{ck} denote the corresponding county population share from the relevant census benchmark. In this subsection, $g = N$ denotes the NSDAP. We measure the distance between entrants and the county population across the set of characteristics $\mathcal{K}$. We include the same characteristics as in Figure 6. We use the Euclidean distance

$$D^g_{ct} = \left(\frac{1}{|\mathcal{K}|} \sum_{k \in \mathcal{K}} \left(x^g_{ctk} - x_{ck} \right)^2 \right)^{1/2}, \tag{3}$$

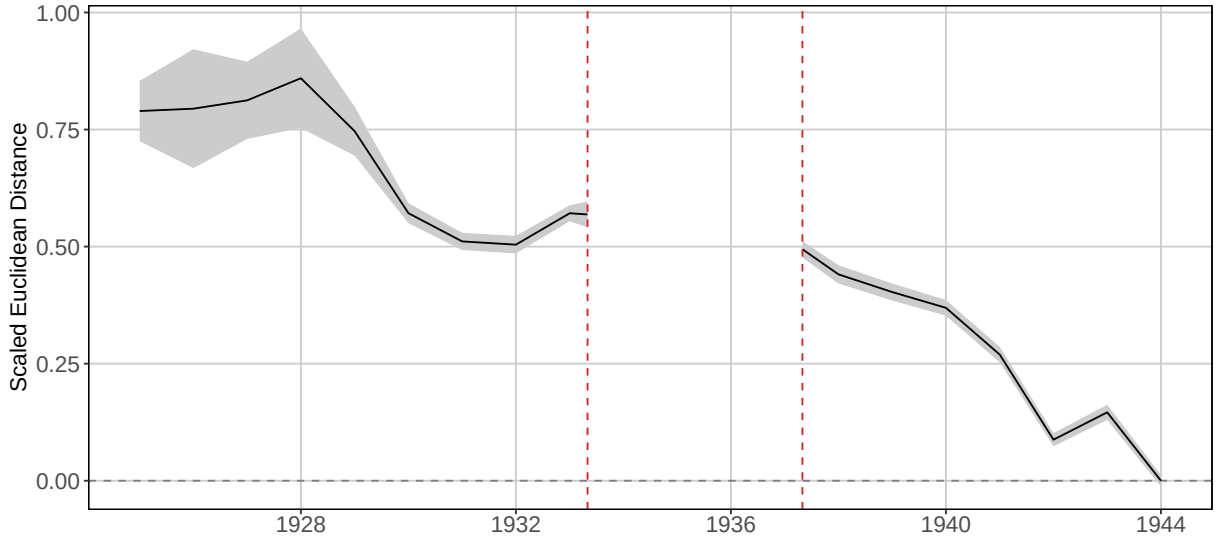
where higher values indicate that entrants differ more from the local population. We divide each gap by the cross-county standard deviation of the benchmark, so that characteristics with different dispersion enter on a common scale. We then average this distance across counties within each period,

$$\bar{D}^g_t = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{C}^g_t|} \sum_{c \in \mathcal{C}^g_t} D^g_{ct}, \tag{4}$$

where $\mathcal{C}^g_t$ is the set of counties with at least 100 entrants into group g in period t.[21] Finally, we

[21] We note that neither the threshold nor sampling error drives the series. Lowering the threshold from 100 entrants

Figure 8: Representativeness Gap of Joiners Over Time



Note. Average distance $\bar{D}_t$ between NSDAP joiners and their county population across eight characteristics (agricultural share, industrial share, trade share, administrative share, worker share, self-employed share, Protestant share, female share), averaged across counties with at least 100 joiners per year and rescaled to $[0, 1]$. Higher values indicate that joiners differ more from the local population. Vertical dashed lines mark May 1, 1933 (admissions ban) and May 1, 1937 (partial reopening of admissions). Shaded area shows 95% confidence intervals.

rescale the resulting series to the unit interval.[22]

New entrants became progressively more representative of their local populations as the party expanded. Figure 8 shows that joiners differed substantially from their county populations in the party's early years, 1925–1928. This divergence declined through the early 1930s, with a temporary increase in 1933 when the NSDAP seized power. After the admissions freeze ended in 1937, divergence fell further and reached its lowest level in the early 1940s. The selection documented in the previous subsection was therefore not constant over the party's history. It was strongest among early entrants and weakened as membership expanded. This pattern is consistent with the NSDAP's transition from a relatively narrow ideological movement to a mass organization.

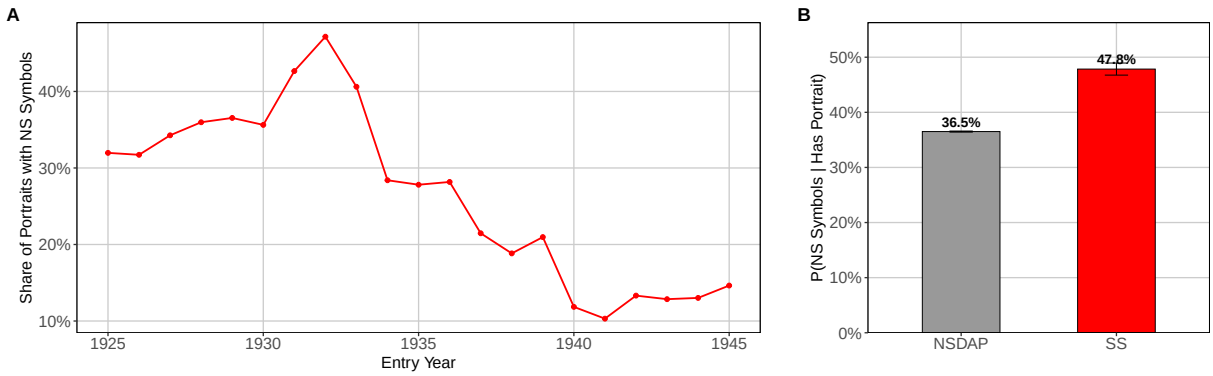
4.6 Fact 6: The SS Selection

The SS displays the same broad pattern as the NSDAP. Within counties, individuals who joined the NSDAP and the SS were less likely to have an agricultural or industrial background and more

to one changes the ratio of the 1940–1944 average to the 1925–1928 average from 0.50 to 0.47, and correcting D_{ct} for sampling error leaves it at 0.50. Almost all of the cumulative decline occurs within counties.

[22]The benchmark is the 1925 county population, held fixed across years. The series therefore measures the gap to a fixed benchmark, and it cannot separate a genuine broadening of recruitment from the convergence that follows mechanically once the party absorbs a large share of the population. Further, more than a third of the decline occurs by 1939, before military mobilization changed the composition of the civilian population.

Figure 9: NS Symbols in Portraits: NSDAP vs. SS



Note. Panel A shows the share of NSDAP membership portraits displaying NS symbols by individual entry year. Each portrait is counted in the year corresponding to its member's entry. Panel B shows the probability of displaying NS symbols conditional on having a portrait, separately for NSDAP and SS members.

likely to work in trade, transport, administration, or services. They were less likely to be blue-collar workers and more likely to be self-employed. They were slightly more likely to be Protestant and less likely to be female.[23]

At the same time, we find that the SS remained strongly selected along other characteristics that cannot be observed through the available censuses: SS members were disproportionately young men born between approximately 1905 and 1912. They were also more highly educated, were more likely to hold university degrees like doctorates, and were disproportionately employed in academic, and legal (see Appendix Figure B.6).[24]

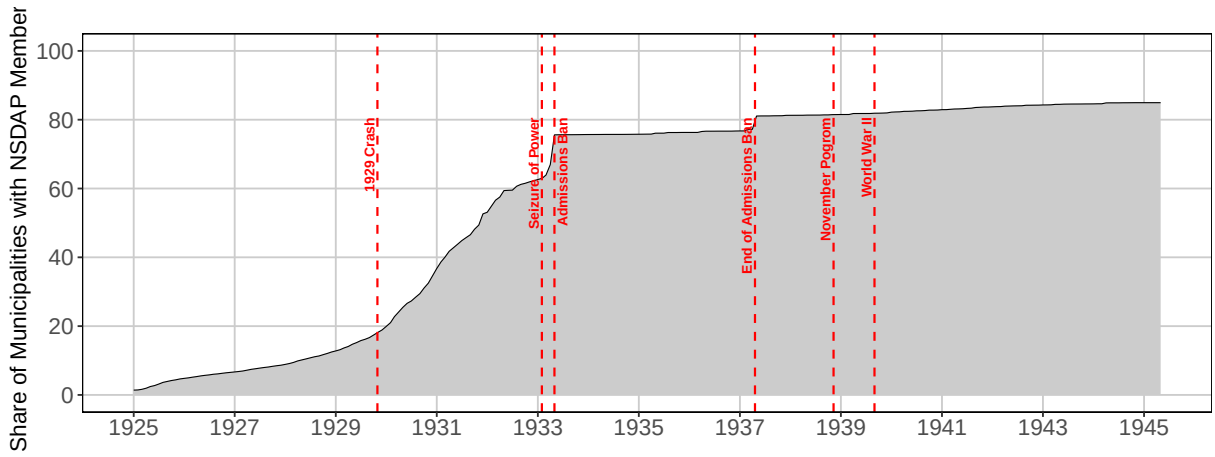
Membership portraits provide an additional, albeit imperfect, proxy of alignment with the Nazi regime. We code all available portraits for the presence of National Socialist insignia. Panel A of Figure 9 shows that, through 1939, roughly 20 to 45% of new NSDAP members with portraits displayed some form of NS insignia. Panel B shows that SS members were about 10 percentage points more likely than other NSDAP members to display such symbols.

These differences are consistent with historical accounts of the SS as a self-conscious elite. Himmler sought to cultivate a "New Aristocracy from Blood and Soil" through selective recruitment and rigorous screening (Longerich, 2012, p. 127). The portrait evidence should nevertheless

[23]The SS also had some female members, who were part of the SS Women's Auxiliary Corps which was established in 1942.

[24]One of our two sources is a promotion gazette, so the identified sample likely over-represents members who advanced within the hierarchy. Education and professional status predict advancement, and these gaps are therefore upper bounds. The birth-cohort concentration is not, since selection on promotion would shift the sample older.

Figure 10: Share of Municipalities with NSDAP Members



Note. Monthly share of municipalities with at least one cumulative NSDAP member from 1925 to 1945. Each data point is the fraction of all municipalities in which at least one membership card records an entry date on or before that month.

be interpreted with some caution: displaying National Socialist insignia could also have served instrumental purposes, including career advancement. Such incentives, however, were plausibly weaker before the NSDAP's seizure of power in 1933.

5 Coordination Dynamics

Section 4 documented two striking features of party membership: sharp variation across municipalities and discontinuous waves of entry over time. We now examine whether these patterns are consistent with local coordination mechanisms driving membership decisions, in the sense that existing party members facilitated subsequent entry. We note that these patterns likely reflect applications and admissions jointly and that we cannot separately identify the two.

5.1 Diffusion

Figure 10 plots the share of municipalities with at least one NSDAP member over time. This share increases steadily until the 1933 membership wave, by which point around 75 percent of municipalities record at least one member. Despite the sharp surge in entry after March 1933, geographic expansion remains limited and by 1939. The mobilization wave was thus concentrated on the intensive margin: new members entered predominantly in municipalities where members were already present.

We test this intensive-margin pattern more formally. Panel A of Figure 11 plots rolling 12-month estimates of ρ from

$$n_{mt} = \alpha_m + \gamma_t + \rho\, n_{m,t-1} + \varepsilon_{mt},$$

where n_{mt} is monthly entry in municipality m. The municipality fixed effects α_m absorb constant cross-municipality differences, and $\hat{\rho}$ captures within-municipality temporal persistence. The coefficient is near zero through the 1920s, spikes sharply around 1929 and 1933, and then falls back. These spikes indicates strong serial correlation in within-municipality entry.

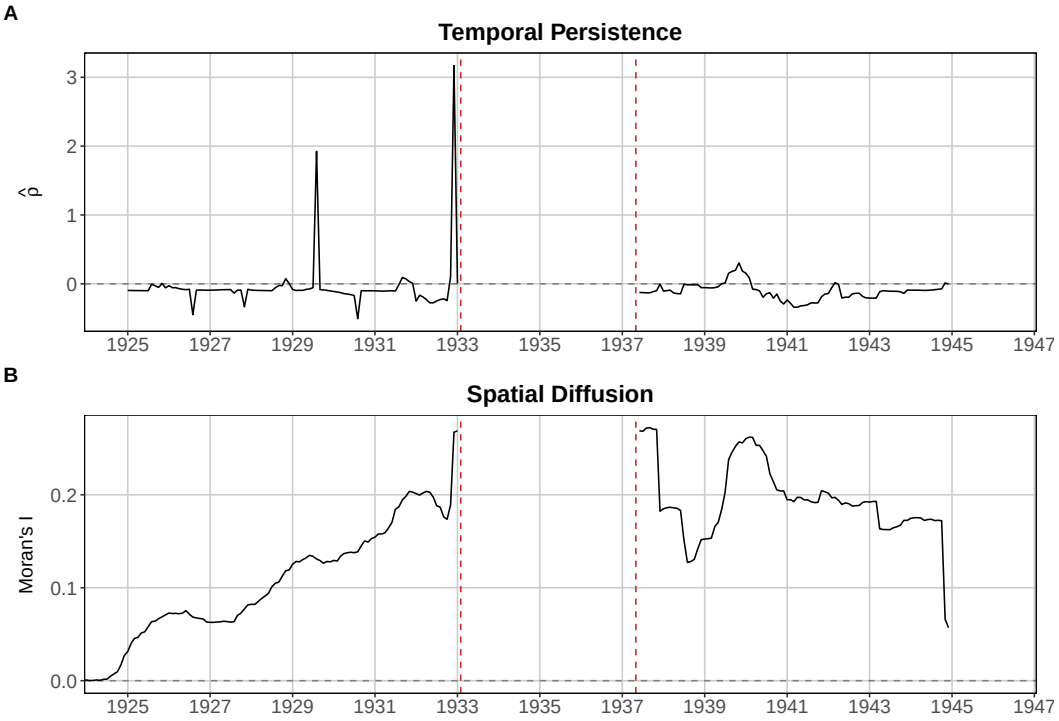
Next, we examine whether entry was also spatially clustered across nearby municipalities. Panel B plots Moran's I, which captures spatial dependence between municipality, for log monthly entry using nearest-neighbor weights. There is a positive spatial autocorrelation, and municipalities with many joiners tend to be near other municipalities with many novel joiners. We find that the correlation rises gradually through the late 1920s and early 1930s and remains elevated after 1937, but remains at modest levels relative to the within municipality dynamics. This indicates that despite the fine-grained heterogeneity, geographically neighboring municipalities still resemble one another more than randomly located municipalities do. This pattern is consistent with the geographically localized recruitment activities described in Section 2, where local branches organized meetings and propaganda events both in their own municipalities and in nearby communities.

The strong temporal correlation at the local level reinforces the intensive-margin interpretation. $\hat{\rho}$ rises sharply around 1933, reflecting explosive within-municipality dynamics in which a single entry is followed by many additional entries in the same municipality in subsequent months. Spatial diffusion, by contrast, remains builds gradually rather than in discrete waves. Persistence also extends across the admissions ban. Among municipalities with entry in both windows, the rank correlation between entry rates before May 1933 and after May 1937 is 0.48 and the fitted slope is 0.57, so mobilization carries across the ban at less than proportional rates (Appendix Figure B.8).

We next ask what happens within a municipality after its first joiner. We define three network cells: *community* (the municipality); *workplace* (the municipality-by-industry-by-occupational-status cell); and *family* (individuals sharing a surname within the same municipality).[25] For each cell c,

[25]These cells are defined ecologically rather than by documented interpersonal ties: shared surnames within a municipality need not indicate kinship, and workers in the same municipality-by-industry-by-occupation-status cell need

Figure 11: Diffusion in Municipal Entry



Note. Panel A reports rolling 12-month estimates of the AR(1) coefficient $\hat{\rho}$ from monthly municipal entry regressions with municipality and month fixed effects. Panel B reports rolling 12-month Moran's I for log municipal entry using 10-nearest-neighbor weights across municipalities. Vertical dashed lines mark the admissions ban from May 1, 1933 to May 1, 1937.

let T_c denote the year of the first joiner and estimate

$$y_{ct} = \alpha_c + \gamma_t + \sum_{k=0}^{K} \beta_k \, \mathbf{1}\{t - T_c = k\} + \varepsilon_{ct}, \tag{5}$$

where y_{ct} is the share of eventual cell joiners who enter in year t. The denominator excludes the first joiner in year T_c, so the coefficients trace the subsequent wave net of the triggering event. Because the outcome is mechanically zero before the first joiner, pre-event periods are shown empty and period -1 serves as the reference period. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Figure 12 reports the results. In all three types of networks, the share of eventual joiners entering in a given post-event year is positive immediately after the first cell joiner and peaks within the first five years. Entry rates decline gradually afterward as the pool of remaining joiners shrinks. Once entry begins in a cell, further entry arrives in a sustained wave.

The evidence presented here is descriptive. It does not identify a peer effect in the broader

not share a physical workplace. Our estimates therefore may reflect more than interpersonal networks alone, and we interpret them accordingly. At the same time, the median municipality has only a few hundred inhabitants; thus, in most municipalities, we believe this measure carries a meaningful signal of interpersonal network exposure.

population, nor does it distinguish propagation from saturation, common local shocks, latent local demand, or other sources of correlated entry. To examine saturation more directly, Appendix Figure B.9 traces the share of eventual joiners already in the party against subsequent entry growth; growth is initially steep and then flattens, consistent with depletion of the pool of eventual joiners. Appendix Figure B.7 shows a related pattern: municipalities with higher cumulative membership through 1932 also exhibit higher joining rates in 1933–1939. Together, the temporal persistence in Panel A of Figure 11 and the post-entry pattern in Figure 12 document pronounced temporal clustering of entry within municipalities. These patterns are consistent with local self-reinforcement, but the descriptive designs do not distinguish that mechanism from common shocks, latent local demand, administrative batching, or depletion of a fixed pool. They are also consistent with recent quantitative case studies of local entry dynamics (Caprettini et al., 2026).

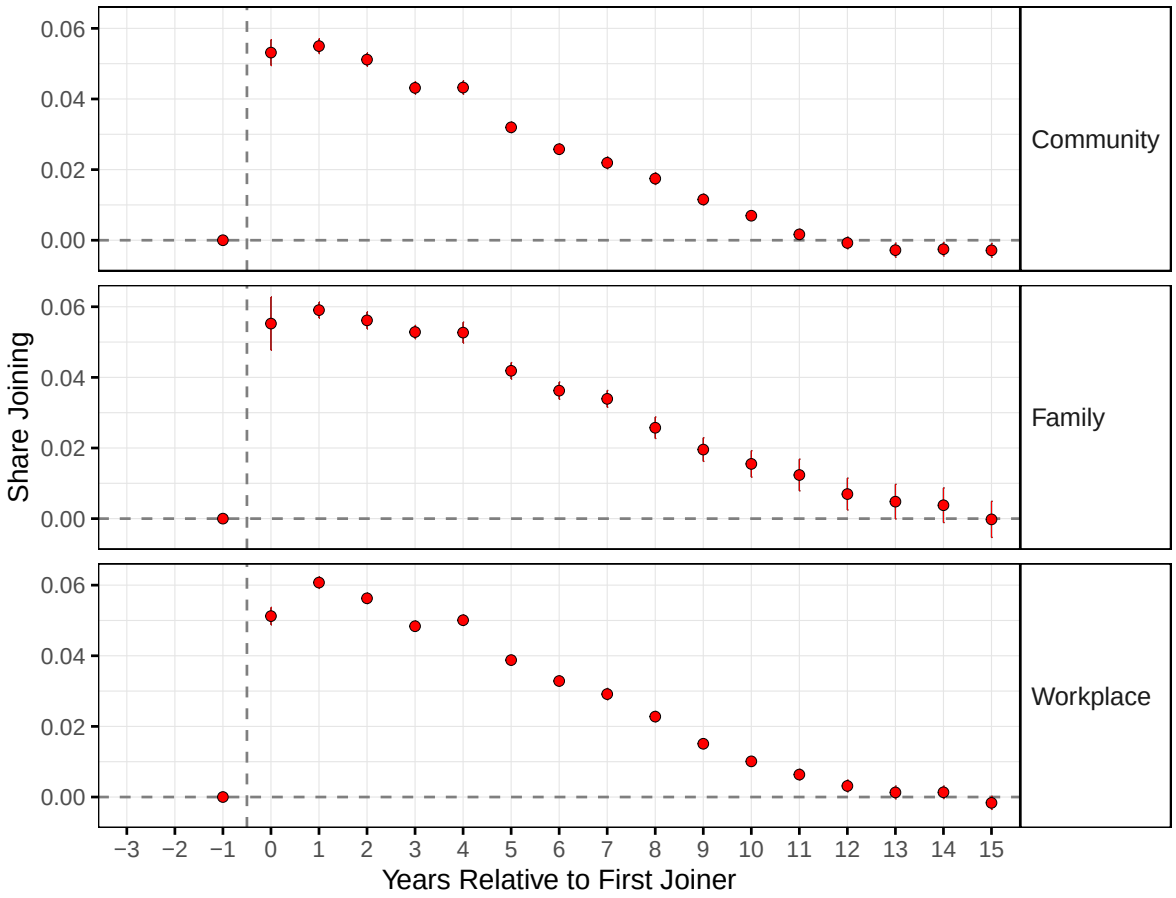
To examine whether an earlier NSDAP presence is associated with a different subsequent membership trajectory, we compare municipalities whose first joiner arrived before 1929 with municipalities that had no pre-1929 joiner. We match municipalities one-to-one within county on pre-determined characteristics. Appendix Table B.3 reports balance on these characteristics.[26] Results are shown in Figure 13. For each matched pair, we align the control municipality to the entry date of the treated municipality's first joiner, so that event time refers to the same calendar period in both municipalities. Ten years after the first joiner, cumulative entry is roughly four times higher per 1,000 residents in early-joiner municipalities as in matched controls. Thus, municipalities with an early NSDAP presence maintained a substantial membership advantage over otherwise similar municipalities throughout the following decade.

5.2 Cascade

A central fact from our analysis is that entry into the NSDAP accelerated discontinuously in March 1933. Recorded entry reflects applications and admissions jointly: the party rationed admission (Section 2.2), and recruitment ran through local branches and personal networks (Section 2). We therefore ask how the March 1933 acceleration varied with pre-determined characteristics of the municipal party base. We construct a municipality-by-month panel covering January 1932

[26] We match on a Lasso propensity score and keep a pair only when the two scores differ by no more than 0.05, which leaves 6,220 pairs.

Figure 12: Cascade Dynamics



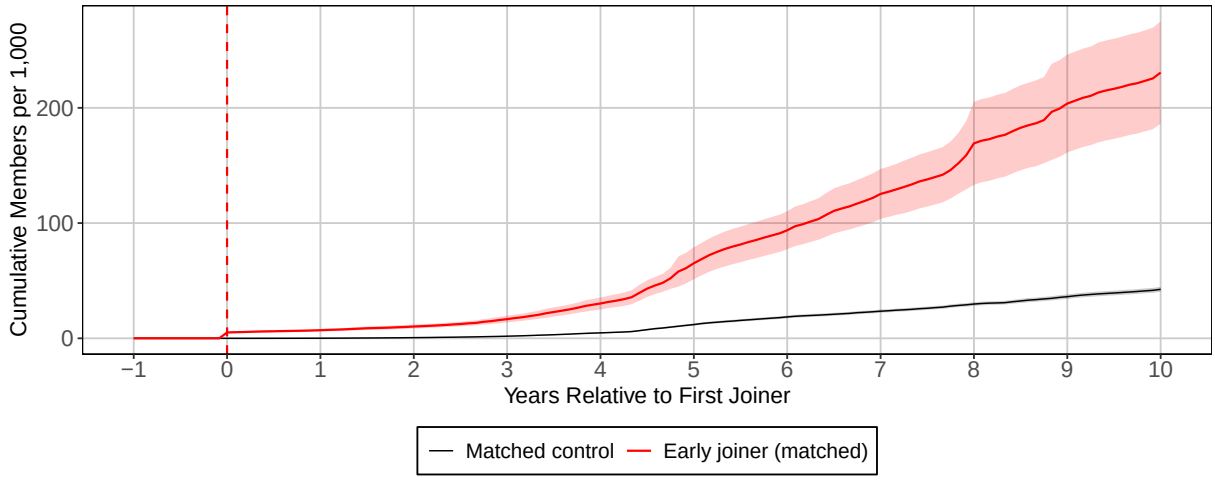
Note. Descriptive event studies at the network-cell level. The outcome is the share of eventual cell joiners who enter in year t, with the first joiner removed from the denominator. *Community*: municipality. *Family*: individuals sharing a surname within the same municipality, restricted to cells with at least five eventual joiners. *Workplace*: municipality-by-industry-by-occupational-status cell, restricted to cells with at least five eventual joiners. Event time is defined relative to the first cell joiner. Pre-event periods are mechanically zero and shown empty; period -1 is the reference. Post-period coefficients are estimated with cell and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

through June 1934 and estimate

$$\text{NSDAP share}_{mt} = \alpha_m + \gamma_t + \beta\,(\text{Post}_t \times Z_m) + \delta\,(\text{Post}_t \times \text{Any}_m) + \varepsilon_{mt}, \tag{6}$$

where Post_t turns on in March 1933, Z_m is a municipal characteristic computed from members who joined before March 1933, and Any_m indicates the presence of any pre-March NSDAP member. We include $\text{Post}_t \times \text{Any}_m$ to estimate the coefficient net of pure party presence. Municipality and month fixed effects absorb local levels and the national trajectory; standard errors cluster by county. A causal interpretation of β would require Z_m to be uncorrelated with other drivers of post-March growth conditional on pre-March presence; this assumption is strong and we interpret

Figure 13: Cumulative Membership Around the First Joiner



Note. Cumulative NSDAP members per 1,000 residents around the arrival of the first joiner (dashed line, year 0). Early-joiner municipalities (first joiner before 1929) are matched one-to-one within county to municipalities without a pre-1929 joiner, on a Lasso propensity score estimated from pre-determined municipal and district characteristics. Each matched control is plotted on the calendar clock of its treated partner, so both series average over the same months. Bands around each series are 95% confidence intervals from standard errors clustered at the county level.

β as a descriptive association. We consider three cuts of Z_m: local notables (Table 1), demographic and industrial composition (Appendix Table B.4), and the presence of the party's own paramilitary organizations (Table 2). The final column of the notables and composition tables enters all traits jointly.

We find three results that point to both supply- and demand-side mechanisms. First, the post-March 1933 surge in entry is largest in municipalities whose pre-March base was disproportionately female (Appendix Table B.4). Compositionally, the wave accelerated where the pre-existing NSDAP base was more agricultural and tilted toward civic-administrative occupations, not toward industry or the working class. Second, among local notables, we find the strongest differences for teachers, a group disproportionately targeted by Nazi propaganda (Kater, 1983; Falter, 2020; Voigtländer and Voth, 2015) and central to the dissemination of local norms. Historically, education played an important role in fostering compliance (Paglayan, 2022) and shaping ideological preferences (Alesina et al., 2021; Cantoni et al., 2017). Beyond teachers, local individuals holding doctorates and policemen retain a positive partial association in the joint specification. Third, a pre-March 1933 SS and SA presence is associated with a substantial additional post-March increase over and above bare party presence (see Table 2). These associations are consistent with

Table 1: March 1933 Wave: Pre-March Local Notables

	Teacher	Doctor	Policem.	Pastor	Indust.	Estate	
	NSDAP membership share						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Post March 1933 x Any NSDAP Member	0.0148***	0.0157***	0.0165***	0.0164***	0.0166***	0.0166***	0.0143***
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Teacher	0.0078***						0.0058***
	(0.0003)						(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Doctor		0.0094***					0.0058***
		(0.0004)					(0.0004)
Post March 1933 x Policeman			0.0095***				0.0024***
			(0.0006)				(0.0006)
Post March 1933 x Pastor				0.0094***			0.0035***
				(0.0005)			(0.0006)
Post March 1933 x Industrialist					0.0090***		0.0014*
					(0.0007)		(0.0007)
Post March 1933 x Estate owner						0.0068***	0.0016**
						(0.0007)	(0.0007)
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Month FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean Outcome	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247
Observations	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210
R^2	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89

Note. Municipality-by-month panel, January 1932–June 1934. Dependent variable: municipal NSDAP membership share. EColumns 1–6 interact Post March 1933_t with a binary indicator equal to one if municipality m had at least one member of the indicated profession who joined before March 1933, controlling for Post × Any NSDAP Member. Professions are classified from standardized occupation strings in the membership records; Doctor includes members with a doctorate or an *Arzt* title excluding veterinarians and dentists. Column 7 enters all six interactions jointly. Municipality and month fixed effects included. Standard errors clustered at the county level in parentheses. Significance: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

an active coordination role for militant cadres and also with unobserved local characteristics generating both early SS recruits and a larger mass entry.

6 Consequences

The coordination dynamics documented above help explain how local NSDAP presence emerged and expanded. We now turn to whether this variation mattered beyond party growth itself, by examining its association with the persecution of Germany's Jewish population.

Using a municipality-by-year panel from 1930 to 1945, we examine two outcomes: deportations and emigration. Annual counts of deportees and emigrants are drawn from the individual-level event records from the List of Jewish Residents in Germany 1933-1945, 1939 German Minority Census and the German Federal Archives' memorial book. We assign each victim to a municipality

Table 2: March 1933 Wave: Pre-March Paramilitary Presence

	NSDAP membership share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post March 1933 x Any NSDAP Member	0.0155***	0.0161***	0.0151***	0.0149***
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Post March 1933 x SA	0.0093***		0.0080***	0.0087***
	(0.0004)		(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Post March 1933 x SS		0.0086***	0.0059***	0.0062***
		(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Month FE	✓	✓	✓	
County x Month FE				✓
Mean Outcome	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247
Observations	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,945,350
R^2	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89

Note. Municipality-by-month panel, January 1932–June 1934. Dependent variable: municipal NSDAP membership share. Column 1 interacts Post March 1933_t with a binary indicator for whether municipality m had at least one SA member who joined before March 1933; column 2 does the same for the SS; column 3 enters both indicators jointly. All columns control for Post × Any NSDAP Member. SA and SS indicators are constructed from the organizational affiliations recorded on the membership cards, introduced in Section 3.1. Municipality and month fixed effects included; column 4 replaces the month fixed effects with county-by-month fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the county level in parentheses. Significance: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

using their last recorded German residence.[27]

The estimating equation is

$$\text{asinh}(Y_{mt}) \;=\; \alpha_m + \gamma_t + \beta \;\text{asinh}\left(\frac{\text{NSDAP}_{mt}}{\text{pop}_m}\right) + X'_{mt}\psi + \varepsilon_{mt}, \tag{7}$$

where Y_{mt} is the deportation or emigration count of Jews in municipality m and year t, NSDAP_{mt} is the stock of active members as of year-end. We use an inverse hyperbolic sine transformation for Y_{mt} and NSDAP_{mt}. α_m and γ_t are municipality and year fixed effects, and X_{mt} includes log population, the 1933 Jewish population share[28], and an urban indicator. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Table 3 reports the results. Columns (1)–(3) examine deportations, columns (4)–(6) emigration. Column (1) and (4) include year fixed effects only. Column (2) and (5) add county fixed effects,

[27]The memorial book records the last German residence. Thus, residents driven from small towns before deportation may be counted at their metropolitan address; if persecution pushed residents out of municipalities with a strong party presence, this attenuates the estimate. We note that we also observe the deportation history for most individuals.

[28]We fix the Jewish population share at its 1933 level, since subsequent declines partly reflect the deportations we seek to explain. This control therefore matters only in specifications without municipality fixed effects.

log population, the 1933 Jewish population share, and an urban indicator. Column (3) and (6) replace these with municipality and year fixed effects, so that identification comes from within-municipality variation in NSDAP membership over time.

Table 3: Consequences of NSDAP Strength

	Deportations			Emigration		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
NSDAP Membership Share	0.010***	0.010***	0.012***	0.003***	0.004***	0.003***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County FE		✓			✓	
Municipality FE			✓			✓
Mean Outcome	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.003	0.003	0.003
Observations	1,543,773	1,543,773	1,543,773	1,543,773	1,543,773	1,543,773
R^2	0.01	0.06	0.17	0.00	0.10	0.29

Note. Municipality-by-year panel, 1930–1945. Dependent variable: asinh(deportation count) in columns (1)–(3), asinh(emigration count) in columns (4)–(6). Regressor: asinh(NSDAP membership share). Fixed effects as indicated: year in all columns, county in columns (2) and (5), municipality in columns (3) and (6). Controls where indicated: log population, Jewish population share (1933 baseline), urban indicator. Standard errors clustered at the county level. Significance: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Across all specifications, municipalities with higher NSDAP membership shares exhibit higher levels of deportation in the same year. The estimated association is positive and statistically significant in every specification, including the model with municipality and year fixed effects. Historical accounts suggest several mechanisms linking local party strength to persecution. Local NSDAP chapters implemented anti-Jewish measures, collected denunciations, and organized the surveillance and registration of Jewish residents and businesses. Much of this information was gathered through local NSDAP cell and block leaders, whose local knowledge provided the party and security apparatus with detailed information on Jewish residents (Gellately, 2001, p. 133)(Reibel, 2002, pp. 136–137, 324–326). Importantly, the local NSDAP did not itself organize or execute the deportations, which were carried out by the security apparatus in cooperation with the SA and SS. Its local organizational network nevertheless facilitated persecution by supplying information and administrative capacity that helped identify, monitor, and locate Jewish residents.

NSDAP membership is also positively associated with Jewish emigration, consistent with the idea that stronger local party presence contributed to an environment in which Jewish residents were more likely to leave before deportations began.

We interpret these results as suggestive evidence that our membership data capture meaningful variation in local party presence that is predictive of regime violence. However, unobserved local ideology or institutional capacity could drive both NSDAP membership and persecution. The identifying assumption underlying column (3) and (6) is that, conditional on municipality and year fixed effects, changes in NSDAP membership are uncorrelated with other determinants of deportations. This assumption would be violated if, for example, local antisemitic sentiment simultaneously drove party growth and deportation intensity within the same municipality over time.

7 Conclusion

Interest in the rise of fascism is inseparable from the question of whether it could happen again. The literature has approached this question through different notions of 'ordinariness.' One tradition asks whether Nazis were a distinctive subpopulation, selected on ideology or observable characteristics (Goldhagen, 1996; Kater, 1983; Falter, 1991). Another asks whether people who were otherwise ordinary could be drawn into participation and perpetration through authority, conformity, and social context (Arendt, 1963; Browning, 1992). The first question directs attention to population composition. The second directs attention to the circumstances under which behavior changes.

We bring new evidence to this debate by digitizing the near-universe of NSDAP membership records. Our composition results show both the value and the limit of representative comparisons. Early joiners were disproportionately middle class and overwhelmingly male. After each wave of mass entry, new members more closely resembled the census population of their counties, with the smallest composition gap in the early 1940s. The SS did not converge in the same way. Its members remained younger, more educated, more concentrated in professional occupations, and more likely to exhibit National Socialist insignia. The Nazi movement therefore combined a broadening mass membership with more selective recruitment into a committed organizational core. These comparisons do not establish whether a given member would have made the same choice under different conditions.

Ordinariness, however, is also a claim about a counterfactual. The relevant question is whether

there was a state of the world–with somewhat different local conditions or different choices by others–in which the same person would not have joined. When entry depends on the behavior of others, similar places need not converge to a common participation rate. Small differences in initial conditions can instead produce sharply different outcomes (Schelling, 1971; Granovetter, 1978).

The geographic and temporal structure of membership is consistent with this form of contingency. We find evidence for excess variance across space and time. A quarter of municipalities did not record a member, while approximately 90 percent of the variation in municipal membership shares occurred within counties. Entry came in discontinuous waves rather than along a smooth trend, and initially similar municipalities diverged after the appearance of early joiners. An account based only on fixed individual or local characteristics would require those characteristics to vary sharply within counties, cluster at a very fine geographic level, and become behaviorally relevant in non-linear ways. Our descriptive evidence points to contingency and social interaction as central objects of explanation.

The broader implication is that mass radicalization need not require a population of ideological extremists. Under political uncertainty, participation in an extremist movement can spread through ordinary social environments and become self-reinforcing. This is the sense in which the NSDAP's rise was ordinary: not because its members were ideologically neutral, morally innocent, or prima facie representative of the German population, but because participation seemed contingent on circumstances that could have led similar people and places toward different outcomes. Ordinariness, in this sense, describes the formation of a mass movement rather than the character of those who joined it.

The records we gather are among the richest individual-level archives of any political movement in history. They expand the study of the rise of fascism to quantitative analysis at the level of individual decisions. More broadly, they make the formation of mass political movements a tractable empirical object that can be studied decision by decision, across people, places, and time, rather than inferred from aggregate political outcomes. This opens a wide research agenda on how movements form, whom they attract, how participation spreads, and how they translate into political change. The records also create opportunities to study denazification, the effects of party membership on wealth and careers over the long-run, and the interaction of bottom-up social forces with top-down political organization.

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Appendices – For Online Publication

A Data

A.1 Main Data

The NSDAP membership card files are held by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as Record Group 242 (National Archives and Records Administration, 2026). The collection comprises two complementary card indexes (*Karteien*):

1. **Zentralkartei** (Series A3340-MFKL). The central membership file maintained by the NSDAP's national membership office (*Reichskartei*) in Munich. It contains 9,539,039 digitized microfilm images organized into letter groups A through T, with partial losses within Fa–G and Ka–O; letters U–Z are not present in this series.
2. **Ortsgruppenkartei** (Series A3340-MFOK). The local group membership file, organized by *Ortsgruppe*. It contains 6,723,785 digitized images across all 26 letter groups (A–Z).

Together, the two series comprise 16,271,153 digitized microfilm images across 5,443 microfilm rolls. Each card records a member's name, birth date, occupation, membership number, and organizational affiliation. Within each letter group, images are arranged on microfilm rolls (75–188 rolls per letter, approximately 2,500–3,500 pages per roll) in uncompressed TIFF format. The images can include blank frames, microfilm headers, or administrative sheets.

We supplement the main card files with the earliest surviving register of party members, held by the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, 1920). The register includes very early members, including Adolf Hitler, who are not covered by the NARA registries.

A.1.1 Extraction Pipeline

We extract structured data from each card image using Google's Gemini vision-language model (`gemini-3.1-flash-lite-preview`) via the Generative Language API. The pipeline operates in two stages. In the first stage, each TIFF image is downloaded from NARA's S3 storage, converted to RGB JPEG (quality 90) in memory, and uploaded to a Google Cloud Storage bucket. This conversion reduces per-image size from approximately 11 MB to 1.7 MB while retaining sufficient resolution for handwriting recognition. The conversion and upload run on Google Compute Engine virtual machines, processing disjoint letter groups in parallel.

In the second stage, each JPEG is submitted to the Gemini API with the extraction prompt shown in Listing 1. The API returns structured JSON conforming to a fixed schema (Listing 2). Concurrent requests are managed by an asynchronous pipeline that logs all extractions for reproducibility. The prompt (Listing 1) instructs the model to transcribe all visible text, preserve original German spelling, and annotate illegible or struck-through entries. Disambiguation rules separate the occupation field (*Beruf/Stand*) from marital status (*Familienstand*).

A.1.2 Variables Extracted

Table A.1 describes the fields extracted from each card image. Fill rates are conditional on the page containing an identifiable membership record (non-blank scans).

Listing 1: Extraction prompt submitted with each card image.

```
Source: 1925-1945 NSDAP membership card (Mitgliedskarte).
Script: typeset and handwritten (Suetterlin/Kurrent), sometimes Fraktur.

First parse all visible text on the card. Then fill JSON fields from the
parsed text only. Do not infer missing values. Use empty string for
absent fields. Mark illegible text as [unclear: best guess]. Wrap
struck-through text in [crossed-out: text]. If multiple cards for
different persons on one scan, return one object per person. Layout
varies, some cards are just continuation pages with little information,
most have no portraits.

Format dates dd.mm.yyyy. If only year visible, use yyyy. If month+year,
use mm.yyyy.
beruf_stand: Do NOT confuse with Familienstand.
geborene: always a surname, never an occupation.
```

Listing 2: JSON response schema (field names and types).

```
page_id              string   Unique identifier
nachname             string   Surname
vorname              string   Given name(s)
title_honorific      string   e.g. Dr., Prof., Ing., Dipl.
beruf_stand          string   Occupation (Beruf/Stand)
geborene             string   Maiden name
verehelichte         string   Married name
geb_datum            string   Date of birth (dd.mm.yyyy)
geb_ort              string   Place of birth
nsdap_mitgl_nr       string   Membership number (4-8 digits)
aufn_eingetr_eintritt string  Admission/entry date (dd.mm.yyyy)
aufn_beantragt       string   Admission requested (dd.mm.yyyy)
wiederaufn_beantragt string   Re-admission requested (dd.mm.yyyy)
wiederaufn_genehmigt string   Re-admission approved (dd.mm.yyyy)
austritt             string   Exit date (dd.mm.yyyy)
geloescht            string   Membership deleted (dd.mm.yyyy)
ausschluss           string   Expulsion (dd.mm.yyyy)
aufgehoben           string   Expulsion annulled (dd.mm.yyyy)
gestrichen_wegen     string   Reason for deletion
zurueckgenommen      string   Retracted (dd.mm.yyyy)
abgang_von_wehrmacht string   Departure to Wehrmacht (dd.mm.yyyy)
zugang_von_wehrmacht string   Return from Wehrmacht (dd.mm.yyyy)
gestorben            string   Death date (dd.mm.yyyy)
wohnort              string   Place of residence
strasse              string   Street
hausnummer           integer  House number
ortsgr               string   Local group (Ortsgruppe)
gau                  string   Regional district (Gau)
wohnung_weitere      array    Further addresses [{wohnort, strasse,
                              hausnummer, ortsgr, gau, date}]
move_to              string   New location after moving
move_date            string   Move date (dd.mm.yyyy)
bemerkungen          string   All text not fitting another field
dienststelle         string   Office/post
membership_other_ns  string   e.g. SS, SA, NSV, HJ
verwarnung           string   e.g. Verwarnung, Schwarze Liste, OPG
family_status        string   ledig, verheiratet, verwitwet, geschieden
family_status_children integer 1 if children noted
handwritten          integer  1 if card is handwritten
portrait             string   Semicolon-delimited descriptors
vormerkkarte         integer  1 if preliminary card
not_legible          integer  1 if card is not legible
```

Table A.1: Variables Extracted from NSDAP Membership Cards.

Field	Type	Description	Fill (%)
page_id	ID	Unique NARA identifier (e.g., A0004-02870)	100.0
name	Text	Surname (*Familienname*)	100.0
vorname	Text	Given name(s) (*Vorname*)	93.6
geborene	Text	Maiden name, married women only	3.9
geb_datum	Date	Date of birth	92.4
geb_ort	Text	Place of birth	86.8
stand	Text	Occupation (*Beruf/Stand*)	86.3
mitgl_nr	Number	NSDAP membership number	92.4
aufnahme_datum	Date	Date of admission/entry to the NSDAP	89.5
aufnahme_beantragt	Date	Date admission was requested	45.5
wiederaufnahme	Date	Re-admission request or grant	2.1
austritt	Date/Text	Exit from the party	2.9
geloescht	Date/Text	Membership deleted	0.1
ausschluss	Date/Text	Expulsion	0.3
aufgehoben	Date/Text	Expulsion annulled	0.1
gestrichen_wegen	Text	Reason for deletion	1.5
zurueckgenommen	Date/Text	Membership retracted	0.2
abgang_wehrmacht	Date/Text	Departure to Wehrmacht	<0.1
zugang_von	Text	Transfer from Wehrmacht	<0.1
dienststelle	Text	NS duty station (*Dienststelle*)	0.8
gestorben	Date/Text	Death recorded on card	0.9
bemerkungen	Text	Unstructured remarks field	40.1
wohnung	Text	Address (*Wohnung*)	88.6
ortsgr	Text	Local group (*Ortsgruppe*)	82.9
gau	Text	Regional district (*Gau*)	81.9
wohnung_weitere	Text	Additional addresses, semicolon-delimited	23.0
card_type	Category	Card format: “small” or “large”	100.0

Note. Fill rates are shares of cards with a non-empty value in each field, computed over all parsed cards with a non-empty surname. Administrative fields (e.g., exit, expulsion, death) can have low fill rates because most members did not experience these events during the observation period.

Table A.2: Summary Statistics

	N	Mean	SD	P25	Median	P75
Panel A: Individual						
Female	10,506,417	0.130	0.336	0.000	0.000	0.000
Protestant Prob.	10,506,417	0.655	0.336	0.441	0.782	0.945
Urban	10,506,417	0.495	0.500	0.000	0.000	1.000
East of Elbe	10,506,417	0.320	0.466	0.000	0.000	1.000
PhD	10,506,417	0.012	0.107	0.000	0.000	0.000
Nobility	10,506,417	0.007	0.083	0.000	0.000	0.000
SS Members	10,506,417	0.005	0.073	0.000	0.000	0.000
SA Members	10,506,417	0.015	0.123	0.000	0.000	0.000
Age at Entry	9,255,433	33.198	12.243	23.000	32.000	41.000
Pre-1933 Joiner	9,434,594	0.177	0.382	0.000	0.000	0.000
Blue-Collar	6,590,558	0.394	0.489	0.000	0.000	1.000
White Collar	6,590,558	0.298	0.457	0.000	0.000	1.000
Self-Employed	6,590,558	0.300	0.458	0.000	0.000	1.000
Agriculture	6,588,779	0.132	0.339	0.000	0.000	0.000
Industry	6,588,779	0.413	0.492	0.000	0.000	1.000
Trade	6,588,779	0.279	0.448	0.000	0.000	1.000
Administration	6,588,779	0.138	0.345	0.000	0.000	0.000
Panel B: Municipal Data (1933)						
NSDAP Share	73,513	0.030	0.038	0.000	0.017	0.043
SS Share	73,513	0.000	0.007	0.000	0.000	0.000
Population	73,513	848.740	11037.806	117.000	250.000	522.000
Jewish Population Share	73,513	0.003	0.038	0.000	0.000	0.000
Protestant	73,513	0.694	0.348	0.633	0.897	0.958
Protestant Prob. (NSDAP)	73,513	0.695	0.349	0.596	0.886	0.963
Female	73,513	0.507	0.009	0.501	0.506	0.517
Female Share (NSDAP)	73,513	0.057	0.133	0.000	0.000	0.067
Agriculture (Census)	63,717	0.579	0.168	0.469	0.607	0.704
Industry (Census)	63,717	0.268	0.147	0.155	0.225	0.355
Trade (Census)	63,717	0.079	0.035	0.057	0.072	0.093
Administration (Census)	63,717	0.025	0.011	0.019	0.022	0.027
Blue-Collar (Census)	63,717	0.423	0.120	0.342	0.423	0.513
Self-Employed (Census)	63,717	0.193	0.043	0.162	0.189	0.222
Agriculture (NSDAP)	73,513	0.143	0.212	0.000	0.049	0.221
Industry (NSDAP)	73,513	0.254	0.262	0.000	0.250	0.407
Trade (NSDAP)	73,513	0.091	0.156	0.000	0.000	0.143
Administration (NSDAP)	73,513	0.085	0.153	0.000	0.000	0.125
Urban	73,513	0.048	0.215	0.000	0.000	0.000
East of Elbe	73,513	0.629	0.483	0.000	1.000	1.000
Synagogue Presence	73,513	0.014	0.119	0.000	0.000	0.000
Unemployment Rate	61,277	0.112	0.061	0.065	0.098	0.148
Hyperinflation Exposure	73,513	26.106	0.185	26.029	26.090	26.156
Banking Crisis (Unemp. Change)	73,513	0.048	0.023	0.030	0.048	0.065
Panel C: County Data (1933)						
NSDAP Share	992	0.044	0.087	0.029	0.038	0.048
SS Share	992	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
Population	992	62896.583	100198.282	26935.500	42354.000	65746.500
Jewish Population Share	992	0.004	0.006	0.000	0.002	0.005
Protestant	927	0.613	0.372	0.183	0.809	0.939
Protestant Prob. (NSDAP)	991	0.627	0.339	0.269	0.771	0.920
Female	870	0.506	0.012	0.500	0.506	0.513
Female Share (NSDAP)	992	0.075	0.035	0.047	0.067	0.104
Agriculture (Census)	909	0.540	0.191	0.435	0.576	0.681
Industry (Census)	909	0.295	0.154	0.178	0.261	0.392
Trade (Census)	909	0.087	0.049	0.057	0.076	0.101
Administration (Census)	909	0.027	0.016	0.019	0.024	0.029
Blue-Collar	909	0.405	0.127	0.310	0.401	0.499
Self-Employed	909	0.200	0.047	0.168	0.199	0.237
Agriculture (NSDAP)	992	0.131	0.076	0.087	0.122	0.164
Industry (NSDAP)	992	0.334	0.053	0.307	0.336	0.364
Trade (NSDAP)	992	0.161	0.043	0.136	0.155	0.180
Administration (NSDAP)	992	0.115	0.020	0.105	0.115	0.125

Note. Panel A reports individual-level characteristics of NSDAP members. Panels B and C report municipality- and county-level data for 1933 unless noted otherwise. Variables labeled "(NSDAP)" are computed from individual membership records aggregated to the respective geographic level. "(Census)" variables are employment shares from the 1925 *Berufszählung*. Protestant is the census Protestant share; Protestant Prob. is the individual-level Bayesian name-based Protestant probability, and Protestant Prob. (NSDAP) its mean across members (Appendix A.4). Hyperinflation Exposure is cumulative log local inflation over 1920–1924, and Banking Crisis (Unemp. Change) the change in city unemployment during 1931 (Appendix A.5.2).

A.1.3 Extraction Challenges

Three features of the source material introduce measurement error.

Handwriting and layout. Thousands of local officials completed cards by hand between 1925 and 1945, producing wide variation in legibility. The model marks text it cannot decipher as `[unclear]`; approximately 2–5% of fields per card contain this annotation. Two card formats appear in the collection: *small cards* (index-card sized, single page) and *large cards* (A5, two to three consecutive microfilm pages).

Field disambiguation. The occupation field (*Beruf*) appears in varying positions across card formats. Dates appear in inconsistent formats and require standardization. Membership numbers occasionally include thousand separators or textual prefixes.

Duplicates. Members may appear on multiple cards within and across the *Zentralkartei* and *Ortsgruppenkartei*.

The above extraction challenges may introduce measurement error that might not be classical (Carlson and Dell, 2025). If legibility correlates with card age, region, or member prominence, estimates may exhibit bias. We address this by (i) validating key variables against external sources (see Appendix A.2), and (ii) observing the quality of extraction by whether cards were machine-printed cards and using the `[unclear]` annotations to flag uncertain fields.

A.1.4 Post-Processing

The raw extraction output undergoes several post-processing steps.

(i) *Multi-page linking.* Continuation pages inherit the name and membership number from the most recent preceding front page within the same roll.

(ii) *Date standardization.* Dates are converted to ISO 8601 format, with regime-period dates validated to fall within 1925–1945 and birth dates within 1840–1930.

(iii) *Membership number normalization.* Thousand separators and textual prefixes are stripped.

(iv) *Abbreviation expansion.* Abbreviated location fields are matched to full names elsewhere on the same card.

(v) *Bemerkungen parsing.* Structured information (e.g., expulsions) is extracted from the unstructured remarks field via pattern matching.

(vi) *Deduplication.* The party kept two card files, a central alphabetical index and an index ordered by local branch, so members can appear on two cards. We merge cards into persons using three identifiers: membership number, name, and birth date. Two cards merge when they agree on two of the three. Agreement tolerates one misread digit or letter, and two where a further piece of evidence backs the pair: a matching place of residence, place of birth, or local group, or a filing position a few pages apart, where duplicate cards of one member sit. Cards that disagree on both name and birth date never merge, whatever the number says, because a misread number usually lands on the number of another member. A pair refused on these grounds stays split even where other cards would chain the two together.
Any linkage of scanned cards trades off two errors. Merge too little, and one member remains two records. Merge too much, and two members become one invented person. The two errors do not weigh equally: a duplicate inflates the record count in a way we can bound, while an invented person enters the data as fact and cannot be detected later. We set the rules using over 1,000 card pairs that we labeled one by one; the same pairs guided the

choice of rules, so the rates below are in-sample checks rather than out-of-sample error rates. At the chosen rules, the linkage makes no false merge among the labeled pairs of distinct people, and misses 10 percent of labeled duplicates. Loosening the rules further would start merging pairs our labels show to be different people, mostly siblings admitted together and namesakes born on the same day. The linkage stops where removing more duplicates would begin inventing people.

After deduplication, the file holds 10.5 million person records, which overstates distinct members. Membership numbers indicate the size of the overstatement. The party issued each number once and never reassigned it, and a member who left and later re-entered ordinarily received a new number, so the number series counts membership spells rather than people. The density of recorded numbers falls away above 10.174 million, the largest number in the sample that Falter (2020) drew from the card files. We read this frontier as the top of the issued series and treat the few scattered numbers above it as misread digits, though we cannot rule out that some offices recorded numbers in other forms. Under this reading our data hold at least a few hundred thousand more records than the party issued numbers, and the overstatement of members is likely larger still: re-entrants hold two numbers, and the two card files survive incompletely, so the members present in the surviving cards number below the ceiling. The number of members behind our records therefore likely lies between 9 and 10 million. The excess records remain by design. Most belong to members whose two cards disagree on several identifiers at once: for these pairs the surviving fields cannot tell one member filed twice from two members, and merging would mean guessing identities. Some may also be replacement or applicant cards that never stood for a separate member; we drop the provisional cards the extraction identifies and leave the rest unmerged rather than guess.

These limits shape how we use the file. Record-level error can run in both directions: some members appear twice, and, despite the guards, some merged records may combine two people. We therefore draw no conclusion from any single record. Our analyses rely on aggregates, joining rates within places over time, and we read the results as statistical patterns rather than as verified individual histories. Some degree of record error is unavoidable in a source of this size. As an additional check, we compare our extraction with an independently transcribed sample of several hundred thousand records prepared by the Federal Archives, the institution responsible for official inquiries concerning historical NSDAP membership (see Appendix Section A.2).

A.1.5 Derived Individual Variables

Occupation. The occupation field (*Beruf/Stand*) records free-text entries in German, often abbreviated (e.g., "Kfm." for *Kaufmann*, "Schlosserges." for *Schlossergeselle*). We classify each unique occupation string into the categories of the 1925 occupational census (*Berufszählung*), following the classification of the Statistisches Reichsamt (1927–29) (StDR Bde. 402–405). The classification yields two variables: *Stellung im Beruf* (occupational status: self-employed, salaried employee, wage worker, civil servant, or family worker) and industry sector. A language model maps each raw string to the census categories, preserving the original German occupational taxonomy. We also retain an alternative ISCO/NACE classification. If the model was not able to infer either industry or occupation, we treat these observations as unclassifiable. The main text reports the workplace specification at the municipality-by-industry-by-occupational-status level.

Place-names. Each membership card records up to three place names (residence, birthplace, and *Ortsgruppe*) as free text. We link these to the geocoded municipalities of official censuses using textual similarity to retrieve candidate matches. Because many German place names recur across regions (e.g., multiple municipalities named "Neustadt"), similarity alone can be insufficient. We resolve ambiguities in three steps. First, we restrict candidates to the same *Gau* as the card's recorded residence. Second, we rank by population similarity: for each candidate municipality m in *Gau* g, we compare the share of cards mentioning the associated place name ($\hat{s}_m = n_m/n_g$) to the municipality's 1910 census population share ($s_m = \text{pop}_m/\text{pop}_g$), scoring by $1 - |\hat{s}_m - s_m|$. This penalizes assigning a frequent place name to a small hamlet or a rare name to a large city. Third, closest distance to either the local *Ortsgruppe* or birthplace breaks remaining ties. We provide more details on our underlying geocoding procedure and the construction of municipal polygons in Appendix Section A.3.

Gender. We classify each member's gender from their first name in two steps. First, we match against a curated German first-name dictionary with known gender assignments. Second, for unmatched names, we apply a suffix heuristic: names ending in *-a*, *-ia*, *-ie*, *-ina*, *-ine*, or *-ette* are classified as female.

SS membership. We identify SS members from two sources. First, we flag all individuals whose NSDAP card text mentions an "SS" affiliation in the organizational membership or remarks fields. Second, we link our records to approximately 50,000 individuals named in the *SS-Verordnungsblatt* (DWS-XIP, 2025), matching on membership number where available and on name and date of birth otherwise. The external source provides SS entry date, rank, and promotion history.

Academic title and nobility. We detect academic titles and aristocratic status via pattern matching on the name and profession fields. Doctoral degrees are flagged by matching "Dr." or "Doktor." Nobility is identified by matching over 25 German aristocratic prefixes and titles, including *von*, *zu*, *Freiherr*, *Graf*, and their feminine variants.

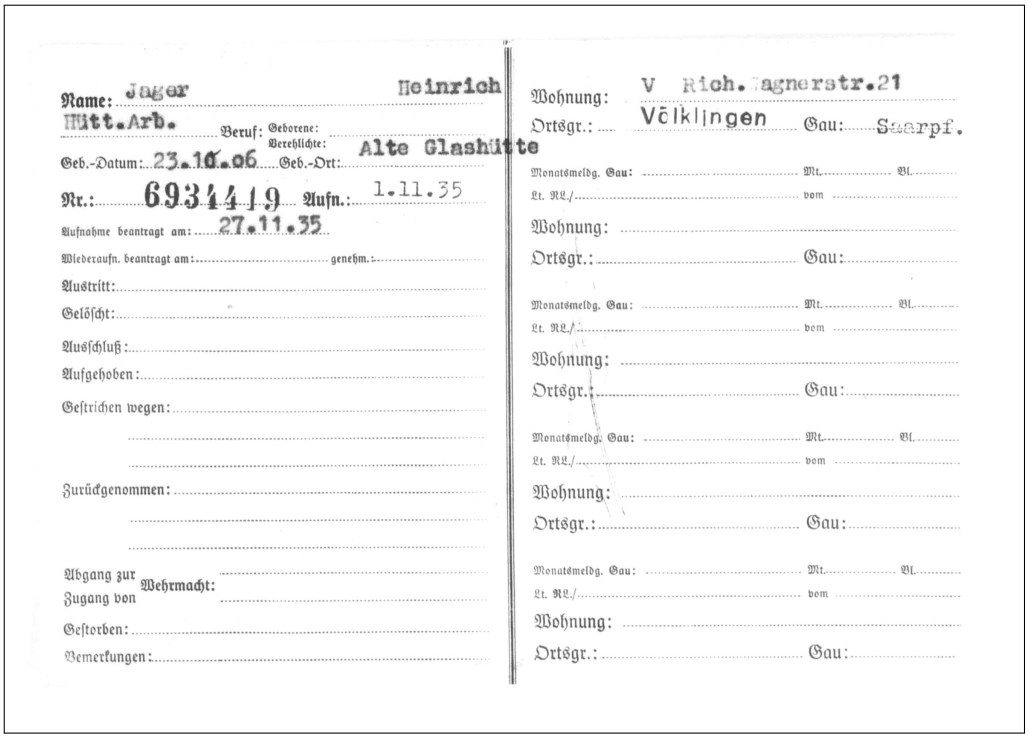
Residential mobility. Membership cards record address changes in the *Wohnung weitere* field, a list of further addresses with dates. We extract the first residential move: destination municipality, street, and date. When this field is empty, we use the separate move-to and move-date fields recorded elsewhere on the card.

Figures A.1 and A.2 show sample membership cards in the two main formats. Figures A.3 and A.4 show sample portraits with NS insignia. Figure A.5 shows a sample portrait without NS insignia.

A.2 Validation against Sample of the Federal Archives

We benchmark the extraction against a hand-transcribed sample by the German Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*). The Federal Archives, which hold the archival membership records and manage their provenance, hand-transcribed a systematic sample of roughly every fiftieth image, yielding 369,709 records that report the name, birth date, birthplace, and membership number recorded on each card. Because the cards are filed in a fixed order, such a sample spans the full collection, and it is representative of the population of cards as long as filing position is unrelated to extraction error. We treat the transcription as an external expert benchmark and compare it, field by field, to our extraction of the same cards.

Figure A.1: Sample Membership Card: Machine-Printed

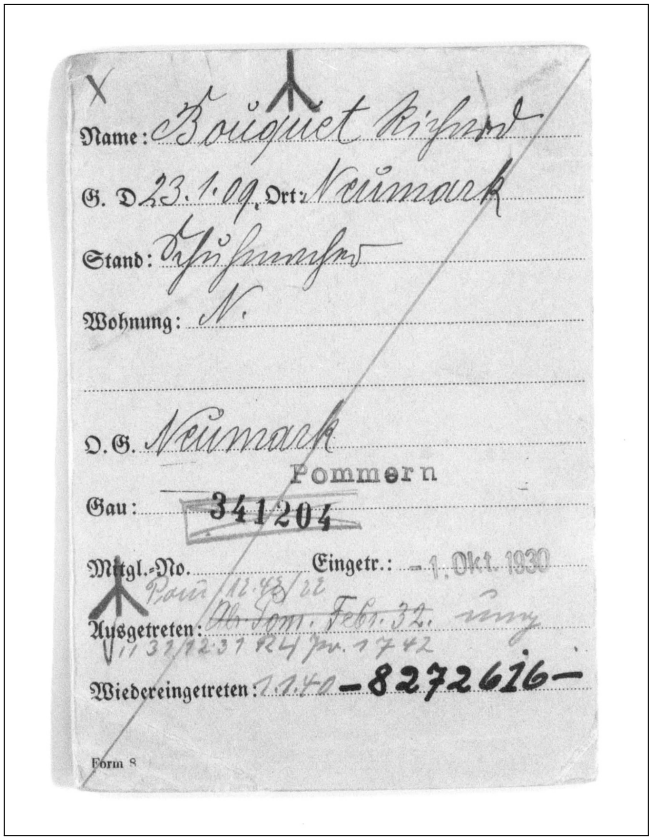


Note. Machine-printed NSDAP membership card from the *Zentralkartei*. Fields are filled by typewriter.

We link records by blocking on birth year and the two leading characters of the surname, score candidate pairs on a weighted combination of string similarities, and keep the best match for each transcribed record. Every field except birthplace is compared by exact agreement, after we standardize umlauts, punctuation, and case on both sides. For birthplaces, we geocode both entries through the same method as in the main text and count them as consistent when they lie within two kilometers, because the cards are handwritten and the transcription often abbreviates, so the same place is frequently written slightly differently. Figure A.6, Panel A reports agreement by field, with a lighter band for agreement within two character edits. Agreement exceeds 90% for every field except the surname and the birthplace. Birthplace agreement is 87%. Exact surname agreement is 86%, and rises to 92% within two characters. Because the transcription is itself fallible, these rates understate agreement: the cards are frequently hard to read, and some entries are ambiguous even to a trained human, so a disagreement need not reflect an error on our side. The Bundesarchiv did not record residence systematically, so we do not benchmark it here; within our own data, residence must be geographically consistent with the local branch and regional district on the same card, which provides a separate check.

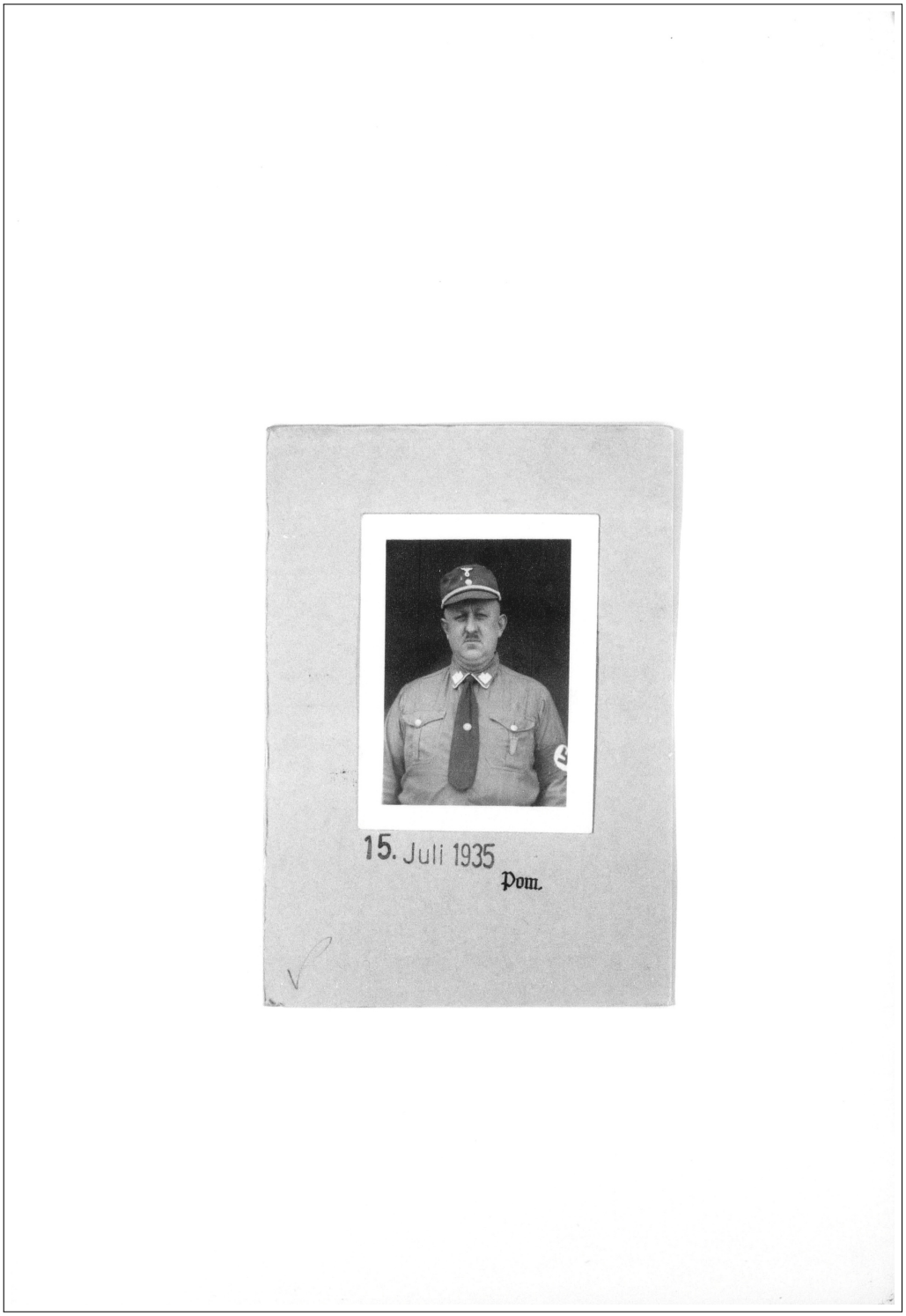
The comparison requires linking each transcribed record to its counterpart in our data, and the linkage could favor cards that are easy to read and so overstate agreement. Two features limit this concern. First, we link 99.7% of the sampled records, so the unlinked remainder is likely too small to move the comparison. Second, the Bundesarchiv recorded a membership number for 37% of the cards. Of those cards, we match two thirds, whose number identifies exactly one record in our extraction. This identifier does not enter the name, date, or place comparison, so agreement on the remaining fields cannot be an artifact of the linkage. The number we extract matches the recorded one in 97% of the linked records that report a number on both sides. Such a near-unique identifier

Figure A.2: Sample Membership Card: Handwritten



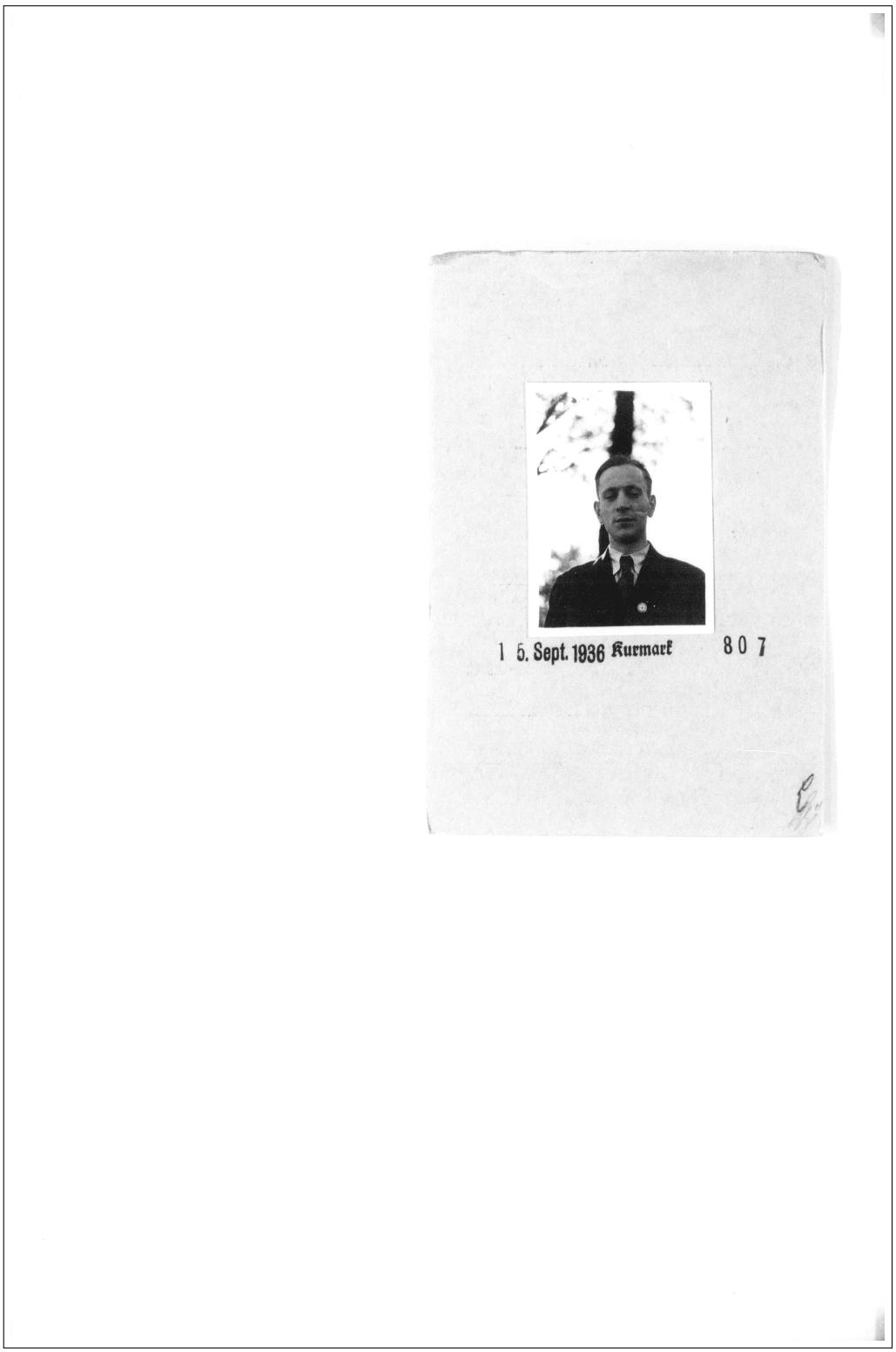
Note. Handwritten NSDAP membership card from the *Zentralkartei*. Fields are completed in cursive by a local party official.

Figure A.3: Sample Membership Card: Portrait With NS Symbols



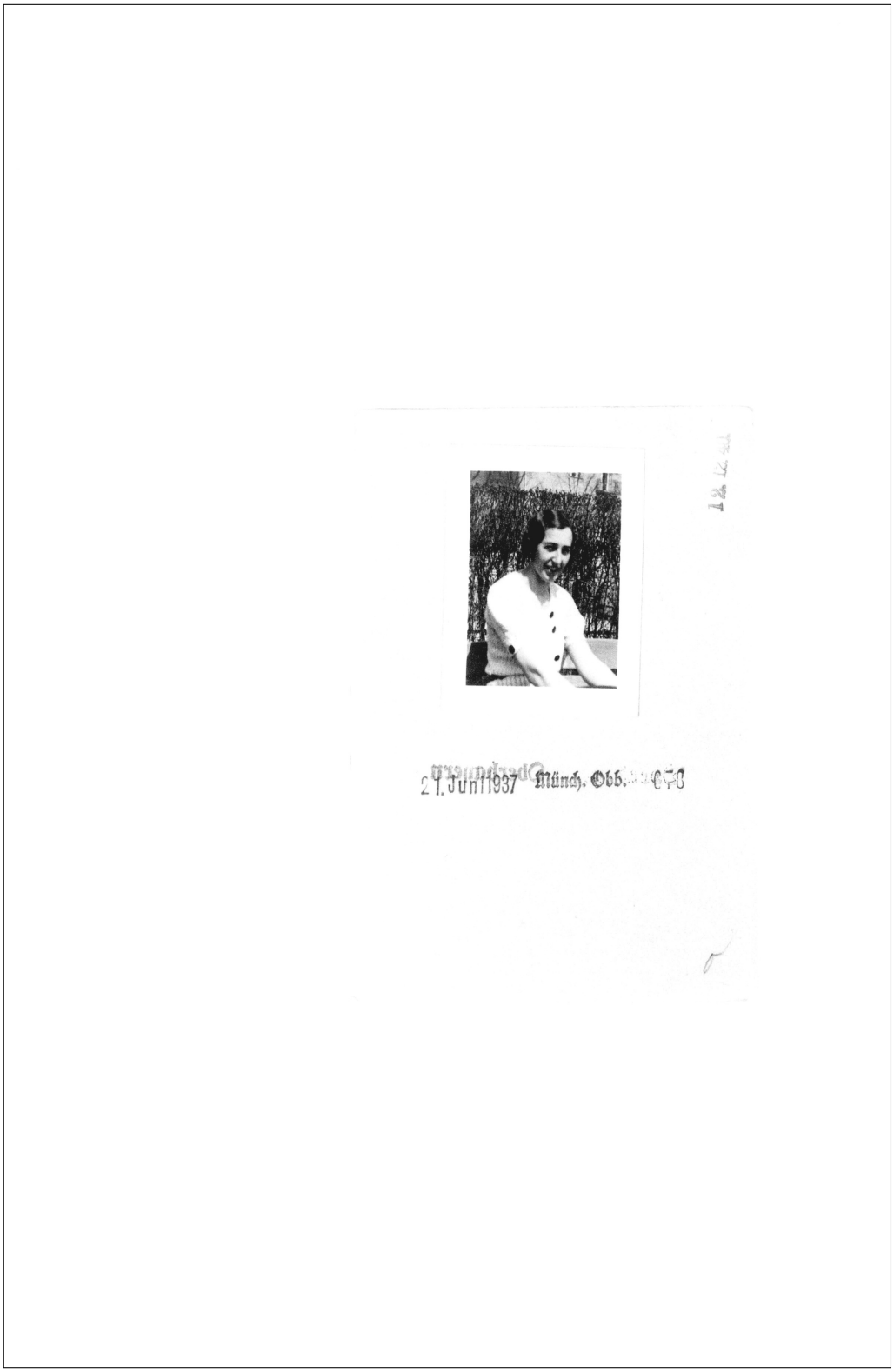
Note. Portrait in NSDAP membership card with NS insignia.

Figure A.4: Sample Membership Card: Portrait With NS insignia



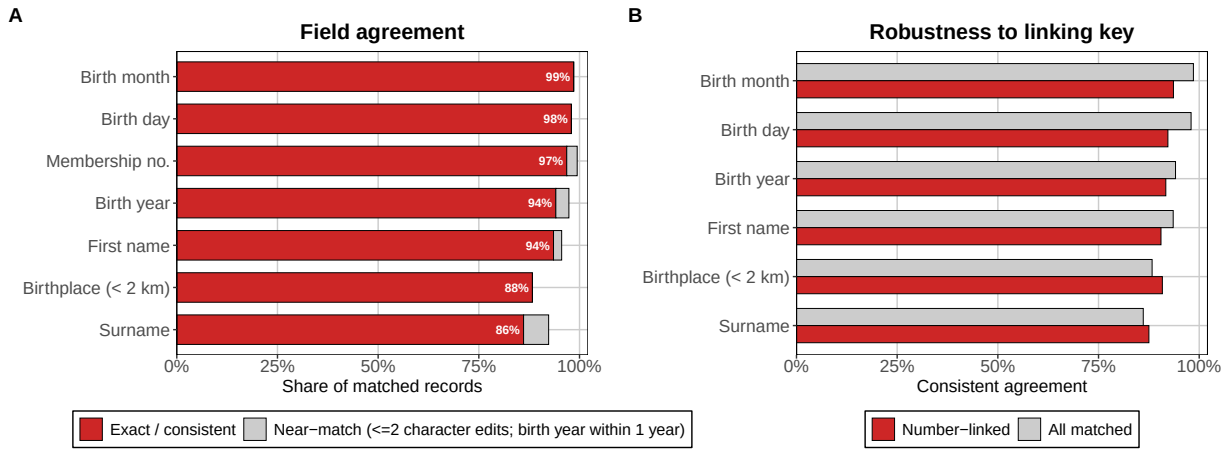
Note. Portrait in NSDAP membership card with NS symbols.

Figure A.5: Sample Membership Card: Portrait Without NS Symbols



Note. Portrait in NSDAP membership card without NS symbols.

Figure A.6: Validation against the Bundesarchiv Sample



Note. Comparison of the extracted membership records with a systematic Bundesarchiv transcription introduced in Appendix A.2. Panel A reports, for each field, the share of linked records that agree exactly (dark red), with a lighter band for near matches (within two character edits, and within one year for the birth year), computed over the records that report the field on both sides. Birthplace is compared spatially: both entries are geocoded through the same method as described in the main text and counted as consistent when they lie within two kilometers. Panel B repeats the comparison for the records whose membership number identifies exactly one record in the extraction.

is rarely available for historical record linkage, where matching on name, age, and birthplace alone links only a minority of records at appreciable false-match rates (Abramitzky et al., 2021; Bailey et al., 2020). Under this key, agreement figures are roughly comparable (Figure A.6, Panel B). The date comparison may be inflated, because one candidate pass requires an exact birth day and month and so favors records whose dates already agree.

A.3 Reconstruction of Municipal Boundaries

No digitized shapefiles of municipal boundaries exist for the German Empire or interwar Germany. County-level (*Kreis*) boundaries are available from the Census Mosaic project (MPIDR and CGG, 2011), but municipality-level analyses require finer geographic units. We develop a new approach that combines official municipal census data with fine-grained spatial units from modern cadasters to reconstruct historical municipal boundaries.

Inputs. The reconstruction takes two inputs as ground truth. The first is the municipality list of each municipal census, which records name, county, and population (Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, 1915; Statistisches Reichsamt, 1936; 1941). The second is the modern cadaster: for each country we use the finest stable cadastral unit, the German *Gemarkung* (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vermessungsverwaltungen der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AdV), 2025),[1] the Austrian *Katastralgemeinde* (Bundesamt für Eich- und Vermessungswesen (BEV), 2025), the Pol-

[1]The German layer combines the Gemarkung boundaries published by the surveying agencies of the sixteen federal states, coordinated in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vermessungsverwaltungen der Länder (AdV). We use the open geodata portals or download services of Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Berlin, and Hamburg, and state files obtained directly from the remaining six agencies.

ish *obręb ewidencyjny* (Główny Urząd Geodezji i Kartografii (GUGiK), 2025), the Czech *katastrální území* (Český úřad zeměměřický a katastrální (ČÚZK), 2025), and the French commune (Etalab and Direction Générale des Finances Publiques (DGFiP), 2025); two territories without a usable modern cadaster receive fallback layers described below. To obtain coordinates for each census municipality, we draw from several sources in priority order. For cities, we use a curated database of historical city locations. For the remaining municipalities, we match place names to the *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon des Deutschen Reichs* (Uetrecht, 1912), a historical gazetteer whose modern digital edition provides coordinates for approximately 130,000 German localities; matching uses textual similarity, conditions on the county, and breaks ties by population. To detect coordinate errors, we compare each municipality's location to the median coordinate of its county and district, flag outliers beyond a multiple of the median absolute deviation, and hand-code flagged municipalities until none remain.

Assignment. We treat each census municipality, placed by its coordinate, as the unit to be mapped, and assign every cadastral unit to the municipality whose point lies inside it. Where one unit contains several municipalities, we split it among them by a Voronoi tessellation of their coordinates within the unit; where a municipality spans several units, we merge them. Each municipality then receives a single polygon and its recorded population, and the procedure conserves the census totals by construction. We restrict each territory to the area covered by the relevant census. As a baseline, we use the 1910 census for the Reich, Alsace-Lorraine, the Memel Territory, and the formerly German parts of western Poland (Posen and West Prussia, lost in 1918–20), the 1937 census for Austria, for which the census authorities retrospectively tabulated 1933 populations on the later territorial boundaries, and the 1939 census for the Sudetenland, first enumerated after its 1938 annexation.

Assumptions and validation. The reconstruction rests on two observations. First, the modern cadaster preserves the municipal geography of the period we study: the German *Gemarkung* layout dates to the Reich cadastre introduced by the 1930s soil-valuation law (*Bodenschätzungsgesetz*) and usually follows the municipal boundaries of that time (Deutsches Reich, 1934; Wikipedia, 2026).[2] Second, the assignment is doubly robust: a municipality is placed correctly if either its coordinate falls inside the correct cadastral unit or the match on the remaining dimensions (population share, county and *Gau*, name similarity) identifies the correct unit, so an error in one input is harmless when the other is right. The raw count of cadastral units supports this alignment: modern Germany has roughly 45,000 Gemarkungen, a count comparable to the municipalities recorded in the historical censuses of our study period. The cadastral names also preserve historical spellings, which aids the name-based dimension of the match; in Austria, the Katastralgemeinden retain the names and spelling variants of the nineteenth-century Franciscean cadastre.

Scope and limits. The approach carries over to any setting in which a stable modern cadaster, a historical census list, and rough coordinates coexist. It fails where the cadastral geography itself was redrawn. In the northern half of former East Prussia, today the Kaliningrad oblast, the German cadaster did not survive; we fall back on the bounding boxes of Russian cadastral quarters

[2] A *Gemarkung* is not an administrative unit. However, its boundaries and often its name frequently coincide with those of modern administrative units, such as municipalities, urban districts, city quarters, localities, or unincorporated areas. Following municipal mergers, the *Gemarkungen* of the former municipalities were often retained rather than consolidated. As a result, many municipalities today comprise several *Gemarkungen* (or, in Austria and Czechia, *Katastralgemeinden*).

(Federal Service for State Registration, Cadastre and Cartography (Rosreestr), 2022), meshed into Voronoi cells and clipped to the historical coastline, an approximation of location rather than of boundaries. In the Memel Territory, we use Lithuanian elderships (*seniūnijos*) (Registrų centras, 2025), an administrative layer one tier below the municipality rather than a cadastral one. More generally, cadastral boundaries are not always identical to administrative municipal boundaries, and the cadastre can be coarser than the historical municipalities in some rural areas and finer in cities. The reconstruction is therefore an approximation, not an exact representation.

A.4 Protestant Classification

We estimate religious affiliation in two stages. We first construct municipal Protestant shares by combining two observable census quantities: Protestant population shares from the 1925 census at the county level and the denominational composition of churches at the municipal level. We then refine these municipal probabilities at the individual level using the joint distribution of first names and religious affiliation in 1.6 million parish-register records.

County prior. The 1925 population census reports Protestant and Catholic population counts at the county level (*Kreis*), which we take from Falter and Hänisch (1990). We use the county Protestant share as the baseline probability that a resident is Protestant.

Municipal refinement. The *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon* reports the number of Protestant (*evangelische Kirchen*) and Catholic (*katholische Kirchen*) churches in each municipality. We use this second measure of local religious composition to distribute the observed county Protestant share across municipalities. Within each county, we compute the population-weighted mean Protestant church ratio $\bar{R}_c = \sum_m \text{pop}_m \cdot r_m / \sum_m \text{pop}_m$, where $r_m = n_m^{\text{ev}} / (n_m^{\text{ev}} + n_m^{\text{kath}})$. The municipal Protestant share is then $P_m = P_c \cdot r_m / \bar{R}_c$, bounded to lie within $[0.01, 0.99]$. This allocates the county share across municipalities in proportion to local church composition. Municipalities without churches retain the county share.

Name signal. We estimate name-specific likelihood ratios from 1.6 million records in digitized German parish registers (Verein für Computergenealogie e.V., 2025), which directly observe both first name and religious denomination. For each first name n, we compute the Protestant share $\hat{p}_n$ and convert to a likelihood ratio $\Lambda_n = [\hat{p}_n/(1-\hat{p}_n)] \,/\, [\bar{p}/(1-\bar{p})]$, where $\bar{p}$ is the overall Protestant share in the parish register sample. This ratio is invariant to the sample's denominational composition. Table A.3 reports selected examples. The final individual probability is $P(\text{Prot} \mid \text{name}, \text{municipality}) = \Lambda_n P_m \,/\, [\Lambda_n P_m + (1 - P_m)]$.

Figure A.7 validates the classification. We hold out 20 percent of parish register books entirely and estimate name-specific Protestant shares from the remaining 80 percent. For approximately 317,000 held-out individuals, the predicted Protestant share tracks the actual share closely.

A.5 Supplementary Data Sources

A.5.1 Jewish Population and Deportations

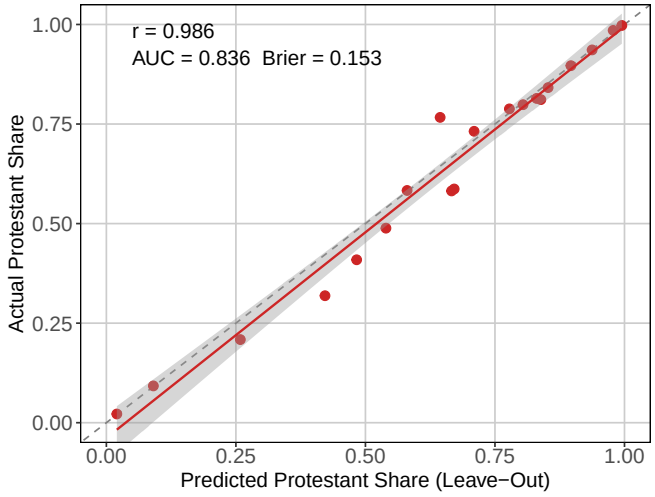
Jewish communities. We compile historical Jewish community population counts from approximately 4,600 localities across Germany, drawing on the *Jüdische Gemeinden* online archive (Alicke, 2026). We match locality names to our geocoded municipalities and aggregate counts to the municipal level. Where the archive reports counts for several years, we interpolate intervening years

Table A.3: Name-Religion Association: Selected First Names

Protestant names				Catholic names				Ambiguous names			
Name	N	% Prot	Λ	Name	N	% Prot	Λ	Name	N	% Prot	Λ
Gottlieb	3,777	94.3	7.54	Alois	1,202	2.2	0.01	Karl	10,603	72.2	1.18
Friedrich	21,854	92.9	5.92	Ignaz	311	2.4	0.01	Martin	7,974	75.9	1.43
Ernst	6,547	91.0	4.57	Josef	7,861	6.3	0.03	Anna	116,224	70.9	1.11
Heinrich	30,243	83.8	2.34	Franz	18,672	19.1	0.11				
Johann	154,338	81.9	2.06	Maria	59,869	53.9	0.53				
Wilhelm	15,798	80.7	1.90	Elisabeth	14,520	54.8	0.55				

Note. Likelihood ratios (Λ) estimated from 1.6 million parish register records (Verein für Computergenealogie e.V., 2025) with direct observation of religious denomination. $\Lambda > 1$ indicates a name more common among Protestants; $\Lambda < 1$ more common among Catholics. N is the number of observations with recorded denomination.

Figure A.7: Validation of Protestant Classification



Note. Twenty percent of parish register books are held out at the book level; name-specific Protestant shares are estimated from the remaining 80 percent with shrinkage ($K = 5$). Binned scatter of predicted versus actual Protestant share for the held-out individuals (20 equal-sized bins). The dashed line indicates perfect calibration; the solid line is a linear fit to the binned points, with its 95% confidence band.

log-linearly between observed data points. These municipal-level counts enter the cross-sectional analysis as a control for historical Jewish population shares.

Deportations. We obtain individual-level records on Jewish residents, deportees, and emigrants from three sources: the List of Jewish Residents in the German Reich 1933–1945, the 1939 German Minority Census, and the German Federal Archives' memorial book (*Gedenkbuch*) (Tracing the Past e.V., 2018; Bundesarchiv, 2026). Each record contains a residential address, which we map to a municipality via spatial intersection with our municipal polygons. We aggregate to municipal-level counts of Jewish residents, deportees, and emigrants.[3]

[3]The data we provide also permit researchers to measure individual-level residential proximity between NSDAP members and Jewish residents. Residential addresses can be parsed into street names and house numbers, normalized using the same procedure applied to the membership cards, and matched to party members at the municipality, street, and house-number levels.

A.5.2 Economic Shock Exposures

Hyperinflation exposure. We measure local exposure to the 1923 hyperinflation as cumulative local inflation between January 1920 and December 1924, following Braggion et al. (2023). From the town-level monthly consumer price indices they compile and harmonize (Braggion et al., 2023; Braggion et al., 2024), we take the log change in the price index over this window; the series does not report January 1920, so we anchor the start on the adjacent December 1919 and February 1920. This leaves 273 towns with prices at both ends of the window. Each municipality takes the value of the nearest town; county exposure is the population-weighted mean over the county's municipalities. We record the distance to the source town alongside each exposure.

Banking-crisis exposure. We measure exposure to the 1931 banking crisis as the change in the city unemployment rate during the crisis year, computed from the city cross-section in the replication files of Doerr et al. (2022). As bank-level Danatbank exposure is randomized in the public replication data, we rely on the realized unemployment change instead. Municipalities and counties are assigned as for the hyperinflation measure.

A.5.3 Census and Election Data

The census and election returns compiled by Falter and Hänisch (1990) report demographic and voting outcomes at the county (*Kreis*) level, but disaggregate municipalities with more than 2,000 inhabitants as separate observations within each county. We use this structure to maintain maximum geographic resolution. Using the reference coordinates provided with the election returns, we spatially assign each municipal polygon to its county in the Falter data via nearest-neighbor matching. Within each county, we then link individually reported municipalities to their nearest municipal polygon; the remaining polygons receive the residual county aggregate. This procedure preserves sub-county variation wherever the source data provide it, rather than collapsing all municipalities to a single county-level observation.

A.5.4 Motives for Joining (Abel Reports)

We draw on 580 autobiographical reports collected in 1934 by sociologist Theodore Abel as part of a prize competition he organized in cooperation with the NSDAP, in which members were invited to explain why they had joined the movement (Abel, 1938). Reports average 2–5 pages. Participants self-selected into the competition, so the sample is not random and is skewed toward early, ideologically committed joiners. We therefore treat the evidence as qualitative corroboration of the heterogeneity of motives.

We code each report with a large language model (GPT-4o-mini) using a structured prompt that assigns binary indicators for five causal motives: economic hardship, antisemitism, anti-communism, national renewal/order, and social belonging. The prompt codes a motive as one only when the text explicitly links that factor to the decision to join the party. Background characteristics, general ideological statements, and post-entry activities are excluded. Table A.4 shows one illustrative German-language passage per category. Figure 2 in the main text reports the resulting distribution of motives.

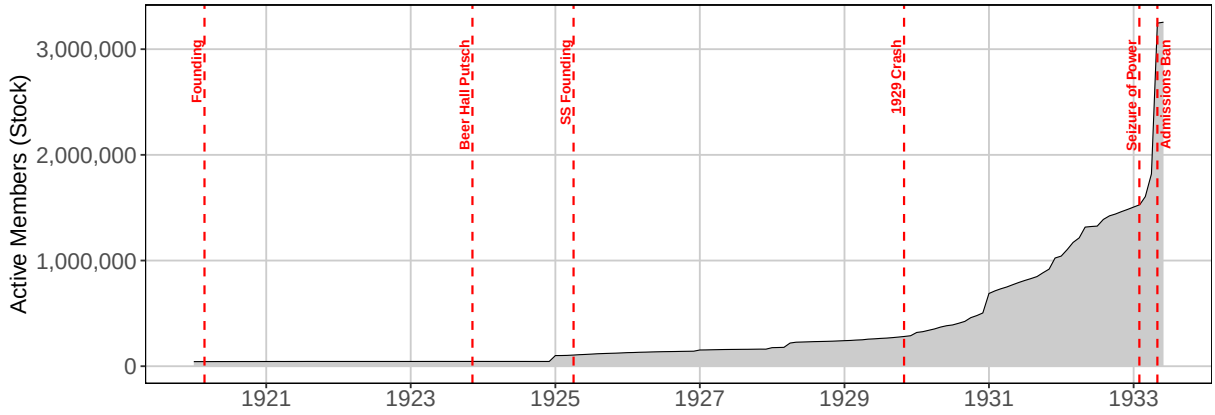
Table A.4: Example Causal Quotes by Motive Category

Category	Quote
Economic hardship	*"Ich wurde nach 14 jähriger ununterbrochenen Arbeitszeit arbeits- und brotlos gemacht."*
Antisemitism	*"Der Jude saß an der Regierung und verschacherte unser Vaterland mit allen ihm zu Gebote stehenden Mitteln."*
Anti-communism	*"Die Gefahr des Bolschewismus veranlasste mich zum Eintritt."*
National renewal/order	*"So ist das Letzte aus langem Erleben die Sehnsucht nach einem freien, starken Deutschland."*
Social belonging	*"Die Kameradschaft zog mich an."*

Note. One illustrative verbatim passage per category, drawn from the coded corpus.

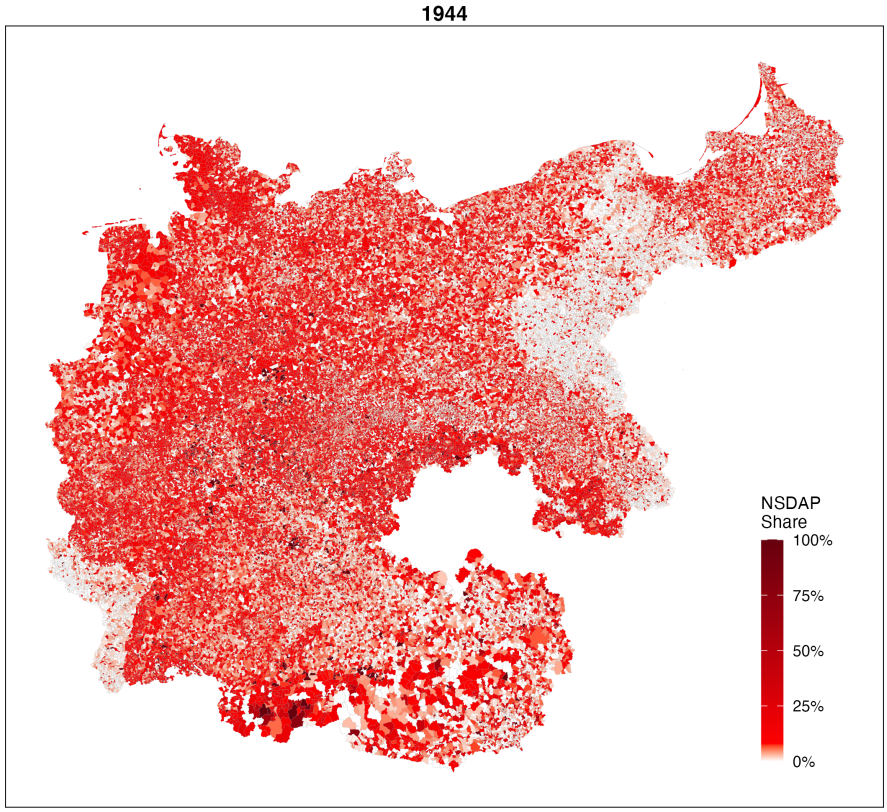
B Additional Figures and Tables

Figure B.1: NSDAP Membership Before 1933



Note. This figure shows NSDAP member counts before 1933.

Figure B.2: Geographic Distribution of NSDAP Members in 1944, Full Territorial Coverage



Note. This figure extends Figure 4 to the full territorial extent of Greater Germany, adding Austria, the Sudetenland, the areas annexed from Poland (including Posen), and Alsace-Lorraine. It shows the membership stock at the end of 1944. Membership shares use municipal population in 1910, except in the Sudetenland (1939) and in Austria (1933). Overall population changed little across these years, in part because of the First World War, but shares across territories are not strictly comparable to the rest, since the denominator is measured in a different year and predates the 1944 numerator.

B.1 Membership and Electoral Outcomes

Our individual-level records imply a measure of local party support that can be compared to electoral outcomes. We use the county-level Reichstag election returns and, for Baden and Hesse, the municipality-level returns introduced in Section 3.2, covering the elections of 1928, 1930, July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933. For each election we measure the cumulative membership stock per 1,000 inhabitants in the month before the election and, separately, monthly entries per 1,000 inhabitants in windows around it.

Table B.1 reports regressions of the NSDAP share of valid votes on the pre-election membership stock. Each sample runs through the same three comparisons. The first holds the election fixed and compares all units (columns 1 and 4). The second narrows the comparison to units in the same region, states for counties and counties for municipalities (columns 2 and 5). The third holds the unit itself fixed and uses variation over the five elections (columns 3 and 6). The association is positive and precisely estimated in all six specifications, of similar size at the two levels of observation, and on the order of half a percentage point of vote share per additional member per 1,000 inhabitants.

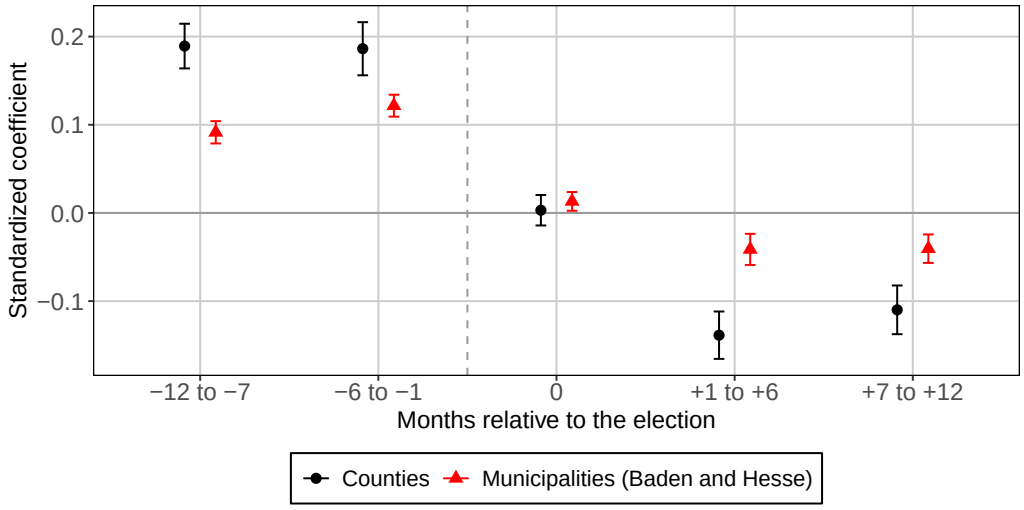
Figure B.3 examines the timing, holding the unit fixed in both samples. Monthly entries per 1,000 inhabitants, averaged within five windows from twelve months before to twelve months after each election, enter jointly; all variables are standardized within sample, so the coefficients are comparable across the two levels of observation. Entries in the two pre-election windows predict the vote share, more strongly across counties than across municipalities. The coefficient on the election month itself is close to zero, and the two post-election windows carry negative coefficients. Conditional on pre-election entries, places with more subsequent entries recorded lower vote shares, which could be consistent with later joining occurring where support was initially weaker. We note that the windows overlap across the July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933 elections, which fall three to four months apart, so the post-election coefficients partly cover the run-up to the following election.

Table B.1: Membership and NSDAP Vote Shares

	Counties			Municipalities		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
NSDAP Members per 1,000	0.74***	0.72***	0.57***	0.72***	0.52***	0.46***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Election FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State FE		✓				
County FE			✓		✓	
Municipality FE						✓
Observations	4,858	4,858	4,858	9,348	9,348	9,348
R^2	0.74	0.75	0.92	0.51	0.64	0.84

Note. The unit of analysis is a county-election (columns 1–3) or a municipality-election (columns 4–6), for the Reichstag elections of 1928, 1930, July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933. The dependent variable is the NSDAP share of valid votes in percent. NSDAP Members per 1,000 is the cumulative membership stock per 1,000 inhabitants in the month before the election. The unit fixed effect is the county fixed effect in column 3 and the municipality fixed effect in column 6. Municipality columns cover Baden and Hesse; the Hessian returns do not include March 1933. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Significance: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

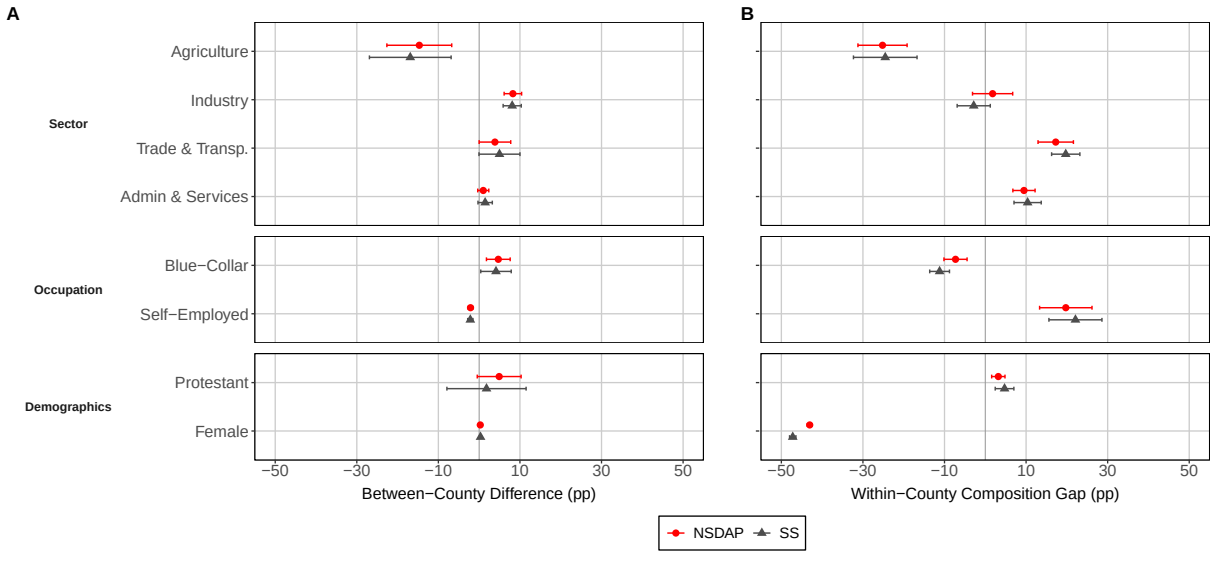
Figure B.3: Membership Entries Before and After Elections



Note. This figure plots coefficients from two regressions of the NSDAP share of valid votes on monthly NSDAP entries per 1,000 inhabitants, averaged within five windows relative to the election month and entered jointly. All variables are standardized within sample. Black circles: counties, with election and county fixed effects. Red triangles: municipalities in Baden and Hesse, with election and municipality fixed effects. Bars are 95% confidence intervals from heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. The dashed line separates the pre-election windows from the election month. The sample covers the Reichstag elections of 1928, 1930, July 1932, November 1932, and March 1933.

B.2 Comparison with the Prior Membership Sample

Figure B.4: Community Composition: Unweighted-Benchmark Analogue of Figure 6



Note. This figure complements Figure 6. Panel **A** plots $\Delta_k^{g,\text{between}}$ using an *unweighted* cross-county mean $\bar{x}_k = C^{-1}\sum_c x_{ck}$ in place of the denominator-consistent population-weighted benchmark used in the main text. Panel B is identical to the main-text Panel B of Figure 6. NSDAP ($g = N$) in red, SS ($g = S$) in gray. Values in percentage points; error bars show 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the county level. The unweighted benchmark treats every county equally regardless of population.

Most prior quantitative research on the social composition of the NSDAP relied on the 0.5% sample of membership cards assembled by Kater (1983) and Falter (1991) and released as the NSDAP Membership File (Falter, 2022). The released file contains about 50,000 records. We use this file for two benchmark exercises. Panel A asks whether applying the same occupational and gender classifications to the Falter–Kater sample and to our full analysis file produces similar national shares. Panel B asks whether a sample of this size can recover the within-county differences studied in the main text, and then compares this sampling benchmark with estimates from the actual Falter–Kater sample.[4] County-level comparisons in Panel B use the subset that can be linked to 1925 county boundaries.

Panel A of Figure B.5 compares national occupational and gender shares for the 1925–1945 analysis period. Filled red triangles report estimates from the full analysis file, and open red diamonds report estimates from the Falter–Kater sample. We use the same definitions in both files. The classifications follow the employment-status and industry categories of the 1925 *Berufszählung*. Workers and self-employed members exclude agriculture, farmers are agricultural self-employed, and white-collar members combine *Angestellte* and *Beamte*. Occupational shares are computed among members with valid employment-status and industry information. The two files produce closely corresponding occupational shares in the aggregate. As an additional check, we restrict the sample to members who entered between 1925 and 1932. The resulting shares lie within a few percentage points of the midpoints of the ranges reported by Kater (1983). The largest differences concern workers and farmers, categories that depend on how agricultural employment is classified. Overall, Panel A shows that applying the same coding to the two files produces similar national occupational and gender distributions.

Panel B proceeds in three steps. First, we use the full analysis file to establish the within-county differences that a smaller sample would ideally recover. For each county and characteristic, we subtract the 1933 census share from the corresponding member share (see Equation (2)). A positive value therefore means that the characteristic was more common among members than among other residents of the same county. The red series weights counties by the number of members contributing to the relevant share; the gray series weights eligible counties equally. Counties enter if they contain at least three member records and have nonmissing member and census shares for the characteristic. The full file shows substantial differences between members and their county populations. The largest gaps are for gender and agriculture, both of which are much less common among members. Members are more concentrated in trade and transport, administration and services, and self-employment. Giving counties equal weight makes the agriculture and industry gaps larger but does not change most other estimates substantially. Blue-collar employment is the only characteristic for which the sign depends on the aggregation. The starred rows identify the three characteristics emphasized by Falter (1991): Protestantism, agriculture, and self-employment. These estimates are not direct replications of that study. Falter (1991) relates NSDAP penetration to multiple characteristics that vary across counties, whereas Panel B compares members with other residents of the same county. The two comparisons therefore answer slightly different questions.

Second, we ask whether these full-file differences would still be detectable if we observed only a 0.5% sample of membership cards. We repeatedly draw samples from the full file at the Falter–Kater sampling fraction and recompute the within-county gaps. The narrow intervals treat individual membership cards as independent draws. Because the original sampling design may have generated dependence across cards from the same area, the wider intervals use a more conserva-

[4]The Falter–Kater sample is not self-weighting. All estimates from the released file use the supplied `weight_rel` weights.

tive exercise that resamples counties and then samples cards within each selected county at the same sampling fraction. The released data do not contain usable primary-sampling-unit identifiers, so this clustered exercise is an approximation rather than an exact reconstruction of the original sampling design. Under both sampling exercises, the 95% intervals remain on the same side of zero as the full-file estimate for every characteristic and under both county aggregations. Allowing for county clustering substantially reduces precision, but does not change the direction of any result. Thus, the resampling exercise shows that a sample of the Falter–Kater size is large enough to recover the sign of the within-county differences observed in the full file.[5]

Third, we compare these benchmarks with estimates obtained directly from the Falter–Kater sample. Open diamonds report within-county estimates calculated directly from Falter–Kater records that can be linked to 1925 county boundaries. These estimates have the same sign as the full-file estimates for all seven characteristics available in the membership cards. White-filled diamonds provide a diagnostic in which the released weights are rescaled within each county to match that county's membership count in the full file. This adjustment changes the estimates only modestly. Because it uses county totals from the full file, however, it is a diagnostic for county-level sampling error rather than an estimator that could be constructed from the Falter–Kater sample alone.

Lastly, the within-county result does not extend to between-county sorting. Table B.2 repeats both resampling designs for the between-county sorting gap of Equation (1), the member-weighted county average of a census characteristic minus its population-weighted or unweighted county average. Under the population-weighted benchmark, the full-file sorting gaps are small, and the clustered 95% intervals include zero for six of the eight characteristics. Under the unweighted benchmark, the gaps are larger and every clustered interval excludes zero. A sample of the Falter–Kater size therefore supports cross-county comparisons that weight counties equally, the approach taken in the earlier literature, but not the population-weighted sorting gaps, which require a more extensive membership sample.

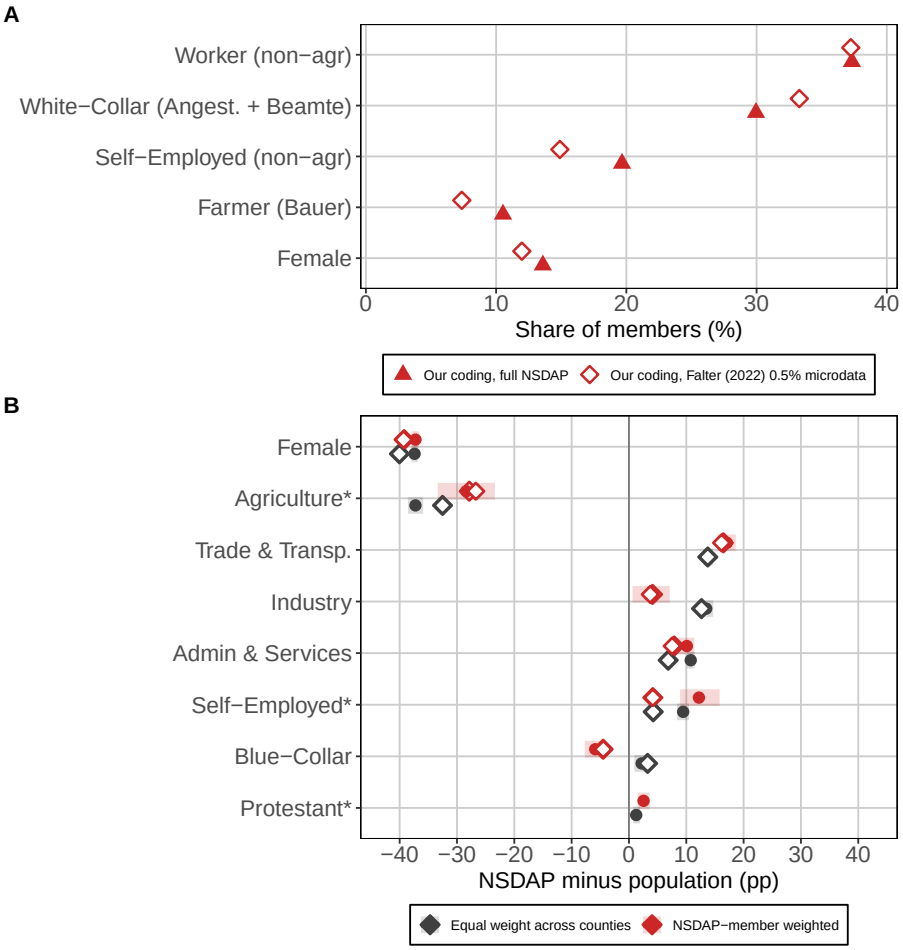
Table B.2: Between-County Sorting at the 0.5% Sampling Fraction

	Population-weighted benchmark			Unweighted county benchmark		
	Full file	95% iid	95% cluster	Full file	95% iid	95% cluster
Agriculture	−7.9	[−8.1, −7.6]	[−14.3, −2.8]	−13.1	[−13.3, −12.7]	[−19.3, −7.7]
Industry	+4.2	[+4.0, +4.4]	[+2.2, +6.0]	+7.6	[+7.3, +7.8]	[+5.7, +9.3]
Trade & Transp.	+2.1	[+2.0, +2.2]	[+0.3, +5.2]	+3.3	[+3.2, +3.4]	[+1.2, +6.3]
Admin & Services	+0.5	[+0.5, +0.6]	[−0.1, +1.6]	+0.8	[+0.8, +0.8]	[+0.1, +1.9]
Blue-Collar	+2.7	[+2.6, +2.9]	[+0.5, +4.7]	+5.1	[+4.9, +5.2]	[+2.7, +7.2]
Self-Employed	−1.2	[−1.2, −1.1]	[−1.7, −0.5]	−2.1	[−2.1, −2.0]	[−2.6, −1.4]
Protestant	+1.9	[+1.6, +2.3]	[−1.6, +4.5]	+6.8	[+6.4, +7.2]	[+2.5, +10.6]
Female	+0.0	[−0.0, +0.0]	[−0.1, +0.1]	+0.2	[+0.2, +0.2]	[+0.1, +0.3]

Note. Between-county sorting gap $\Delta_k^{N,\text{between}}$ (Equation (1)): the member-weighted county average of the census characteristic minus the population-weighted county average (columns 1–3) or the unweighted mean across counties (columns 4–6), in percentage points. Counties enter if they contain at least three member records with the relevant information. Interval columns report 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles across 500 resamples at the Falter–Kater sampling fraction; iid columns resample cards independently, and cluster columns resample counties with replacement and sample cards within each selected county at the same nominal rate.

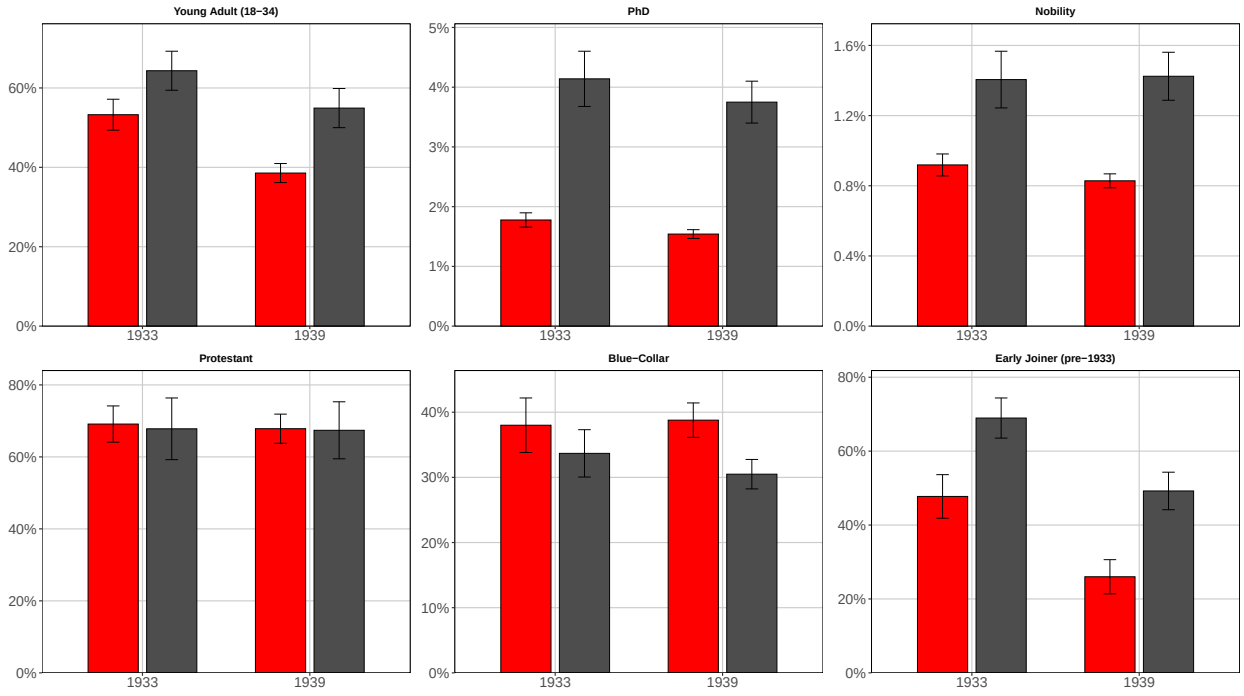
[5] We note, however, that the sample size is insufficient to recover how these within-county differences changed year-by-year.

Figure B.5: Validation and Sampling Precision in the Falter–Kater Membership File



Note. Panel **A** reports national occupational and gender shares for the 1925–1945 analysis period. Filled red triangles apply our coding to the full analysis file; open red diamonds apply the same coding to the Falter (2022) microdata using the released (relative) sampling weights. Workers and self-employed members exclude agriculture; farmers are agricultural self-employed; white-collar members combine *Angestellte* and *Beamte*. Occupational shares are computed among records with valid employment-status and industry information. Panel **B** reports the within-county difference between the member share and the 1933 census share, in percentage points. Red estimates weight counties by the number of members contributing to the relevant share; gray estimates weight eligible counties equally. Counties enter if they have nonmissing member and census shares. Filled circles are full-file estimates. Thin bars are 95% percentile intervals from 500 iid card resamples at the Falter–Kater sampling fraction. Thick, translucent bars are analogous intervals from 500 county-cluster resamples that draw counties with replacement and sample cards within each selected county at the same nominal rate. Open diamonds use the linked Falter–Kater records with the released weights. White-filled diamonds post-stratify those weights so that their sum in each county equals the full-file member count. Starred rows denote characteristics emphasized by Falter (1991).

Figure B.6: NSDAP vs. SS: Individual-Level Characteristics



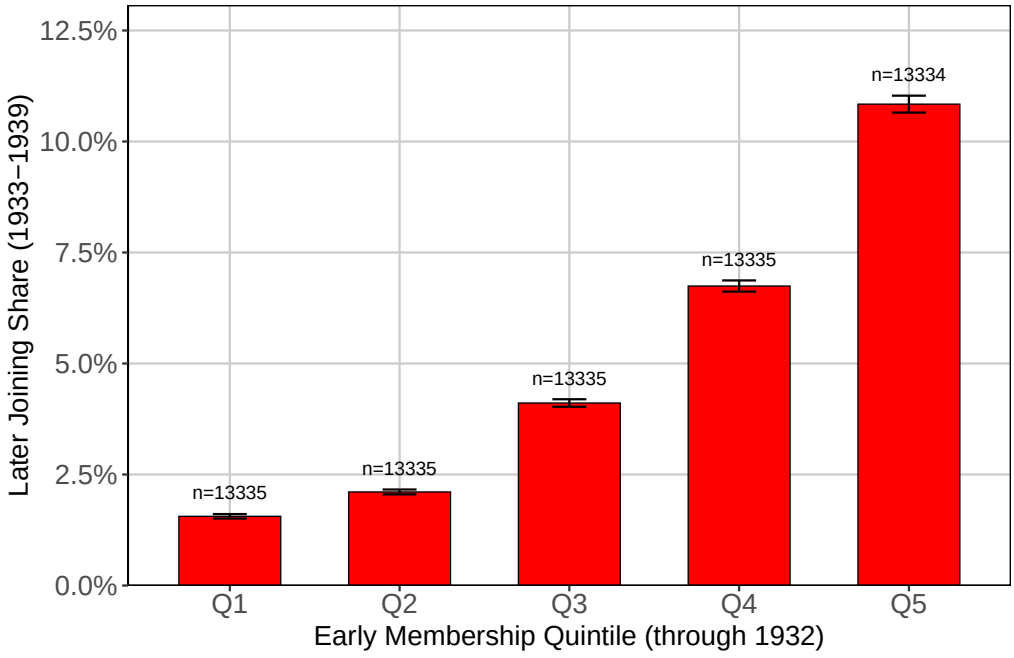
Note. County-level mean shares for NSDAP (red) and SS (dark gray) at 1933 and 1939. We plot differences across six characteristics: Young Adult (18–34), PhD, Nobility, Protestant, Blue-Collar, and Early Joiner (pre-1933). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Table B.3: Balance of Matching Characteristics

	Full sample			Matched sample		
	Early	Non-early	Std. diff.	Early	Non-early	Std. diff.
Log Population	6.753	5.352	1.065	6.181	6.171	0.009
Urban	0.252	0.019	0.721	0.072	0.072	-0.001
Protestant Share	0.688	0.695	-0.018	0.701	0.701	-0.002
Synagogue Presence	0.072	0.006	0.346	0.014	0.012	0.019
Jewish Share (District)	0.004	0.003	0.145	0.003	0.003	-0.008
Female Share (District)	0.508	0.507	0.069	0.507	0.507	-0.004
Agricultural Share (District)	0.371	0.445	-0.415	0.394	0.393	0.004
Blue-Collar Share (District)	0.407	0.406	0.003	0.402	0.403	-0.002
Self-Employed Share (District)	0.246	0.246	0.003	0.251	0.250	0.004
East of Elbe	0.443	0.655	-0.438	0.444	0.443	0.002
Municipalities		73,513			13,024	

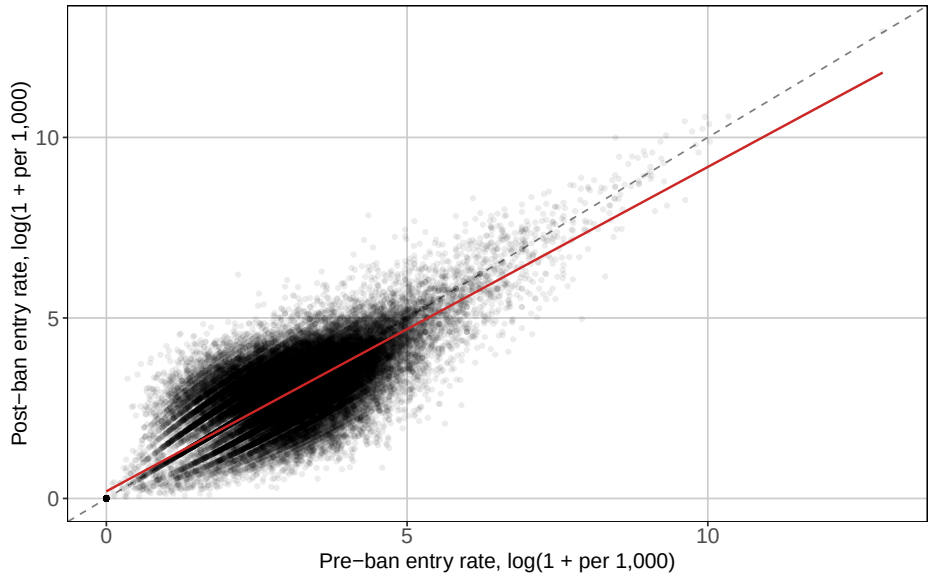
Note. Municipal cross-section showing covariate balance for the sample in Figure 13. Early joiners are municipalities with a first joiner before 1929. The first three columns report the full sample; the last three report the matched sample. Standardized differences are differences in means divided by the square root of the average of the two group variances. Matching is one-to-one within county using a Lasso-based propensity score, with pairs retained only if their propensity scores differ by no more than 0.05.

Figure B.7: Early Local Membership and Later Joining



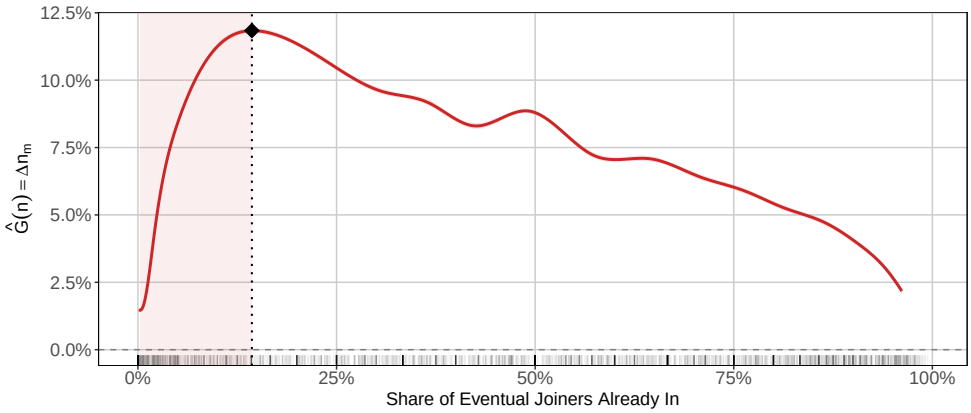
Note. Municipalities binned into quintiles by cumulative NSDAP members through 1932. Bars show the mean share of the remaining 1933 population that joins during 1933–1939, with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure B.8: Cross-Wave Persistence of Municipal mobilization



Note. Municipal NSDAP entry rates in the 12 months preceding the admissions ban (June 1932–May 1933, horizontal axis) and the 12 months following its lift (May 1937–April 1938, vertical axis), expressed per 1,000 residents and plotted on a $\log(1+x)$ scale. The dashed gray line marks $y = x$; the red line is an OLS fit with a 95% confidence band.

Figure B.9: Flow Map of Municipal Entry Growth



Note. Descriptive flow map based on annual membership figures. For each year, we use an end-of-year snapshot. The horizontal axis shows the share of people who would eventually join the NSDAP in a municipality and had already joined by the previous year; the vertical axis shows the year-to-year change in that share. The curve summarizes the relationship using a flexible statistical fit, with the degree of smoothness chosen from the data by restricted maximum likelihood (REML). The shaded area shows the 95% confidence band. The diamond marks the highest point of the fitted curve, and the small tick marks along the horizontal axis show a random subsample of the observed lagged shares. We interpret the flattening of the curve after its peak as descriptive evidence that the pool of eventual joiners saturated.

Table B.4: March 1933 Wave: Pre-March Membership Composition

	Female	Agric.	Admin/Svc	Trade	Industry	Protest.	Blue-Coll.	Self-Empl.	
				NSDAP membership share					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Post March 1933 x Any NSDAP Member	0.0138***	0.0151***	0.0128***	0.0124***	0.0161***	0.0165***	0.0160***	0.0159***	0.0073***
	(0.0002)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0004)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Female	0.0083***								0.0038***
	(0.0003)								(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Agriculture		0.0034***							0.0035***
		(0.0003)							(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Admin & Services			0.0088***						0.0053***
			(0.0002)						(0.0002)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Trade & Transp.				0.0092***					0.0064***
				(0.0003)					(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Industry					0.0017***				0.0028***
					(0.0002)				(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Protestant						0.0007*			0.0005
						(0.0004)			(0.0004)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Blue-Collar							0.0017***		-0.0001
							(0.0002)		(0.0003)
Post March 1933 x Above med. Self-Employed								0.0019***	-0.0012***
								(0.0002)	(0.0003)
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Month FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean Outcome	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247	0.0247
Observations	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210	1,947,210
R^2	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.89

Note. Municipality-by-month panel, January 1932–June 1934. Dependent variable: municipal NSDAP membership share. Post March 1933_t equals one from March 1933 onward. Columns 1–8 interact Post with a binary indicator for whether municipality m lies above the cross-municipality median on the indicated share of its pre-March members, controlling for Post $\times$ Any NSDAP Member. The Protestant share is the mean of the individual-level Bayesian name-based Protestant probability across pre-March members. Column 9 enters all eight interactions jointly. Municipality and month fixed effects included. Standard errors clustered at the county level in parentheses. Significance: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

C Historical Background

This appendix complements the historical background in Section 2 by providing additional detail on admission rules and their evolution (C.1); the local organizations that administered admission (C.2); the party's initial success and failure in reaching individuals and municipalities (C.3); the social settings and local nodes through which recruitment operated (C.4); directed aspects of recruitment (C.5); and local party members' participation in persecution (C.6). The available regional and village studies cover a selective set of localities, the historical cases discussed here therefore need not be representative of the broader population of municipalities.

C.1 Membership Restrictions

We summarize the restrictions on membership over time in Table C.1. The statutory criteria changed little between 1921 and 1945; admission policy changed repeatedly. The statutes of 1921 and 1926 opened membership to Germans of "Aryan" descent with an unblemished record (*unbescholten*); the 1926 statute added a minimum age of 18. Jews, "Colored People," Roma and Sinti, Freemasons, and members of other secret societies were excluded, and members paid dues. In 1937 the racial criterion was extended to exclude persons classified as "hereditarily ill" (Reibel, 2002, p. 164). The party was banned after the November 1923 putsch and admitted no one until its refounding in February 1925 (Pridham, 1973, pp. 50–51).

Admission ran through the local branch, and rejection required no justification. The organizational handbook of the party stated the rejection rule as follows: "Rejection of admission is made, without any statement of reasons, by the responsible Ortsgruppenleiter in agreement with the competent party court" (*Organisationsbuch*, quoted in Reibel, 2002, p. 90). Applications were rejected over personal conflicts with local party officers and, after March 1933, on suspicion of opportunism. After the 1937 reopening, applicants first had to prove their willingness to work in the branch, for example as block helpers, to attain the status of *Parteianwärter* (Reibel, 2002, p. 164).

The ban of May 1, 1933 was a reaction to the entry wave of that spring with an argument about ideological purity. As applications surged after the seizure of power, the leadership argued that admission had to become more selective, and the Reich treasurer closed admissions by decree of April 19, 1933 (Verfügung 6/33). Members admitted after May 1, 1933 faced a two-year probationary period (*Anwärterzeit*). Within the party there was discussion of screening the 1933 cohort and expelling those judged insufficiently committed; the expulsions were not carried out (Falter, 2020).

The ban leaked through organizational and territorial exemptions. Members of the party youth organizations could join on reaching maturity, at 18 for men and 21 for women. In 1935 the Gauleiter of the Bayerische Ostmark obtained an exemption that admitted 66,000 new members from his Gau; other Gauleiter tried to replicate it and failed. Members from the Saar were admitted from November 1935, former Stahlhelm members of pre-1933 standing from April 1936, and leading members of the factory-cell organization NSBO and the artisans' and retailers' organization NS-HAGO in spring 1937. The last episode alone added approximately 230,000 members, against 5,000 to 10,000 in the other months of 1937 (Falter, 2020). Some Gauleiter also circumvented the ban by admitting applicants without remitting contributions to the central treasury (Grüttner, 2014, p. 101).

The reopening of April 20, 1937 (Anordnung 18/37) was announced centrally, with a single effective date for the whole Reich; implementation varied locally. Priority went to members of party organizations who had "proven themselves," especially the SA, SS, NSKK, and the Reich Labor Service; doctors, dentists, and pharmacists could apply with a Hitler Youth record (Falter, 2020, p. 45). Admission quotas allocated by the Reich treasurer were recalculated down to the local

Table C.1: Admission to the NSDAP, 1921–1945

Period	Who could join	Excluded	Special provisions	Statutes
1921 – Nov. 1923	Germans of "Aryan" descent with an unblemished record (*unbescholten*)	Non-"Aryans"; non-Germans; those not *unbescholten*	None	Statute of 1921, §3
Nov. 1923 – Feb. 1925	No admissions: party banned and dissolved after the putsch	—	Refounding cancels all prior cards; every member reapplies	Ban of Nov. 1923
Feb. 1925 – Apr. 1933	*Unbescholten* Germans of purely "Aryan" descent, age 18 and older	As above; Freemasons and members of other secret societies	None	Statute of May 22, 1926, §3
May 1933 – Apr. 1937	Ban. HJ and BDM members at maturity; initially also SA, SS, NSBO	All others	Bayerische Ostmark (1935; 66,000); Saar (1935); pre-1933 Stahlhelm members (1936); leading NSBO and NS-HAGO members (1937; approx. 230,000)	Verfügung 6/33 of Apr. 19, 1933
May. 1937 – Apr. 1939	Relaxation: "proven" members of SA, SS, NSKK, RAD; loose in practice	As in the previous period	*Parteianwärter* status introduced; Austria and Sudetenland (1938); Memel and Protectorate (1939)	Anordnung 18/37 of Apr. 20, 1937
May 1939 – Jan. 1942	All Germans meeting the statutes	As above; from 1939 also the clergy	*Parteianwärter* status abolished; temporary stops on applications to clear backlogs	Anordnung 34/39 of May 10, 1939
Feb. 1942 – Jul. 1944	Second ban. HJ and BDM graduates at 18; honorably discharged and war-disabled veterans; resettlers	All others; exceptions only *ad personam*	Entry age lowered to 17 (Jan. 1944); applications from newly annexed territories stopped	Bekanntgaben 7/42 and 13/42
From Jul. 20, 1944	Additionally: active soldiers	As above	Soldiers previously barred by the Reichswehr law	Anordnung of Jul. 1944

Note. Adapted and condensed from Table 1.1 in Falter (2020); translation ours; the row for 1923–1925 added. Dates are centrally announced eligibility rules; local implementation varied (Appendices C.1 and C.2). Abbreviations: HJ (Hitler Youth), BDM (League of German Girls), NSKK (National Socialist Motor Corps), RAD (Reich Labor Service), NSBO (factory-cell organization), NS-HAGO (artisans' and retailers' organization).

branches, and Gau leaderships issued age and occupation templates for admissions (Reibel, 2002, pp. 90, 164). In practice the restrictions were applied loosely, and most who applied could join. The motive was in part fiscal. The party reopened admission "mainly because of [its] great need for money" (Hoser, 2007); dues were its principal recurring revenue (Lingg, 1939, pp. 162–163), and operating revenues grew from 25.3 to 188.5 million RM between 1934 and 1939 (Hoser, 2007).

The full lifting of May 10, 1939 (Anordnung 34/39) removed the ban, abolished the *Parteianwärter* status, and barred the clergy from membership. The reopening created processing bottlenecks, and the central organization repeatedly imposed temporary stops on the submission of new applications to clear the backlog (Falter, 2020).

The second ban, effective February 2, 1942, closed mass entry for the rest of the war. Whether it was motivated by administrative overload or by renewed doubts about the commitment of new members is not settled. Exemptions remained for graduates of the youth organizations at age 18, with recruitment benchmarks of 30 percent of Hitler Youth boys and 5 percent of (BDM) *Bund Deutscher Mädel* girls, for honorably discharged and war-disabled veterans, and for resettlers to the Reich. In January 1944 the entry age fell to 17; from July 20, 1944 active soldiers could join, while applications from the newly annexed territories were stopped (Falter, 2020).

C.2 Local Organization: Ortsgruppe, Stützpunkt, and Kreisleitung

Membership was tied to a local branch. Local branches (*Ortsgruppen*) and their sub-threshold form, the *Stützpunkte*, were "the organizational frame within which admissions could take place at all" (Reibel, 2002, p. 40). Where a municipality had no unit of its own, applications ran through the branch responsible for the area, typically in a neighboring municipality (Reibel, 2002, p. 90; Grill, 1983, pp. 63–64). In our data such members appear at their home municipality, since members are assigned by residential address (Section 3).

Founding a local branch required a minimum stock of local members. The national leadership required six enrolled members for an Ortsgruppe in July 1926 and at least fifteen from September 1928 (Reibel, 2002, p. 29). Gau practice added thresholds of its own; a 1932 circular of Gau Süd-Hannover-Braunschweig set the guideline that "every place with more than 50 members becomes an Ortsgruppe" (Reibel, 2002, p. 36). Below these thresholds, members formed a Stützpunkt with an upgrade path. For example, the Stützpunkt of Georg Saal's village was subordinated to the Ortsgruppenleiter of a neighboring village until 1935 (Zofka, 1981, pp. 411–412).

The local leader held gatekeeping power that the hierarchy could override. He proposed who from his area should be admitted (Reibel, 2002, p. 90). The Kreisleiter recruited the local Ortsgruppenleiter and the Gauleiter confirmed him (Wagner, 1998, pp. 63–64). This hierarchy could also bypass the local Ortsgruppenleiter. In Gau Westfalen-Nord in 1937, all applications had to be sent to the Kreisleitung, Ortsgruppenleiter were forbidden to reject applications on their own, and Kreis admission committees approved applications that the local leader had turned down (Reibel, 2002, p. 90).

After the party's seizure of power in 1933, its focus shifted from individual members to households, and its function shifted from recruitment to administration and surveillance. From 1936 the size of a unit was defined by the households it supervised rather than the members it contained (Reibel, 2002, p. 382); from 1938 every independent rural municipality with members was to form its own Ortsgruppe (Reibel, 2002, pp. 61–62). The local layer was important for the regime apparatus. Of the 503,379 political officers counted in 1935, 93.6 percent served in Ortsgruppen and Stützpunkte, against 5.5 percent in the Kreis leaderships and less than 1 percent in the Gau and Reich leaderships (Wagner, 1998, p. 13). Dues of 30 pfennig per month, of which 10 went to Munich, were collected irregularly (Noakes, 1971, pp. 93–94).

C.3 Early Joiners

Contemporaries and historians consistently attribute the origins of local party organization to individual early joiners. "Local successes are almost invariably the result of the activity of the branch leader, or of a few energetic members," the *Völkischer Beobachter* observed in May 1928 (quoted in Noakes, 1971, pp. 123–124). Pridham (1973, pp. 108–109) similarly emphasizes the "personal factor": the branch leader 'was the concrete representative of the NSDAP for the local inhabitants," and his standing in the town shaped local attitudes toward the party. Studying membership rolls, Anheier (2003) finds that "single members"—members in places without any local organization—gave the party footholds in communities it had not yet reached, while their locations traced personal and organizational networks.

The initial contacts through which the party reached a locality were often idiosyncratic. The party chapter in *Solln* originated with a war widow who had met Hitler by chance in November 1919; the first member in one Baden town was an eighteen-year-old who encountered the party on a summer trip to Stuttgart in 1921; and the first group in northwestern Lower Saxony was started by a student who returned from Munich carrying a copy of the party program (Anheier, 2003; Grill, 1983, pp. 56–57; Noakes, 1971, p. 21). Bruno Wenzel, who later founded the Hanover branch, discovered the party among the völkisch pamphlets he was paid to distribute at the Leipzig fair and became member no. 3368 in May 1921; a war veteran deported to Bavaria for his political activities founded the chapter in Pasing (Noakes, 1971, p. 14; Anheier, 2003).

An initial member, however, did not necessarily produce a local organization, and the gap between the two could persist for years. Georg Saal, recruited during harvest work by a journeyman employed by his brother, remained the sole party member in his village for nineteen months. Only after a neighboring branch staged a recruitment meeting, at which the Kreisleiter of Günzburg spoke, did the village acquire an organization: the evening produced "twelve members, who elected me Stützpunktleiter the following Sunday" (Zofka, 1981, pp. 411–412). An Abel author describes the same sequence in Buching. At the village's first party meeting in August 1930, she was the first to sign the admission form; 'twelve of my work colleagues did the same," and the village acquired its Stützpunkt (Abel report 3).

Even after an organization formed, early groups remained fragile and could disappear for reasons only weakly related to local political demand. The branch in Schwarme, Kreis Grafschaft Hoya, collapsed under a first leader who, "as a so-called big farmer," 'did not have the confidence of our many small farmers, cottagers and artisans" (Noakes, 1971, p. 100); the party disappeared from Kreis Günzburg after 1924 (Zofka, 1981, p. 391); and when the Ortsgruppe Stühren was dissolved in a 1932 reorganization, most of its members lost interest and left the party (Reibel, 2002, p. 37). Across Lower Saxony, activists of the early 1920s drifted into the Stahlhelm and the Jungdeutscher Orden and returned only after 1928 (Noakes, 1971, p. 95); nationally, resignations exceeded admissions in 1934 (Falter, 2016). The war years further illustrate the consequences of losing individual members. The Ortsgruppe Eschenhahn in Kreis Limburg lost ten of its 24 members to conscription between 1939 and December 1942 (Reibel, 2002, p. 335), and in 1943 the party created the office of "K.-Ortsgruppenleiter" to prevent the conscription of a leader from leaving groups leaderless or forcing mergers (Reibel, 2002, p. 334).

Consistent with this dependence on individual footholds, the party never established a presence in all municipalities. In our data, a substantial share of municipalities had no recorded member even in January 1933 (Figure 10). Szejnmann (1999, p. 52) documents the organizational absence underlying such never-joiner municipalities: in five of the nine villages of one Saxon district where party support remained below the state average, the party "had not organized a single public meeting since November 1925."

Where the sources explain the persistence of such organizational absence, they point both to confessional milieu and to the failure of a local first mover to emerge. Lower Franconia entered 1933 with the lowest membership share of all 32 party districts (Gellately, 2001, p. 133). In Catholic Steinach, part of the village remained aloof from all party organizations without engaging in active resistance (Wöhrle, 2001). As late as 1935, 40.1 percent of mayors in Bavarian rural municipalities had never joined the party, while another 40.6 percent had joined only after the seizure of power (1935 party census, in Zofka, 1981, p. 385). Prominent individuals and local notables could likewise refuse to provide an initial foothold. Alois Lang, internationally known for playing Christ in the Oberammergau Passion Play in 1930 and 1934, repeatedly declined to join the party and did so only in 1937 after sustained pressure from chief administrator Raab (Waddy, 2010, pp. 110–113). In Northeim, a teacher who refused to join the National Socialist Teachers' League dismissed it as "nonsense" (Allen, 1984, p. 208).

Taken together, these accounts distinguish two stages of local party growth. Entry into a municipality often depended on whether an individual first mover created an initial foothold; once such a foothold existed, subsequent growth depended on whether membership spread through the first mover's social environment. The next subsection documents this second stage.

C.4 Diffusion of Membership

Once the party acquired a local foothold, membership often spread through social interaction. Within municipalities, a single recruitment event or visible example could induce several additional entries. The meeting in Georg Saal's village, described above, turned a lone member into a Stützpunkt of thirteen (Zofka, 1981, pp. 411–412). In Northeim, membership surged immediately after Hitler's appointment. By May 1, 1933, close to 1,200 Northeimers had joined, almost 20 percent of the adult population, some from conviction, some for their careers, and some "out of a pure desire to conform" (Allen, 1984, p. 220). The example of respected residents carried weight of its own—"People said, 'If he's in it, it must be all right"' (Allen, 1984, p. 38)—and in Oberammergau, where seven men founded the chapter jointly, the residents of a single household produced "their own joining chain" (Waddy, 2010, pp. 67, 114).

Workplaces provided another important channel of local diffusion. The twelve joiners who followed the Buching author were her work colleagues (Abel report 3). In Marburg, Emil Wißner recruited through the white-collar union DHV and brought residents of his own apartment building into the party (Koshar, 1986, pp. 202–203). From spring 1931, the party organized inside factories through the NSBO (Szejnmann, 1999, p. 111), and the admission of leading NSBO and NS-HAGO members in spring 1937 added approximately 230,000 members (Appendix C.1).

Families likewise transmitted membership across spouses, siblings, and generations. One Abel author joined on August 1, 1931, "urged and encouraged by my son, who was then studying medicine in Kiel" (Abel report 538). Another describes a household whose members entered different parts of the movement: the father was brought in through his son, the eldest son joined the SA, the youngest the Hitler Youth, and the wife became a founding member of the local women's organization in 1929 (Abel report 41). In Oberammergau, "spouses or brothers joined together and were given consecutive numbers" (Waddy, 2010, p. 96); in Northeim, the founding initiative came from two brothers, the Girmanns, who owned a small ironmonger's shop (Noakes, 1971, p. 23).

Local notables could amplify diffusion because their occupations placed them at the center of these social networks. Teachers, one of the professions examined in Table 1, appear particularly prominently in the historical record. Baumgärtner, the teacher in the Günzburg case, was secretary and treasurer of the fire brigade and directed both the church choir and the men's choral society. He joined the party openly in 1929 and retained the choir post. "His recruitment activ-

ity soon bore rich fruit. A number of mostly younger residents joined the party" (Zofka, 1981, p. 409). In Liedolsheim, the schoolteacher August Kramer co-founded the branch and rose to Gau propaganda leader (Grill, 1983, pp. 68–69); nationally, teachers were prominent among entrants (Childers, 1983). Refusal was sufficiently unusual to attract notice: in the whole of Northeim, one teacher declined to join the National Socialist Teachers' League (Allen, 1984, p. 208).

Policemen appear in the sources first as individual participants in local networks and later as instruments of the regime. Gustav Seifert, a former policeman working in a factory, co-founded the Hanover branch in 1921 and explained that the party attracted him because it was run by "men of action" (*Männer der Faust*) (Noakes, 1971, pp. 14–17). By February 1933, Goebbels noted in his diary that police officers who had been hostile were "now all Nazis" (Goebbels, 1993–2008, entry of 24 February 1933, vol. 2/III, p. 134). In the Priental villages, the local policeman served as a key informant of the regime in 1934 (Willer, 2024, p. 88).

Pastors, by contrast, appear primarily as limits on rather than conduits of diffusion. The Catholic milieu slowed the party's growth in Lower Franconia, Steinach, and Aachen (Appendix C.3); a Steinach meeting in July 1932 was announced under the title "Can a Catholic be a National Socialist?" (Wöhrle, 2001); and a Gau leadership warned that political work in the municipality of Windisch-Bleiberg must not be left 'to the Catholic priest in this municipality alone" (Reibel, 2002, p. 305). In April 1936, the pastor of Sachrang was himself denounced to the *Stürmer* (Willer, 2024, p. 72), and from 1939 the clergy was barred from membership altogether (Appendix C.1). The one clerical voice favoring the movement in the Abel corpus is a book by a Catholic priest, which one author credits with prompting readers to reconsider (Abel report 146).

C.5 Party Recruitment Initiatives

We next ask how far the center, rather than local initiative, placed the party in particular municipalities. The sources document the objectives of the leadership, the campaign methods through which the party entered new places, and – in the circulars of the party itself – the limits on their use.

The leadership pursued mass and selectivity simultaneously. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler instructed functionaries to win as many followers as possible, so that a growing organization could carry ever larger propaganda (p. 654, quoted in Rietzler, 1982, p. 408), while warning against admitting them too readily (Appendix C.1). Composition figured in the aims from the beginning. At Rosenheim in July 1925, Hitler ruled that the first task of the local branches was to win the proletarian masses and that the party should not become a "party of men with the doctor's title" (Pridham, 1973, pp. 45–46).

Admission policy also protected the positions of party officers. From 1933, a candidate for Ortsgruppenleiter had to be an "old fighter" who had joined before the seizure of power – a requirement abandoned only when the shortage of suitable personnel made it untenable – and personal networks shaped the allocation of posts (Reibel, 2002, pp. 385–386). Gauleiter, who could be removed only by Hitler (Broszat, 1981), lobbied for admission exemptions for their own regions. The Gauleiter of the Bayerische Ostmark obtained 66,000 admissions in 1935, while others tried and failed (Falter, 2020). After March 1933, incumbent local leaders rejected applicants they regarded as opportunists (Falter, 2020).

The steering that is documented was coarse. The party aimed in the late 1930s at a membership share of approximately ten percent of the population, nationally and within each Gau (Falter, 2020). Below this target, steering took the form of admission recommendations: in February 1937, the Gau organization leadership of München-Oberbayern recommended that Kreis Ingolstadt admit more farmers, whose number there was "only about two-fifths of the Reich average," and

avoid civil servants, whose share, "at 5.1 percent," lay above it (Reibel, 2002, p. 164). When Hesse-Nassau prioritized workers and farmers among new admissions in 1939, the initiative was regional rather than national (Falter, 2020).

Where the party entered new municipalities, it did so through campaigns of traveling speakers and paramilitary events, and entry followed within weeks. The propaganda department prescribed the sequence for a village; a well-prepared first meeting, then a meeting in a neighboring village advertised in the first, then a "German Evening" for several villages together with the SA and its band (*Wille und Weg*, July 1931, quoted in Pridham, 1973, pp. 229–230). The case evidence follows this pattern. Most branches founded in Lower Saxony before 1930 were founded by traveling speakers such as Dincklage, the "rucksack major," who covered his Gau by bicycle and on foot; in Affinghausen, two years of speaker visits, eleven joiners after a meeting in October 1929, and an SA propaganda march from the neighboring Kreis preceded the founding of the branch (Noakes, 1971, pp. 99–100). Gauleiter Lohse opened Dithmarschen by mailing party newspapers and personal letters to acquaintances, which produced a small branch in the village of Lunden in autumn 1925; a recruitment speech he gave in Heide in January 1926 was followed by the founding of a branch the same evening (Rietzler, 1982, pp. 403–404). In October 1931, several hundred SA men marched with flags and music through Brügge, Groß Buchwald, Negenharrie, and Wattenbek on an "SA advertisement day"; at party meetings in early December, 42 residents of Brügge joined on one evening and 36 residents of Negenharrie on another, and the Ortsgruppe Brügge was in all likelihood founded at the Brügge meeting (Fentsahm, 2002, pp. 147–148).

The restricted use of these campaigns was itself policy. A circular of September 1925 reserved appearances by Hitler for branches "which can already show a success," stressing that Hitler was "not a wandering propaganda speaker but the Führer of the movement" (Pridham, 1973, p. 51), and Hitler declined the request of the Liedolsheim activists to come to Baden or to send an associate – the activists joined the Munich branch before returning home (Grill, 1983, p. 70). Financial and logistical constraints were initially binding. Propaganda events required halls and printed material that the party could barely pay for, and a bicycle was often the only means of transport (Pridham, 1973, pp. 59, 63; Noakes, 1971, p. 95). Rietzler (1982, p. 192) concludes that the first Stützpunkte in the north arose as a rule from local völkisch groups and not from direct intervention from Munich, and Goebbels argued in 1927 for developing "one or two dozen" large cities into bulwarks of the movement before extending the work to the countryside (quoted in Rietzler, 1982, p. 408). After 1933, the chronic problem of the branches was staffing their posts (Reibel, 2002, p. 164); one branch leader proposed in 1939 that the municipalities that had become burdensome to him be separated from his branch (Reibel, 2002, pp. 61–62).

C.6 Local Party Penetration and Persecution

Section 6 relates local party membership to the deportation and emigration of Jewish residents. After 1933, the Ortsgruppe became the local surveillance organ of the regime. Before the seizure of power, the branches had organized campaigns and recruited members; afterward, they became the base for monitoring the population (Reibel, 2002, pp. 49–50). The organizational handbook instructed the Blockleiter to "have the spreaders of damaging rumors identified and report them to the Ortsgruppe, so that the competent state agency can be notified" (quoted in Wagner, 1998, p. 69), and Wagner (1998, pp. 64, 74) describes the Ortsgruppenleiter as a potential "village denunciant" who "was precisely informed about the social, family, and financial circumstances of the population living in his area."

Denunciations were driven significantly by the local population. In the surviving Gestapo case files of Lower Franconia, 59 percent of the information came from the population and 13

percent through the party and its organizations (Gellately, 2001, p. 134). Party officers were among the recipients and acted on the information supplied by locals. In Würzburg in August 1933, neighbors denounced a couple to the local branch leader, and the SS paraded the man through town with a placard – an action "completely illegal, because at that time there was no law against sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews" (Gellately, 2001, p. 133). Gellately (2001, pp. 135–136) stresses that this took place "even in Lower Franconia, an area not known for its support of either Nazism or antisemitism up to 1933."

The execution of anti-Jewish measures by the local party depended on its local knowledge. The boycott of April 1, 1933 was preceded by a cell-by-cell registration of Jewish businesses, law offices, and medical practices by the block leaders (Reibel, 2002, p. 317). The chronicle of one Frankfurt cell records the sequence: 36 registered Jewish residents in June 1935, six by September 1941, and in March 1944 the entry that the last Jewish resident had died and the cell was "completely free of Jews" (Reibel, 2002, p. 326). Aryanization drew on the knowledge of the Ortsgruppenleiter about residents, property, and whereabouts (Willer, 2024, p. 87), and the Gestapo carried out deportations together with the local SA and SS (Reibel, 2002, pp. 325–326).

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