

Parliamentary representation and right-wing violence: Evidence from Nazi street brawls in the Weimar Republic

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Abstract

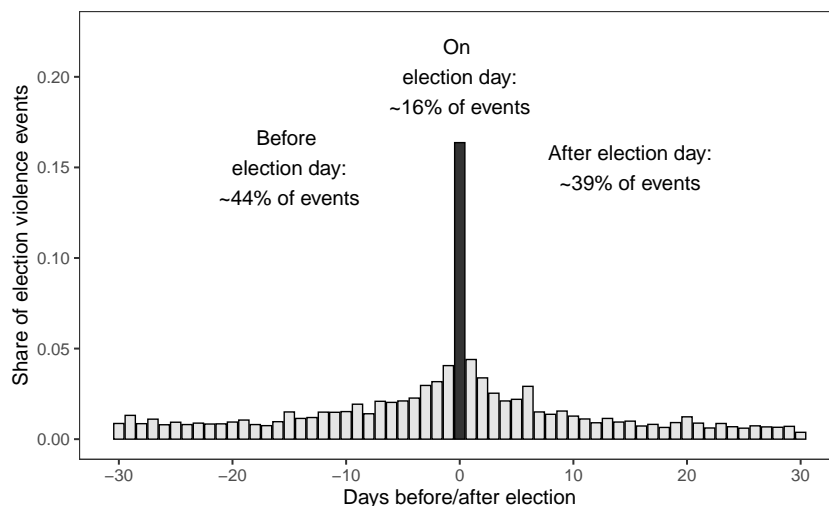
A core promise of democratic elections is to transform political violence into non-violent, institutionalized conflict in parliament. But elections can also incite bloodshed: they can trigger grievances among election losers and equip radical election winners with resources to orchestrate even more violence. Does parliamentary representation curb or fuel street violence? We investigate this question in the context of the July 1932 Reichstag elections in Weimar Germany. We match the home towns of Nazi party candidates to locations of street violence from digitized Prussian police records. Exploiting the randomness between candidates who did and did not receive just enough votes to attain a Reichstag seat we identify the effects of Nazi representation in parliament on street brawls in the Weimar Republic. Initial results indicate that parliamentary representation led to more street violence in elected candidates' home towns, especially when NSDAP candidates had links to the Nazi paramilitary organization, the SA. Our findings have important implications for our understanding of post-election violence, consequences of right-wing representation, and democratic stability.

1 Introduction

Elections, at their core, make a key promise to societies: they are an effective tool to non-violently organize the transfer of political power. Unfortunately, empirical reality does not always match this hope. Throughout history, elections have been marred by episodes of significant violence before, during, and after ballots are cast. In the first half of the so-called “super election year” of 2024, countries from Mexico, to Indonesia, or India have been rattled by violent clashes surrounding voting day (ACLED 2024a,b). Paradoxically, elections often actually inflame the societal disputes they are meant to settle.

Most research has focused on explaining why violence occurs before elections. Findings suggest that violence can be a powerful tool to influence election outcomes by discouraging or mobilizing voters. Violence also reflects state repression of pre-election unrest (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014; Harish and Little 2017; Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020; Daxecker 2020; Fjelde 2020). This empirical focus on pre-election violence leaves a significant blind spot: the period following elections (Wilkinson 2006; ?; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2018; Thomson et al. 2021). As we show in Figure 1, almost half of electoral violence events occur after election day. Why does violence

Figure 1: Election violence



Note: Data from the ECAV dataset by Daxecker, Amicarelli, and Jung (2019)

occur after voting is over?

To answer this question we study the case of the violent July 1932 parliamentary elections in the late Weimar Republic, shortly before Adolf Hitler’s and his Nazi party’s (NSDAP) rise to power.

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The election was not only a landmark event for the rise of the NSDAP, which saw their voting shares being doubled to over 37% of the vote, but also enables us to collect fine-grained data on violence in combination with electoral results. While the NSDAP as a party gained tremendously in votes overall, due to the electoral system—a fixed party-list proportional representation system—several regional chapters remained unsuccessful with their candidates as they were lower on the electoral lists than successful NSDAP candidates. Thus, we zoom in on a so far underappreciated driver of post-election violence: how elections create winners and losers, especially within parties—and how this winner/loser dynamic *within* parties, in turn, can fuel continued violence once ballots are cast.

On the one hand, it is plausible that a party's *non-elected* chapters might resort to violence. Put simply, chapters represented by candidates who fail to enter parliament might resort to violence purely out of frustration over having not enough votes to win a seat in parliament. Given past results, and the general public climate, NSDAP chapters had strong reasons to expect electoral successes. Frustration, here defined as the non-fulfillment of expected electoral success, and its link to aggression is well known in psychological research and confirmed in various empirical studies (Dollard et al. 1939; Priks 2010; Munyo and Rossi 2013). This frustration-driven violence might reflect attempts to challenge the legitimacy of other, more successful parties and to thwart those parties' influence on policy and governance. Not-elected candidates may also seek to distract from their defeat and to signal their continued political relevance to those comrades who did get elected into parliament. Such frustration and signaling could even escalate to full-blown attempts to use violence to reverse the election outcome as a whole.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that it is chapters whose candidates are elected, were electorally successful, that fuel post-election violence. These chapters are formally represented by a candidate in parliament, but are excluded from political power, as their party is refused participation in government. As a result, elected chapters need to square the fact that they've "won" a seat in the parliament with no realistic perspective to use this seat to shape government policy. This dissonance intensifies political grievances, as a results frustration with the political process, and should be especially strong for candidates from radicalized, authoritarian parties who see no value in parliamentary opposition. In addition, elected candidates have strategic reasons to keep up extra-parliamentary pressure to influence coalition bargaining so their party does gain political power after

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all. In addition—and in contrast to the non-elected candidates—winning actual parliament seats might help elected candidates to mobilize personnel for street fights along a bandwagoning/rally-around-the-flag logic.

To distinguish between those two mechanisms empirically, we compare violence in the home towns of Nazi party candidates who were elected to the Reichstag to home towns of not-elected Nazi party candidates in the 1932 July election. To do so we bring together a rich amount of archival documents not only covering violence on a daily basis—stemming from digitized Prussian police records—but also archived electoral lists from the NSDAP along with local election results.

Our research design exploits the randomness between candidates who did and did not receive just enough votes to attain a Reichstag seat in a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD). This design allows us to identify the effects of Nazi representation in parliament on street brawls in the aftermath of the July 1932 election in the Weimar Republic.

We find support for the main implication of the second of the two proposed theoretical pathways: post-election violence is particularly prevalent in the home towns of *elected* Nazi party candidates. Our RDD analysis provides strong causal evidence for this interpretation, with results remaining robust across common RDD model validations and bandwidths, fixed effects specifications, and covariate adjustments.

We also explore supplementary theoretical implications to shed light on the potential mechanisms that drive these results, drawing on additional historical data sources. Violence at the time was orchestrated by violent organizations, with the two most prominent and active being the communists and fascist groups, in particular the armed wing of the NSDAP, the "Sturmabteilung" or Storm Division (SA). Relying on archived and hand-coded "mood reports" by SA unit leaders, we show that units with many elected Nazi candidates in their territory were a) more dissatisfied with the political future of the Nazi struggle, and b) had more resources at their disposal to orchestrate violence, as reflected by SA membership increases in SA territories with more elected candidates.

Our findings advance several important lines of research. First, we make both a theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature on election violence. Theoretically, we conceptualize (and show empirically) how elections can create winners and losers within a party, and how this dynamic can fuel post-election violence. This approach complements previous research that has

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typically concentrated on institutional settings that shape violence in the run-up to elections—such as types of elections, characteristics of party systems, or the extent of ethnic and religious polarization and discrimination (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020; Fjelde 2020; Daxecker and Rauschenbach 2023; Daxecker 2020; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014; Nellis, Weaver, and Rosenzweig 2016; Wilkinson 2006; Bratton 2008). Empirically, we add causally identified evidence to a literature that has predominantly focused on cross-country comparisons. While newer studies have transitioned to a subnational level (Daxecker 2020; Fjelde and Höglund 2022; Wahman and Goldring 2020), clean causal identification has still been difficult in settings that involve multiple case contexts and time periods—a challenge our detailed focus on the Weimar setting can overcome.

Second, our results contribute to the literature on how ideology and perceived injustice can fuel conflict and violence more broadly. A key argument in this field is that individuals or groups who feel being treated unfairly—e.g. by a repressive government, by not being allowed to participate politically, by not receiving fair payments in distributive game experiments—are more likely to express anger and discontent, including resorting to violence (Gurr 2011; Henrich et al. 2006; Moore 1978; Wood 2003). We demonstrate how, under certain conditions, elections can contribute to fueling such perceptions. We show that candidates—especially of radical, system-opposing parties like the NSDAP—can consider being elected to parliament not as a way to influence policy, but as an obstruction to that goal, inflaming motivation and opportunity for violence in the process.

Third, our findings complement research on organizational drivers of conflict. While motivation for violence is ubiquitous, actors also need access to logistics, manpower, and organizational structures, to engage in systematic acts of violence (Lidow 2016; Zhukov 2016). We show that links between political and paramilitary organizations are critical ingredients in the context of post-election violence, and that violence is particularly likely where candidates are elected *and* can rely on sufficient members in a hierarchical organization to orchestrate this violence.

Finally, and most generally, our findings speak to the political science literature on the winner-loser gap. The key finding of that literature is that voters perceive democracy differently, depending on whether the party they support won or lost an election (Blais and Gélinau 2007; Dahlberg and Linde 2017; Nadeau, Daoust, and Dassonneville 2023). We extend this finding to party candidates and show that, under certain conditions, candidates who win seats not necessarily develop more

positive views about democracy. Instead, in situations where radical candidates have access to organized means of violence, winning seats can contribute to undermining democracy by way of stoking violence—as is exemplified in the eventual death of democracy in the Weimar Republic.

2 Case: Elections and political violence in the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic is perhaps the most famous and important case of democratic collapse in history (e.g. Luebbert, Collier, and Lipset 1991; Berman 1997). Endemic, ubiquitous violence undermined this short-lived German democratic experiment (Ziemann 2003; Schumann 2009). Many cities saw large-scale revolutionary uprisings and counter-mobilization in 1918–19, from the conclusion of World War One through the Republic’s founding. Political bloodshed and strife never ceased. The early 1920s brought attempted coups in Berlin and Munich, large-scale strikes and workers’ revolts, and assassinations. The late 1920s were relatively calm, despite economic turmoil, before a renewed surge of political violence in the early 1930s contributed to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. Weimar’s final years were marked by intense, widespread strife (Blasius 2005).

Electoral violence in Germany in 1932 occurred within this broader context. Compared to most political systems today, Weimar Germany was distinguished by high polarization. Parties from the communist revolutionary left through the Nazi fascist right had significant support. Although Catholics and small numbers of minorities such as Poles formed distinct political mileus, religion and ethnicity played a minor role in German politics compared to many polities experiencing electoral violence today. In distinction to many contemporary developing democracies, Germany’s formal parliamentary institutions were also quite old and stable by the 1930s. Elections to the *Reichstag* had been held since 1871. Electoral violence in Weimar Germany was structured by this high degree of polarization among strong political parties and their hierarchically organized paramilitary organizations.

2.1 Parties and elections in the Weimar Republic

German politics from 1918–1933 were divided between “Weimar parties” and those that sought to overthrow the regime. The former were the pre-war Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Catholic Zentrum, along with the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). Combined, they received over three-quarters (76.2%) of the first Weimar vote in 1919. Their support declined markedly thereafter.

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Anti-regime parties included the monarchist German-National People's Party (DNVP) and German People's Party (DVP), who were eventually overshadowed by the Nazis. The left-wing Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and Communist Party (KPD) both advocated a revolutionary Soviet-style regime. On the fascist right, the Nazis grew their support from 6.6 to 18.3% of the vote from 1924-1930, followed by an almost twenty percentage point gain in the first 1932 election. Core Weimar parties barely won a combined 44% of Reichstag seats in 1930 (Möller 2018: 446–49). Parliamentary governance became impossible. An escalating political and constitutional crisis culminated in Hitler's nomination as Chancellor in January 1933.

National parliamentary elections in the Weimar Republic were held under a proportional system.¹ All adult citizens were entitled to vote, including women. The Republic had thirty-five large parliamentary electoral districts, whose boundaries generally followed historical regions. There were no direct mandates for the Reichstag. Each party put forward a list of candidates for each electoral district. In general, parties won one mandate for every 60,000 votes in a district.² The Weimar electoral system generated a splintered party system benefiting small, regionally concentrated movements. This became a major obstacle to the formation of stable, pro-regime governments – by 1930, no fewer than fifteen parties were represented in the Reichstag (Möller 2018: 121–25).

Two dramatic Reichstag elections in 1932 were central to Weimar's crisis and collapse. The first, on July 31, saw the Nazi vote share double to 37.3%, mostly at the expense of conservative, liberal and smaller parties. The second election on November 6 saw Nazi support decline slightly to 33.1%. A hopeless parliamentary constellation after the two 1932 elections saw anti-regime Nazis, KPD and DNVP holding a majority of seats. Two short-lived governments failed to win the support of the Reichstag. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was named Chancellor by President Hindenburg, signaling the impending doom of Weimar democracy (Möller 2018: 340–65).³ Both 1932 elections were characterized by widespread, intense electoral violence.

¹State (*Land*) and presidential elections followed their own rules and are outside the scope of this study.

²Excess votes were aggregated by 16 *Wahlkreisverbände*, or electoral district groups that also more or less mirrored historical geographic divisions like states or kingdoms. If a party won more or less than 60,000 votes in a single electoral district, excess votes were combined by district group, and if this total reached 60,000 then an additional mandate was assigned to that party.

³Hitler's nomination as Chancellor was not strictly contrary to parliamentary norms because he was leader of the largest Reichstag faction. The final death of Weimar democracy came two months later. Amid pervasive Nazi repression and propaganda, Weimar's final, fundamentally flawed election was held on March 5, 1933. From late March, Hitler ruled as dictator by emergency decree under the Enabling Law.

2.2 Paramilitary organizations and the Nazi SA

Electoral violence was loosely controlled by parliamentary parties in the Weimar Republic. Major parties had associated paramilitary Combat Leagues (*Wehrverbände*). They used violence to organize and secure public events like demonstrations and rallies. Violence was also used to assert control of the streets. It was a central element of strategies to mobilize voters and intimidate opponents (Schumann 2009). The most important Combat Leagues were *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmet) associated with the DNVP; *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* (Reich Banner Black-Red-Gold) associated with the SPD; *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (Red Front Fighters' League) associated with the KPD; and, most notoriously, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA, Storm Division) associated with the Nazis. Violent clashes between these groups were not uncommon throughout the history of the Weimar Republic, but escalated dramatically in the early 1930s, reaching a peak in the decisive year 1932.

The SA was founded in 1921. It had similarities to other parties' Combat Leagues. Members were uniformed and some had previous military training. They were known as aggressive, prone to violence, and personally devoted to Hitler. The SA's initial purpose was to provide security for Nazi events and the party leadership (Longerich 1989: 22–32). It later became a tool of electoral mobilization and violence. The organization grew enormously from a few hundred members in Munich in 1921 to over 250,000 nationwide by 1932. The SA was a key element of the Nazi movement but not formally part of the NSDAP. It was organized hierarchically along military lines. Local groups called *Schar* (4-10 men) and *Trupp* (20-60) were subordinate to larger units, most importantly the *Sturm* (a few hundred) and *Untergruppe* (several thousand). *Sturmbannführer* corresponded loosely to party *Gauleiter*, while each *Untergruppe* covered one or two *Parteigau*e, the territorial units in which the NSDAP was organized (ibid., 93-112).

High-ranking SA leaders were Nazi party members and formally appointed to their positions by the party. The SA retained significant autonomy from the NSDAP, however. Despite being part of the same movement, SA and NSDAP were very distinct organizations and subcultures. SA members were predominantly uneducated and working-class, while party members were mostly middle-class. Many storm troopers were even unemployed or homeless, living in SA boarding houses or barracks. Their training included very little political education or indoctrination. They were often not even party members. SA members' loyalty lay primarily with Hitler and the broader Nazi movement. They

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regarded local political leaders with suspicion or even disdain (Longerich 1989: 115-151; Grant 2004: 53-54).

SA and NSDAP had increasingly divergent goals in the early 1930s. Hitler and the party insisted on the “legal path” to power. For the NSDAP, the SA was an effective tool for mobilizing supporters and intimidating opponents. It was also intended to form the core of a new army after the Nazi seizure of power. The SA resented becoming the NSDAP’s “uniformed cheering squad”, however. It had been constructed to be an independent military organization capable of leading the entire Nazi movement. Indeed, its membership had grown to dwarf that of the party. Leaders and rank and file increasingly insisted on a violent overthrow of the Weimar regime. By 1932, the SA, “increasingly difficult to control and socially and politically divergent from the NSDAP as a whole, became a locus of conflict within National Socialism” (Grant 2004: 56).

Divergence between party and SA leaders was particularly intense on the local level. The SA was formally independent. Finances were the primary instrument of party control. SA units lacked income. Party membership fees, including a special charge to support the SA, were collected by local NSDAP officials. Few resources were passed on to local storm troopers, who had to pay for their uniforms and travel costs themselves. So instead of allowing NSDAP functionaries to control the SA, their control of finances more often bred suspicion and resentment. The Nazis had a tribunal system for adjudicating intra-party disputes. But SA officials refused to accept its jurisdiction over their men, leading to clashes and its suspension in late 1932. In 1930, some SA leaders demanded high-ranking party Reichstag election list places for paramilitaries. These would assure them parliamentary mandates and associated privileges. Hitler bluntly refused this demand, declaring a general rule of “incompatibility of SA leadership and mandates.” This led to SA raids on party offices and even a regional coup against the NSDAP leadership (Longerich 1989: 100-105, 131-132). By 1932, SA-NSDAP relations were becoming increasingly fraught as the “legal path” strategy lost support among SA rank and file.

2.3 Electoral Violence in 1932

Violence exploded across Germany in 1932, raising the prospect of revolution or civil war. In March, Hitler ran unsuccessfully for the Reich Presidency against Hindenburg. Campaigning escalated into

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fighters, for example in Hamburg, where around three hundred local SA members and communists brawled and exchanged gunfire (Blasius 2005: 35–36). Fear of SA violence was so acute that the government banned all Nazi paramilitary organizations on April 13 (Blasius (2005: 40–41)). The ban lasted only two months, as the government struggled to contain the Nazis' surging popularity and find a strategy that would save the shaky constitutional order. On June 4, the Reichstag was dissolved with a call for elections at the end of July. It was clear to observers that the stakes of the coming vote could not be higher, and that the SA and their opponents would quickly resort to violence. One commentator remarked that "On the streets shots ring out ...Every day people are wounded ...It is as if a blood lust has seized the population ..." (Blasius 2005: 61).

The July 1932 election campaign brought an unprecedented surge of political violence to Germany. Instigators were not only the SA but also their leftist antagonists. Communists and socialists embraced violence to stem the Nazis' popularity growth and reassert their own political salience. Large cities, especially Berlin, Hamburg, and other industrial centers, saw frequent clashes between Nazis and leftist Combat Brigades. Notorious episodes resulted in severe injuries and deaths. In Ohlau, a small Silesian city, thirteen were hospitalized and two SA members killed in a confrontation with Reichsbanner and communists on July 11. In Altona, a Hamburg suburb, 54 were injured and 12 killed in bloody street battles on July 17. A huge demonstration by almost one thousand Nazis provoked massive attacks on its way through this bastion of German working-class communism (*ibid.*, 61-67). In Northeim, a small town in Lower Saxony, violence also marked the July election campaign. Up to eighty uniformed Nazis held military maneuvers in the woods, and harassed Reichsbanner members through June and into July. On July 10, around 150 SA, Reichsbanner and socialists clashed violently resulting in three hospitalizations (Allen 1965: 119–120).

From August-November 1932, political violence continued in Germany, albeit at a reduced intensity. SA mobilization and provocations aimed to demonstrate the Nazi movement's strength. Hitler calculated that a pervasive atmosphere of chaos and violence would prove the government was incapable of maintaining social order, and illegitimate. He was proven correct. Amid ongoing public disorder and political violence, including the SA murder of KPD member Konrad Pietrzuch, new elections were called on September 20, to be held on November 6. Demonstrations, scuffles, and brawls accompanied campaigning once again, as did a long strike by over 20,000 Berlin public transit

workers that at times escalated into mass disorder (Blasius 2005: 79–126). In Northeim, campaigning lacked the energy of July. But there was nonetheless an uptick in violence as Nazis and leftists clashed sporadically, sometimes resulting in severe injuries (Allen 1965: 133–37).

3 Data

3.1 Capturing street riots from Prussian police records

We are interested in how becoming an “elected loser”—extremist candidates that are elected into parliament, but whose party is refused participation in a coalition government—can help to explain geographic variation in post-election violence in Weimar Germany. Our units of analysis are Nazi party candidates’ home towns. We obtain a list of these home towns from digitizing and coding archived candidate lists of the NSDAP for the July 1932 election. Each party that ran in the Reichstag election was required to submit a candidate list for each of 35 election districts to the national election office (*Reichswahlleiter*).

The Nazi party candidate lists contain candidates’ names, their profession, and importantly, their current place of residence, their home towns. We geolocate each town using the Google Maps API, complemented by manual checks when historical place names differ from contemporary place names, e.g. in Silesia. Using this procedure, we identify a total of 843 candidates in 539 unique Nazi candidate home towns. In our empirical analyses we focus on the 347 home towns that are located in Prussia since violence data is only available for Prussian provinces.

Our main source for violent events in Nazi candidates’ home towns during the summer of 1932 is archival information on political clashes collected by the Prussian Ministry of Interior. The escalating violence in Summer 1932 compelled the ministry to collect more detailed and timely statistical information on individual political riots in Prussia. Consequently, in September 1932, the Ministry sent a circular (*Runderlass*) to all Prussian governorates (*Regierungsbezirke*). The order requested governors to submit monthly statistical reports on all political riots that occurred within their governorates and to provide retrospective reports on all riots that occurred between July 21st and August 31st 1932.⁴

The reports include information on the date and location of events, on the political affiliation of

⁴Bundesarchiv source: HA Rep. 77, Tit. 4043, Nr. 122, pages 91-93.

the attackers and attacked as well as on the number of injured or dead. In addition—depending on the province and reporting period—several reports include information the reactions of the police, whether weapons were found or whether any of the parties involved was uniformed. In several cases, governors backed their reports with short descriptions of the nature of events or press articles covering individual incidents.

We obtained all reports from the official Prussian Secret State Archives (*Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz*) in Berlin.⁵ In total, the files contain 879 pages of lists, letters and press articles. To the best of our knowledge, these records constitute the most comprehensive and detailed account of political violence in the final phase of the Weimar Republic. We hand-coded all events reported in these files to create a violent events dataset which includes information on a total of 3003 individual riots recorded between July 17th 1932 and March 31st 1933.⁶

We then match each violent event to the nearest NSDAP candidate home town within the lowest level of the SA administration, the *SA Untergruppe* (sub-groups). Since Nazi violence was predominantly perpetrated by the SA, the militia's territorial organization at the sub-group-level represents most directly the SA's area of operation. This spatial matching approach enables us to capture violent events that are not only located directly in the candidates' home towns, but also the towns' vicinity—which is plausible given that the operational reach of the SA penetrated even rural areas (Siemens 2019: 61ff.). We document in Appendix [SI.1.2](#) how we digitally reconstruct the territorial organization of the SA in 1932 to be able to match violent events within each SA sub-group.

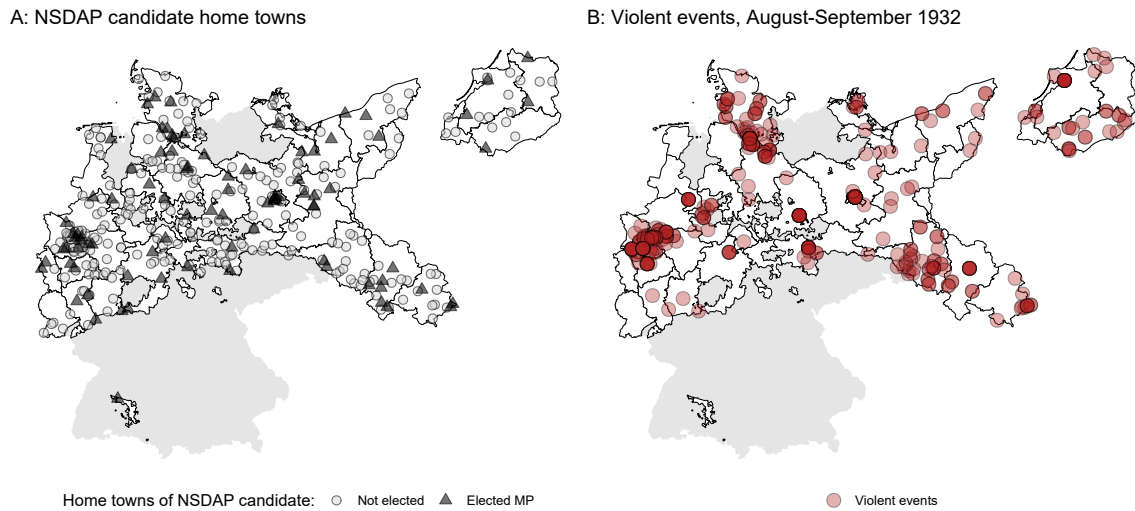
In a final step we aggregate each event to the level of NSDAP candidates' home towns. In our main specifications, we focus on the events directly after the election on 31 July, but before the announcement for the snap elections in November 1932, i.e. the period between 1 August and 12 September (the November elections were announced on 13 September).⁷ These events constitute our main outcome of interest. We exclude the events 12 September to 4 November as the election announcement likely changed the rationale for perpetrating violence.

In addition to this temporal variation, we also distinguish between different types of clashes,

⁵HA Rep. 77, Tit. 4043, Nr. 126/127

⁶We discuss a number of potential problems with this archival data and how we remedy them in our analysis in Appendix [SI.1.1](#).

⁷The data starts in the beginning of July 1932, allowing us to use events prior to the July elections in placebo tests, see e.g. [Figure 4](#).

Figure 2: Home towns of (not-)elected NSDAP candidates and street violence in Prussia in the summer of 1932

Note: The left panel displays the home towns of all NSDAP candidates, indicating whether they were elected (dark triangle) or not (grey circle). The right panel displays the distribution of violent events between 1 August and 11 September. Each dot represents one violent event, with transparency added so that darker/overlapping circles indicate higher concentration of violence. Borders represent Prussian governorates (*Regierungsbezirke*).

based on the perpetrators and targets recorded by the police. Our main type of interest are clashes between the SA and left-wing organizations, typically paramilitaries from the communist party, the KPD. But the Prussian police also recorded attacks against buildings, often buildings of state institutions or (Jewish) shops, and other groups or individuals. We explore these outcomes in subsequent analyses.

Figure 2 illustrates the geographical distribution of candidates' home towns and violent events.

3.2 Measuring regional variation in parliamentary representation

The Weimar Republic's electoral system closely resembled the ideal type of a closed-list proportional representation system. That means that, in addition to candidates' names and professions, parties were required to provide the rank of each candidate on the list. For every 60 000 votes in an election district each party received one seat in the Reichstag. Seats were filled from the top of each list. Combined with the information which candidates were (not) elected into the Reichstag—taken from (Best 1990)—we can reconstruct a relative rank that identifies each candidate's distance to the last, just elected candidate in that election district.

Table 1 illustrates how the logic of the electoral system combined with information on candidates and candidates' home towns allows us to classify towns into elected vs. non-elected categories. Based on the same Nazi candidate information as in Table 1 for each electoral district, we aggregate

Table 1: Example for the NSDAP's candidate list of the "Düsseldorf-Ost" electoral district for the 1932 July elections

Candidate	Rank	Relative Rank	Status	Home town
Friedrich Karl Florian	1	-5	Elected	Düsseldorf
Willi Veller	2	-4	Elected	Wuppertal
Wilhelm Boerger	3	-3	Elected	Neuss
Theodor Oppermann	4	-2	Elected	Düsseldorf
Josef Klein	5	-1	Elected	Düsseldorf
Werner Scheibner	6	0	Elected	Wuppertal
Hermann Schroer	7	1	Non-elected	Wuppertal-Elberfeld
Rudolf Heukenkamp	8	2	Non-elected	Remmscheid-Lennep
Jürgen von dem Knesebeck	9	3	Non-elected	Ratzeburg
Wilhelm Pelzer	10	4	Non-elected	Neuss

Note: The table shows the first 10 candidates on the NSDAP candidate list for the "Düsseldorf-Ost" electoral district (there were 34 candidates on the list in total). The NSDAP received 399,749 votes in this district, which resulted in six NSDAP seats (one seat for every 60,000 votes). The dashed line indicates the resulting cutoff.

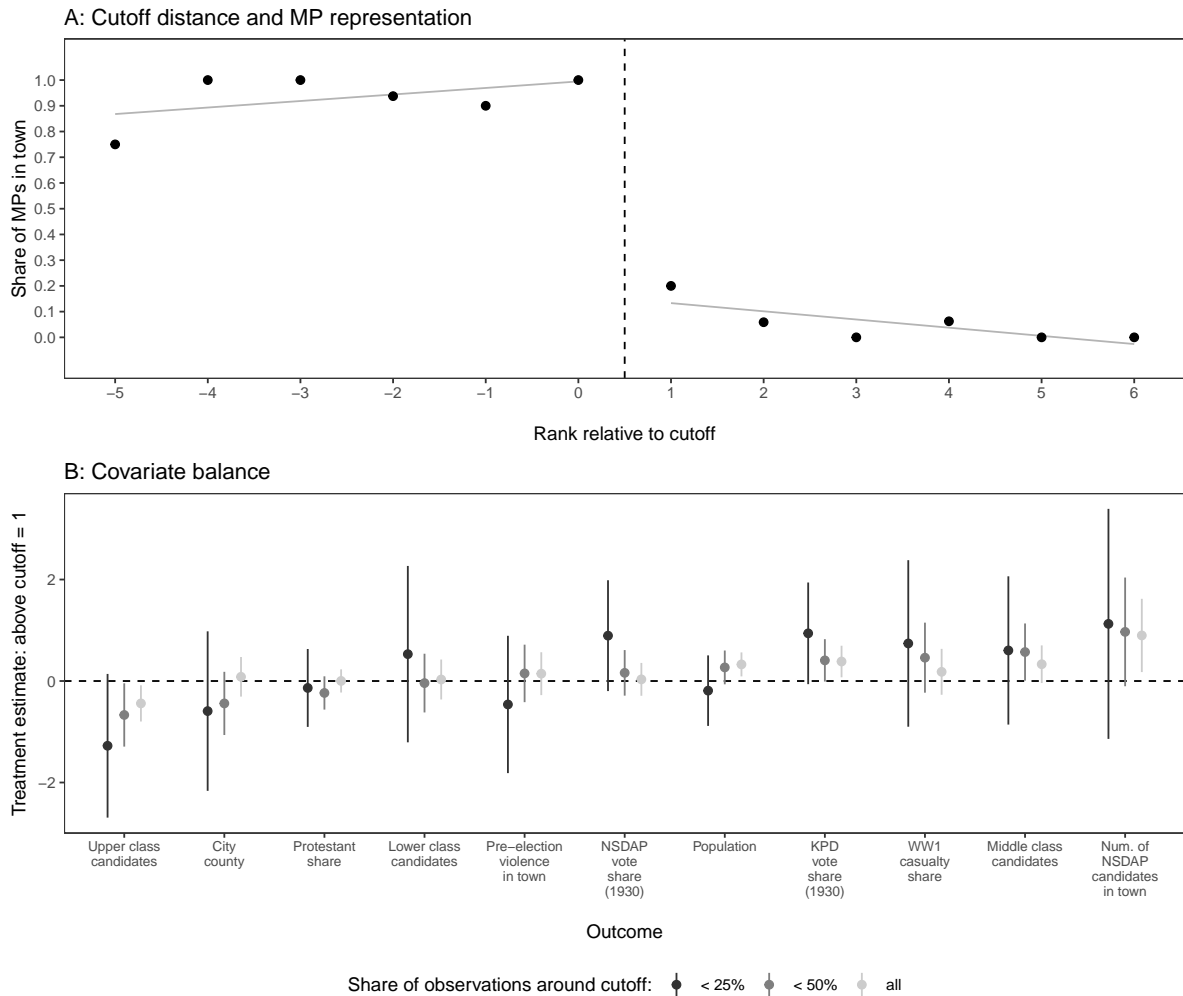
each candidate's relative rank to the level of candidates' home towns, our main unit of analysis. Some candidates live in the same town, however, generating the challenge which relative rank to assign to these multiple-candidate towns. We assign the rank value of the closest absolute rank to the cutoff to the town. If a town is, for instance, assigned a set of relative ranks $MP\ ranks_{town} \in \{-2, -1, 4, 7\}$ we select -1 as the cutoff value for that town. This assignment rule is based on the assumption that the randomness of being (not) elected is the strongest for the candidates closest to the cutoff. In robustness tests below, we permute this assignment rule based on a random pick of the set of ranks assigned to each town. Results are not sensitive to the assignment of the closest rank to a town.

3.3 Empirical strategy

Our research design exploits the fact that the assignment of a town being represented in the post-July Reichstag is as good as randomly determined by candidates' position on the electoral lists: home towns of candidates just above the cutoff that determines representation in the Reichstag should be very similar to home towns of candidates just below that cutoff. We formally estimate the effect of this discontinuity in a regression discontinuity design (RDD).⁸

This design requires two assumptions to hold. First, a town's relative distance to the cutoff should strongly predict MP representation. In theory, the mechanics of the Weimar Republic's electoral

⁸We denote towns with a negative rank as well as a rank of zero as *above* the cutoff, and towns with a positive rank as *below* the cutoff.

Figure 3: Probing regression discontinuity assumptions

Note: Panel A displays the share of locations at each rank with at least one NSDAP Reichstag MP plus a local linear trend. Panel B shows coefficients from separate regressions that predict the variables labeled on the x-axis from being above the treated cutoff. See Appendix [SI.1.3](#) for covariate sources.

system should have made MP representation perfectly determined by relative distance to the cutoff. In practice, however, the NSDAP removed and/or replaced some candidates between the official submission of the electoral lists and the election. In addition, there existed joint electoral district lists (*Wahlkreisverbände*) and a national list (*Reichswahlliste*) which collected the remaining votes to an electoral district—and candidates could run on several lists simultaneously. This led to situations where candidates had to choose through which list they chose to be elected. Because of these reasons slight mismatches between list rank and representation can occur.

We explore the empirical validity of this assumption in the upper panel [Figure 3](#). The panel displays the share of towns with at least one MP based on their assigned relative rank. The plot shows

that the list position relative to a rank strongly predicts MP representation in the Reichstag—but not perfectly. Consequently, in addition to the sharp regression discontinuity design, we also estimate fuzzy RDD specifications, using the relative rank as an instrumental variable for MP representation.

The second RDD assumption is that towns above and below the cutoff should be very similar as a result of the as-if-random assignment of the cutoff—especially if we compare only towns closely around the cutoff. The right panel displays the similarity between towns above the cutoff to towns below the cutoff. Formally, we estimate separate RDD specifications that predict the variable indicated on the x-axis from being above the cutoff and plot the resulting coefficients, together with 95% confidence intervals. Statistically significant coefficients indicate that treated and non-treated towns are different in respect to the variable displayed on the x-axis.

Like any other RDD analysis, our design faces the challenge of bias vs. statistical power. If we include all observations from all ranks, including those ranks far away from the cutoff, causal identification can become biased, since causal inference is most credible only for those observations close around the cutoff. Limiting our data only to observations close to the cutoff reduces the number of observations, however, resulting in statistical imprecision for any estimated effects. We choose a pragmatic solution for this trade-off and present results using three different samples: a full sample of all towns and ranks, as well as a sample restricted to 50 and 25 percent of the observations around the cutoff. Figure SI 3 illustrates the range of the different samples. Consequently, we also estimate the balance tests using these three sample definitions.

The lower panel of Figure 3 shows that towns around the cutoff are very similar to each other, except for a variable that captures that the number of NSDAP candidates from a town. Towns above the cutoff have a slightly higher number of NSDAP candidates. One potential explanation for this imbalance is that candidates higher on the lists came from more towns and cities with a larger population size. In robustness tests, we therefore control for the full set of covariates displayed in Figure 3.

3.4 Model specification

We formally investigate the relationship between MP representation and violence by estimating a series of OLS models of the following form:

$$Y_{id} = \beta_1 \text{rank}_{id} + \beta_2 \text{treated}_{id} + \beta_3 \text{rank}_{id} \times \text{treated}_{id} + \mu_d + \epsilon_{ic} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{id} represents the outcome variable. In our main specifications, we measure Y_{id} as a dummy that equals one if there was at least one riot between SA and KPD in August/September 1932 in town i in election district d . rank_{id} stands for the relative rank of town i to the cutoff in election district d . The relative cutoff is zero and represents the last candidate that has been elected to the Reichstag on the NSDAP candidate list for the July 1932 elections. treated_{id} represents any town i where $\text{rank} \leq 0$, i.e. all towns with candidates that were elected MP in district d . We also include μ_d , an election district fixed effect to account for regional heterogeneity. All estimates therefore compare only within-election district locations to each other. ϵ_c is the error term, which we estimate with robust standard errors clustered by county (*Landkreis*) to account for the binary nature of the dependent variable and spatial correlation of violence across nearby towns.

Given that rank_{id} is centered around zero and under the assumption of randomness around the cutoff, β_2 gives us the difference in violence between treated and non-treated locations—the causal estimand of interest which we label “Towns with MPs” in the results tables below.

4 Results

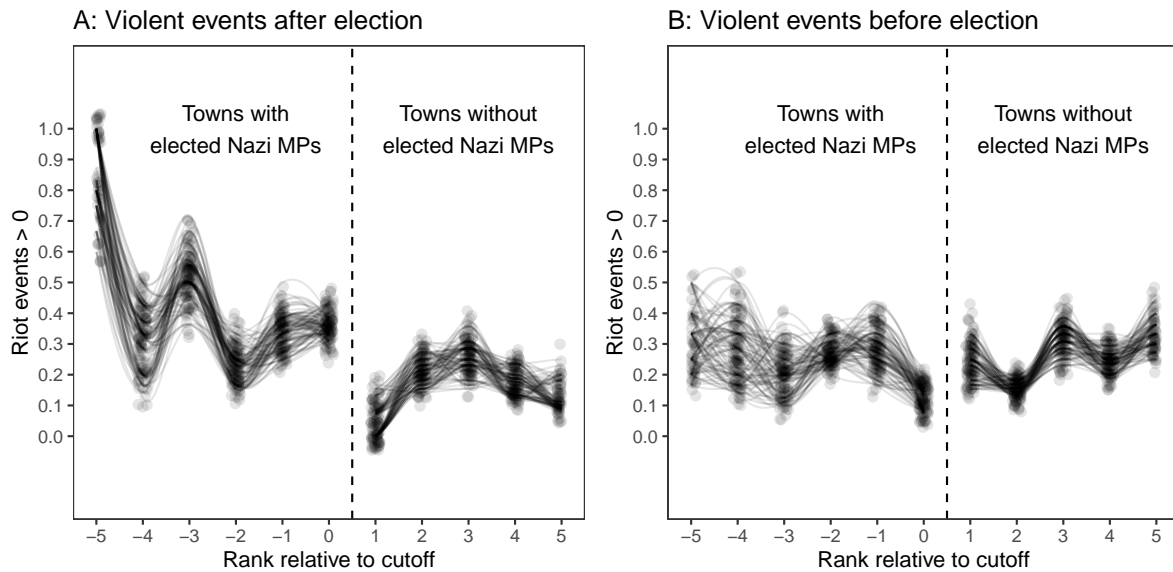
4.1 Graphical illustration of the effect

We descriptively illustrate the difference in violence between towns above and below the election threshold in [Figure 4](#). We compute the share of towns with at least one violent event for each of the ranks below and above the threshold, limiting the range of ranks to +/-5 ranks for presentational clarity. We use [Figure 4](#) to illustrate the validity of our analysis to two potential inferential challenges.

First, [Figure 4](#) helps us to address issues regarding multiple ranks assigned to a town: if there are multiple candidates per town we arbitrarily assign the rank of the candidate closest to the cutoff to that town. To account for any issue stemming from this assignment rule, we implement an algorithm

4 Results

Figure 4: Relative distance to the elected cutoff and share of violent events in Nazi candidate's home towns



Note: The plot displays the relationship between home towns' relative distance to the cutoff and violent events. Panel A includes riots that involved SA/NSDAP and KPD/left-wing forces between 1 August and 11 September. Panel B includes the same perpetrator types but for events before the election (16-31 July), the election date. Ranks are randomly assigned to towns with multiple candidates repeated for 100 times. Loess smoother overlayed.

that randomly picks a rank for a town with multiple candidates (and therefore multiple ranks). We repeat this random picking 100 times, compute the share of towns with at least one riot and store the result.

The left panel of Figure 4 plots the resulting shares, overlayed with a loess smoother to highlight trends. The plot shows that there is a clearly visible jump in the share of towns with violence at the cutoff. This indicates that parliamentary representation of the NSDAP increased violence in elected candidates' home towns.

Second, we use Figure 4 to probe the plausibility that towns of elected MPs were simply more violent already *before* the July 1932 election. The right panel repeats the simulation exercise for cutoff assignment, but this time we compute the share of towns with violent events per ranks for events measured *before* the election. If it in fact was the election and its assignment of parliamentary seats to candidates that had a causal we should not see any relationship between a town being located around the cutoff and levels of prior violence.

The right panel of Figure 4 demonstrates that the cutoff does not pick up an effect of already violent towns. There is no clearly visible jump in violence around the cutoff when we measure violence

4 Results

Table 2: Main RDD results

	Sharp RDD			Fuzzy RDD		
	Observations around cutoff			Observations around cutoff		
	All	<50%	<25%	All	<50%	<25%
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Towns with MPs	0.36*** (0.09)	0.27* (0.12)	0.57* (0.25)	0.41*** (0.11)	0.33* (0.16)	0.78+ (0.40)
Election district FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R2	0.137	0.211	0.303	0.116	0.180	0.045
Num.Obs.	344	178	69	344	178	69

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Outcome is a dummy variable taking one if at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces occurred in a town. Coefficients for relative rank and relative rank \times above cutoff are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .1$.

before the July 1932 election.

4.2 Regression results

We present our main results in [Table 2](#). Models 1-3 present results from a sharp RDD that estimates [Equation 1](#). Models 4-6 estimate [Equation 1](#) using a fuzzy RDD variant, where we use being above the cutoff as an instrument for a town having at least one NSDAP MP representative. Throughout Models 1-6 our dependent variable is a dummy that takes one when there was at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces between 1 August and 11 September. We estimate separate regressions on different subsets of the sample based on narrowing bandwidths around the cutoff, as indicated by the percentage in the column label.

Across models and RDD specifications, we find a positive and statistically significant effect of a town being represented through the NSDAP in the Reichstag on the probability of experiencing violence between August and September 1932. The effect size ranges from 0.27 to 0.78. Since we estimate linear probability models, the effect sizes directly translate into the probability of towns experiencing violence as a function of MP representation at the cutoff. Effect sizes are slightly larger in the fuzzy RDD specifications, but not substantially. Given that the baseline probability of a town experiencing violence after the July 1932 is 21%, these are substantively significant effect sizes, indicating that MP representation at least more than doubles the probability of experiencing

violence.

The results support the interpretation that it is the “elected losers” who drive post-election violence: violence is more likely in home towns of party candidates who were elected to a seat in the *Reichstag* than in home towns of candidates who missed entry into parliament.

4.3 Robustness tests and alternative explanations

In the Appendix we implement a number of robustness tests to probe the sensitivity of our results to modeling and data choices. In Appendix [Figure SI 4](#), we estimate a number of different RDD specifications, including a “robust” variant of the sharp and fuzzy RDD estimator (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2015), as well as a quadratic and cubic polynomial of the running variable. In Appendix [Table SI 1](#) we include a number of pre-treatment covariates, including an indicator for multiple candidates in one town. In the same table, we also present results with and without observations from Berlin, since Berlin represents a large outlier in our data in terms of candidate home towns and number of violent events. In Appendix [Table SI 2](#) we replace the election district fixed effects with fixed effects for Prussian governorates (*Regierungsbezirke*) and SA Group identifiers to account for alternative indicators capturing regional differences. Finally, we estimate our main equation, but leave out one electoral district at a time, to determine if the results are particularly driven by one electoral region (Appendix [Figure SI 5](#)). Across all tests, our main results remain robust.

We also directly address a potential concern regarding the validity of our RDD assumption, namely that the Nazi party and its deputies were not able to anticipate where the cutoff of each list would end up. We implement two tests to probe this possibility. First, we create artificial cutoffs for the 1932 candidate lists based on the Nazi party’s 1930 election results in each election district. We then rerun our main specifications, but use the 1930 cutoff to identify “treated” towns. If there was no anticipation, we should not observe any effect using the artificial 1930 cutoff. [Table SI 3](#) shows that treatment effects drop substantively in size and are not longer statistically significant if we use the 1930 cutoffs. We do find a positive treatment effect when we use the full sample instead of restricting the data to a closer bandwidth around the cutoff, but this pattern likely reflects the fact that similar persons were put at the very top of electoral districts—and post-election violence is particularly concentrated in towns with high-ranking candidates. But once we restrict the bandwidth around the

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cutoff, the effect disappears.

Second, we exploit a feature of the archived candidate lists to probe anticipatory behavior: some of the lists contain hand-written information about rank corrections. While the original, submitted lists were written on a typewriter, several lists indicate that certain candidates' position was amended after the submission. We don't know precisely when this correction was made, but it is reasonable to assume that it was made after the submission, so it could indicate that there was strategic sorting based on unobservable information since the submission of the lists to the election commissioner. This strategic sorting could be correlated with the cutoff and thus bias the exogeneity of the cutoff. We therefore dummy for each candidate whether or not s/he had a manually corrected rank. Computing the average number of corrections per rank, we show in [Figure SI 6](#), however, that there is no visible jump in manual rank corrections around the cutoff. Taken together, the null results from the 1930 placebo tests and the lack of sorting of rank corrections around cutoff suggest that the cutoff in each electoral district was indeed exogenous and not anticipated by the Nazi party.

5 Probing the mechanism

We identify several potential mechanisms underlying the reported results of "elected losers" engaging in more violence. These mechanisms result in a set of additional observable implications that we can test. First, we should observe that the perpetrators of the violence in home towns of elected candidates is driven by Nazi-instigated violence, and not by communist violence targeting the winners. Second, if our hypotheses about motivations of "elected losers" are correct, we should observe political grievances particularly in areas with many "elected losers." Third, and finally, if violence by elected losers is driven by better access to organizational resources, we should see higher availability of resources for violence in areas with many "elected losers." We test each of these implications below.

5.1 "Who:" SA activity after the elections

The logic of elected candidates driving the post-election violence implies that the violence should be perpetrated by the Nazis themselves. It is important to test this implication, since there is an alternative explanation that could also account for the main patterns we have document so far:

5 Probing the mechanism

Table 3: Results by attacker

	SA		KPD	
	Attacker	Target	Attacker	Target
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Towns with MPs	0.228* (0.105)	0.132 (0.119)	0.155 (0.105)	0.221* (0.112)
R2	0.202	0.210	0.142	0.217
Num.Obs.	178	178	178	178

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Coefficients for rank and rank × treated are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .1.

elected Nazi party candidates simply could have been more targeted by the Communist opposition. Communists might have been angered by the Nazi party's landslide success and thus predominantly targeted elected candidates which would lead to a similar pattern in post-election violence as we have documented.

To test this implication, we rely on the Prussian police's collection of information on the perpetrators of the individual attack events. The police were asked to classify the parties involved in the incidents into "attacker" and "targets," with an explicit category of Nazi vs. Communist perpetrators (see illustration of the original police report in [Figure SI 1](#)).⁹ Using this data, we recode our dependent variable to create a series of different dummies, indicating a) whether the SA was attacker or target of the violence in candidates' home towns, or b) whether or not the Communists (KPD) was attacker/target.

We re-estimate Model 2 from [Table 2](#) using the different specification of the dependent variable. We report the results of these disaggregated analyses in [Table 3](#). We find significant differences between home regions of winning and losing Nazi candidates only for attacks of SA units against communist targets. This result clearly demonstrates that it was indeed SA-perpetrated violence that is reflected by our main results, supporting the interpretation that it is indeed the "elected losers" who fuel post-election clashes.

⁹Given that the Prussian police was not a neutral observer of events (and was often targeted by the paramilitaries themselves), there is a possibility that the classification into attackers/targets could be biased. The Prussian police had a strong anti-communist reputation which would have most likely led to an undercount of SA violence. But, should such a bias exist, it would bias our results downwards, since it would make it harder for us to detect "true" SA attacks.

5.2 “Why:” SA motivation after the elections

The logic of “elected losers” driving the results also suggests several testable implications about candidates’ motives for violence. In particular, we should observe political grievances in those areas where candidates were elected. It is the elected candidates that formally receive a seat in parliament, but, by being refused access to power, have the strongest dissonance between their political success—winning a seat—and the perceived uselessness of this seat by not being part of a government coalition.

Without access to representative opinion polls from that time period it is extremely difficult to gauge motivations and widespread grievances. We attempt to overcome this problem by drawing on a unique historical source that provides rare insights into the internal organization and the morale of the SA. In September 1932, Adolf Hitler ordered a report (Stimmungsbericht) to determine the mood of the storm troopers. SA commander Röhm dispatched a questionnaire to SA units all over Germany. We screened the 41 original responses of SA units held by the German Federal Archives and were able to assign 26 of these reports to a distinct SA *Untergruppe* (Sub-Group), the smallest SA unit for which we can reconstruct territorial boundaries.

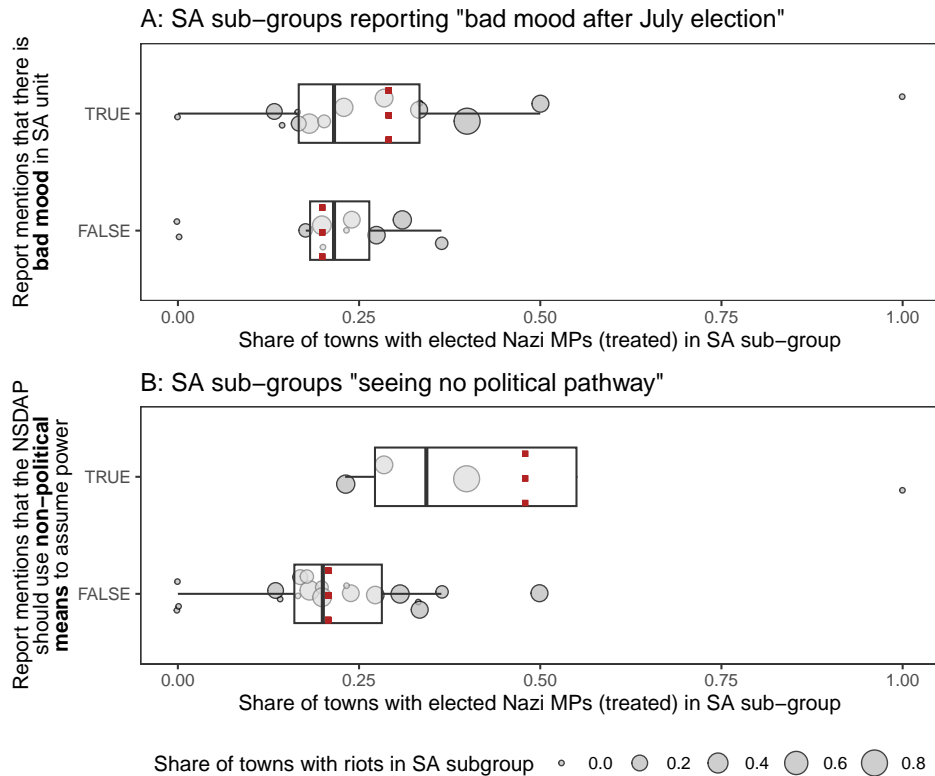
For each report, we handcode reference to two indicators of political grievances: (1) a simple dummy indicating any mention or reference to a “bad mood” within the respective SA sub-group; (2) a dummy that captures more specifically whether or not the report mentions that the unit “sees no political pathway” for the Nazi struggle to achieve power. The latter dummy aims to directly capture the mismatch between candidates being elected to parliament but facing no political channel to use this seat to shape policy.

In addition, for each report (or SA sub-group), by spatially overlapping the administrative boundaries of the SA sub-group with the location of candidates’ home towns, we compute the share of candidate home towns are represented in parliament (the share of treated towns). We then plot whether a SA sub-group mentions a “bad mood” or “no political pathway” as a function of the share of treated towns in this group’s area. If political grievances were higher in areas with many elected Nazi candidates, we should see more mentions and references to bad mood, the higher the share of “treated” towns in an SA sub-group.

Figure 5 shows that overall morale was indeed worse in SA sub-groups with home towns of many

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Figure 5: Motivation for violence in SA reports



Note: Individual circles represent distinct SA sub-groups and their reports. Red, dashed, vertical lines represent group means.

elected candidates. The upper panel shows that SA groups with more elected candidates, on average, are more likely to report that they have a “bad mood after the July election.” Differences are modest, but visible, especially if we compare means (red, dashed line). The political frustration becomes more clearly visible if we look at the lower panel of [Figure 5](#). SA groups with many elected members were particularly likely to mention references to the unit “no political pathway.” The size of the individual circles in the plot also indicates that the violence in the more frustrated units’ areas was higher than in the less frustrated groups.

These quantitative differences can be seen even more directly, when we zoom in on the individual reports themselves. The report of the subgroup Hamburg explained that “Until July 31, 1932, the mood of the SA was very good. The day after the election, confidence began to decline [...]”. More pointedly, the leader of the subgroup Unterfranken highlighted that mood was “depressed” because “the events that the SA expected did not occur.” This loss in motivation may also have led to a reduction in SA units’ offensive activities in the post-election periods. Leaders of SA units that have been elected

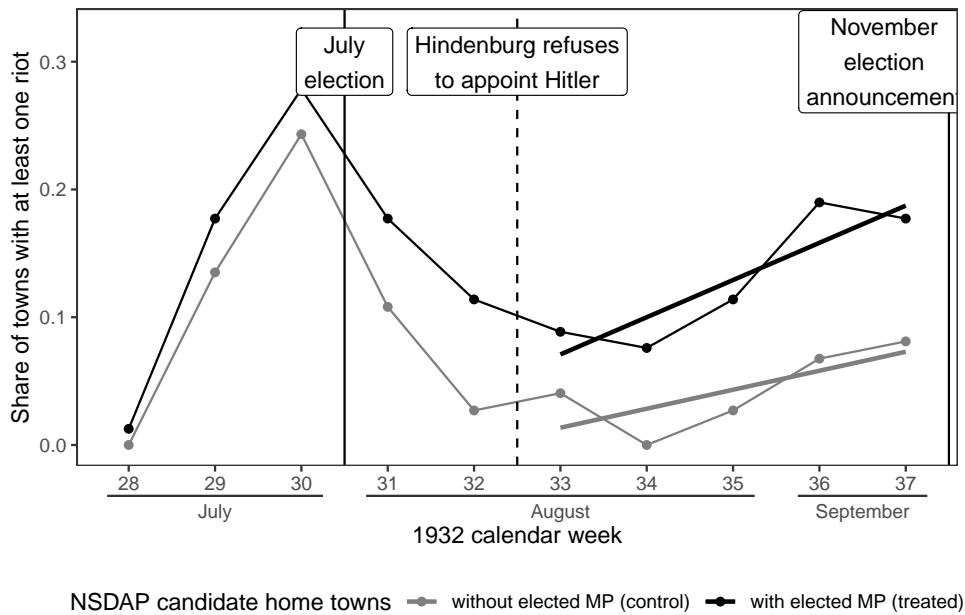
5 Probing the mechanism

into the Reichstag may have been in a better position to uphold motivation among SA members and to lift spirits by highlighting the groups' own electoral success—compared to SA units whose leaders experiences electoral losses themselves. In fact, several group leaders highlight that troops motivation depended on leaders' own motivation—for example, the leader of the group Ostsee: “The lack of opportunity for action has resulted in great disappointment and sometimes hopelessness, especially where the local leader was not sufficiently strong in character” (037). Similarly, the leader of a SA unit in Breslau emphasized that the “subgroup leaders have to keep the spirit fresh in their formations.”

We can also link the frustration on the ground more directly to the Nazis' political negotiations at the cabinet level in the aftermath of the July elections. While the elections saw the Nazis emerge as the strongest party in the *Reichstag*, it only became clear that the Nazis would not be able to lead a government about two weeks after the election. On 13 August 1932, president Hindenburg offered Hitler participation in the government, but refused to allow Hitler to lead the Weimar government as Reich chancellor. This refusal led to breakdown of coalition negotiations with the Nazi party.¹⁰ If frustration about political future is a key driver of violence among “elected losers,” we should observe an increase in violence particularly after this date, especially in the home towns of the elected Nazi candidates.

We probe this expectation in [Figure 6](#), using the precise time stamps of the violent events in our data. We plot the temporal development in violence across towns with (black) and without (grey) elected Nazi MPs. The plot shows that violence gradually fell after its peak before and on election day (but notably slower in towns with elected MPs), but started to increase precisely after the negotiations between Hindenburg and Hitler broke in at the end of week 32. Moreover, we observe a slightly steeper increase in violence in the towns with elected MPs, suggesting that it is indeed those towns where frustrations are more rampant—and where motivations to further keep up pressure on the actors at the top was higher.

¹⁰Das Kabinett von Papen, Document 104 from 15 March 1932 (“Ministerbesprechung/Politische Lage”) and Document 102 from 13 August 1932 (“Adolf Hitler an den Reichswehrminister, Staatssekretär Meissner und Staatssekretär Planck/Anlage”) in “Akten der Reichskanzlei. Weimarer Republik” online; URL: <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei>, 1919-1933.

Figure 6: Motivation for violence II: Breakdown of coalition negotiations

Note: The plot displays the share of towns with violent events within candidates' home towns, classified by towns with elected candidates (black) and without elected candidates (grey) aggregated to the calendar week.

5.3 “How:” SA resources after the elections

In addition to motivation for violence, the logic of “elected losers” as main drivers of post-election violence suggests organizational and/or resource-based mechanisms. Existing literature on bandwagoning effects suggests that an organization’s (e.g. a party) political success can attract new members for this organization: there is evidence from modern-day Europe that a party’s electoral success is positively correlated with a membership increase (Sierens, van Haute, and Paulis 2023). But also in the context of recruitment into violent organizations, such as rebel groups or terrorist organizations, suggest the existence of bandwagoning effect where more successful organizations (in terms of achieving goals in their violent struggles in political agreements or conducting attacks) attract more recruits (Nemeth 2014; Seymour 2014). Conversely, where political success remains elusive, organizations might struggle to recruit new members. Such bandwagoning effects were clearly visible in the context of the Nazi’s eventual rise to power: after Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor in January 1933, the masses flocked into the NSDAP—to such an extent that the Nazis issued an official stop to new members in order to be able to process the vast number of applications (Falter 2020). Thus, if personnel resources played a role in driving post-election violence we should

5 Probing the mechanism

see increased supply of personnel to the Nazis, particularly to the SA, in those places where the Nazis won Reichstag seats.

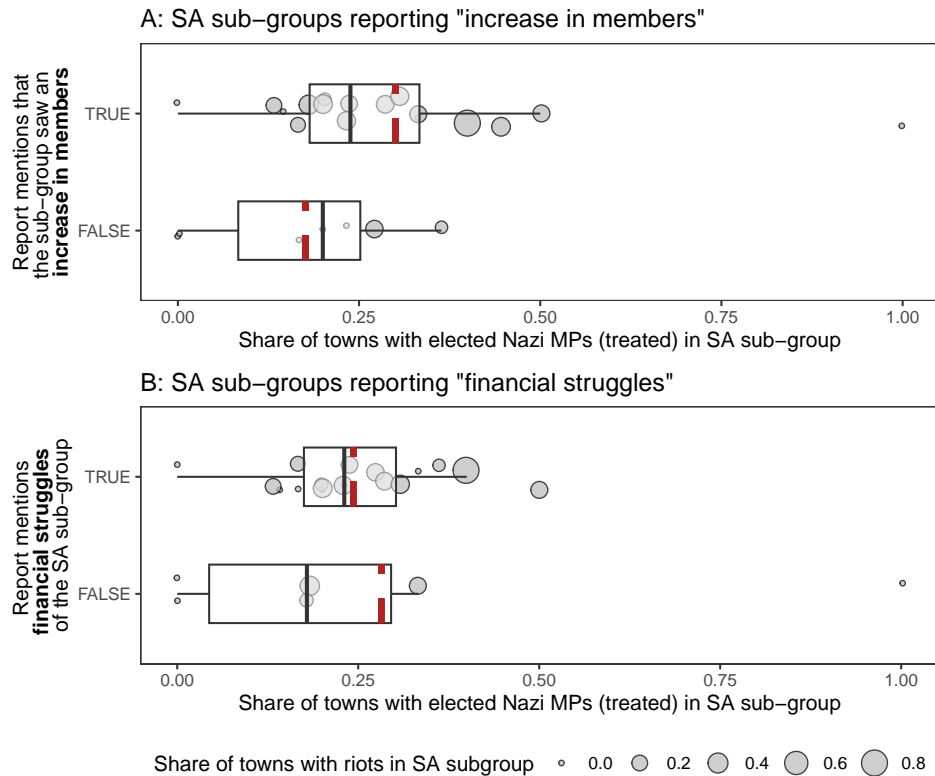
Anecdotal evidence from the SA “mood reports” supports the interpretation that differences in personnel indeed played a role in the SA’s capability to conduct violent operations. SA reports particularly indicate that the outcome of the elections dampened the SA’s ability to recruit new members and/or to prevent membership losses. The subgroup Leine warns that: “Gains are very moderate in relation to the area of the subgroup. The reason for this is the political situation [...]” (033). Similarly, the subgroup Düsseldorf reports “Some resignations occurred due to dissatisfaction (political situation)”. Adverse membership developments also had direct effects on financial endowments. Transfers from regional NSDAP commands (“Gau”) constituted the main regular funding source for most SA units. These transfers depended on units’ membership size: each unit received a fixed share of party membership fees payed by its respective members.¹¹ Financial losses may then have affected the operational capacity of SA units. The leader of the subgroup Brunswick, for example, emphasized that the financial situation of the group made “it difficult for these departments to carry out the most necessary work”. Other reports mirror this warning (e.g., report from SA group Hamburg). Membership losses and the resulting financial consequences may have been less pronounced in SA groups that were able to secure individual electoral victories.

These resource dynamics are also evident if we examine the mood reports more systematically. The upper panel of [Figure 7](#) demonstrates that those SA sub-groups with a high share of Nazi MPs reported, on average, an increase in membership. Interestingly, the lower panel of [Figure 7](#) suggests that SA sub-groups with many elected MPs simultaneously reported to a greater extent the existence of financial struggles—but as almost all units reported any kind of financial struggle we cannot draw too strong conclusions based on this. We also replicate the finding that SA membership increases stayed particularly stable in SA groups with many elected Nazi candidates using official SA membership data, see [Appendix SI.4.1](#). The results from the mood reports strongly indicate that the SA was especially adept in mobilizing recruits in those areas with many elected MPs.

¹¹Quotes from SA reports underscore this association. A subgroup leader in the Gau of Lower Saxony explained that “[...] the budget of the subgroup may have to be decreased next month due to the reduction in the number of new members joining the party”. Echoing this explanation, the leader of the subgroup Hanover East lamented that “The financing of the SA is very unfavorable given the small number of members within the district.”

6 Conclusion

Figure 7: Resources for violence I



Note: Individual circles represent distinct SA sub-groups and their reports. Red, dashed, vertical lines represent group means.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that winners and losers respond differently to elections. Results affect barriers to, and incentives for, violence. In Weimar Germany, the probability of SA violence was significantly greater in towns where Nazi candidates won Reichstag mandates in the July 1932 election. Where Nazis lost, levels of violence declined. Winning an electoral mandate fueled political grievances and was a boost to the resources and mobilization capacity of local SA paramilitaries. Becoming a member of parliament was a significant material reward that could be exploited not only by individual politicians, but by local SA organizations.

These findings have important implications for the study of electoral violence and contention more generally. Mobilizing groups may have election outcomes as their primary objective. They want to influence the constellation of interests in parliament and government to their own advantage. But elections have consequences. They allocate grievances and resources unequally among winners

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and losers. Victors may use newly-gained capacity for violence to exploit weakness among their opponents, despite winning the electoral contest. In this way, elections contribute to violence both in anticipation of, and as a consequence of, voting.

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Supporting Information:

*Parliamentary representation and right-wing violence:
Evidence from Nazi street brawls in the Weimar Republic*

SI Supporting Information

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SI.1 Data

SI.1.1 Prussian police data on street violence

Data illustration

Figure SI 1: Data illustration

Lfd. Nr.	Datum	Ort (evtl. Straße)	Angriffe				Angehörige				Anschläge gegen Bauhelfer (mit genauer Bezeichnung)	Einsch. der Polizei	Zahl der Toten + Verletzte mit Parteizugeh.	Bemerkungen (zu Spalte 6-8) a) durch Waffengebrauch der Polizei = V b) Waffenfunde (Stos-, Hand- und Schusswaffen) c) schriftl. Bericht erstattet? Datum und Nr.		
			NSDAP	Rechts-KPD	Sonstige	Unbekannt	NSDAP	Rechts-KPD	Sonstige	Unbekannt						
1.	26.2.33	Gleiwitz	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
2.	27.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	251
3.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
4.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
5.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
6.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
7.	1.3."	Gleiwitz	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
8.	1.3."	Leobschütz	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
9.	2.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
10.	2.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
11.	3.3."	Alt-Schalkowitz Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
12.	4.3."	Laband	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
13.	5.3."	Kol. Goslawitz, Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
14.	7.3."	Zywodzitz, Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1 Land
15.	7.3."	Alt-Cosel	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	1 Land
16.	8.3."	Ellguth, Kr. Neustadt	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
17.	10.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1 Jude

Note:

Shortcomings and solutions for archival data

Below we list potential shortcomings in the data, their consequences for our analysis, and (if our analysis could be affected) how we address them:

(1) **Limited temporal scope.** The circular of the Prussian Ministry of Interior requests retrospective information only for the period starting on July 21st, exactly ten days before the July parliamentary elections—presumably because previous riots had been reported in the final aggregate quarterly reports that had to be submitted by the governors on August 1st. Thus, the data provide only limited information on the intense political violence that preceded the elections. Moreover, the files do not include any reports on the month of November 1932—the month of the second parliamentary elections in 1932. The communication included in the files does not provide any insights on the reasons for this reporting gap.

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Solution: Since we are mostly interested in the violence between the July and November elections in 1932 our main analyses are not strongly affected by this data gap.

(2) Risk of intentional misreporting. Depending on their own political preferences, governors may have under-reported or over-reported incidents involving the Nazi party or communist movements.

Solution: The archived files demonstrate that the Ministry of Interior itself, in fact, cross-checked many reports provided by the governors based on press articles on individual incidents. The files contain several follow-up requests sent by the Ministry of Interior to governors lamenting that specific riots reported in the press were not included in the lists sent to the ministry. In these cases, the ministry requested the governors to check if the respective incidents did meet the criteria as defined in the circulars and to add the respective incidents to the list. Responses from governors highlight that respective incidents had been excluded because they were included in earlier reports, because press coverage was factually wrong, or because governors had not been informed by the respective district administrators.

(3) Decentralized process of data collection. The county administrators reported incidents to the governors and the governors reported events to the Prussian Ministry of Interior. While the September 1932 circular included a reporting template and the explicit information that all events should be included in the statistics, governors' understanding of the reporting tasks varied—resulting in different reporting formats and differences in the types of events reported (e.g., only the most significant or all events) (Reichardt 2009: 55-56).

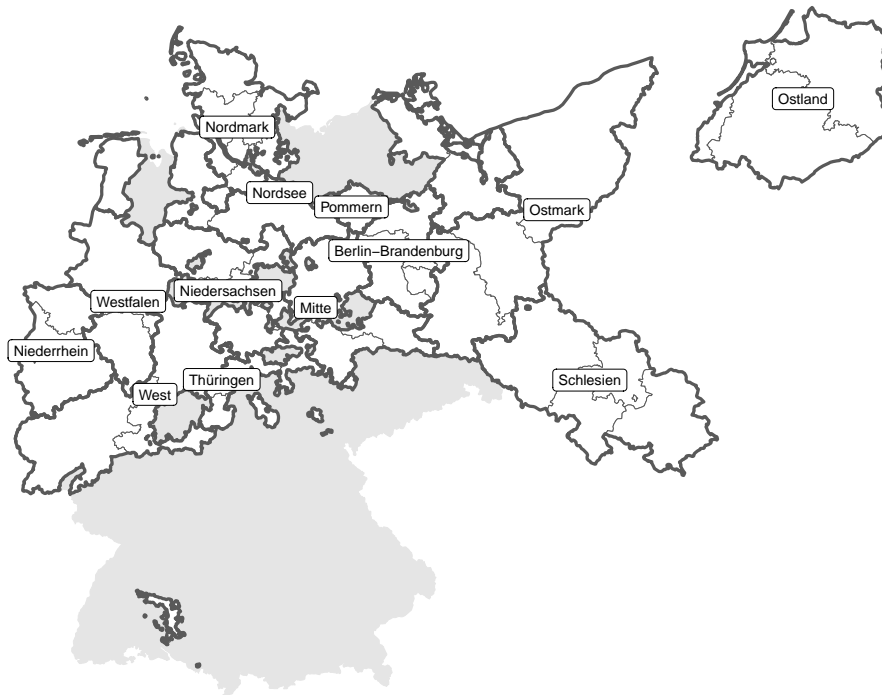
Solution: In our main analyses, we account for potential differences in reporting practices by including regional fixed effects, comparing only towns within certain regions (usually Wahlkreise, but we also run alternative fixed effects specifications).

SI.1.2 Territorial organization of the *Sturmabteilung* in 1932

The SA was a strictly hierarchical, paramilitary organization. Its organizational design changed over the time, but in the period under investigation the SA was organized along the following levels (in descending order) (Campbell 2004: 161-162):

- Supreme SA leadership (*Oberste SA Führung*), led by Ernst Röhm
- SA-group (*Gruppe*), leading one or more sub-groups;
- SA-subgroups (*Untergruppe*)
- Smaller units that were nested into each other, such as *Standarte* (1000-3000 men), *Sturmabteilung* (250-600 men); *Sturm* (70-200 men); *Trupp* (20-60 men); *Schar* (4-12 men)

Figure SI 2: Reconstructing the territorial organization of the SA in July 1932



Note: Thin black lines: SA sub-group (*Untergruppe*) borders, thick black lines: SA group (*Gruppe*) borders. Labels indicate SA group names. We crop the borders to the Prussian borders.

Since precise maps of the SA's territorial composition in 1932 do not exist we infer the approximate area of responsibility based on archival lists of the individual SA sub-groups' headquarters in July 1932. Specifically, we spatially assign a *Landkreis* (country) to the respective SA sub-group based on the shortest distance of the *Landkreis* centroid to a sub-group headquarter. While this procedure necessarily entails a certain degree of measurement error, we cross-checked the results based on SA maps for later years, finding a high degree of overlap.

SI.1.3 Data sources for covariates

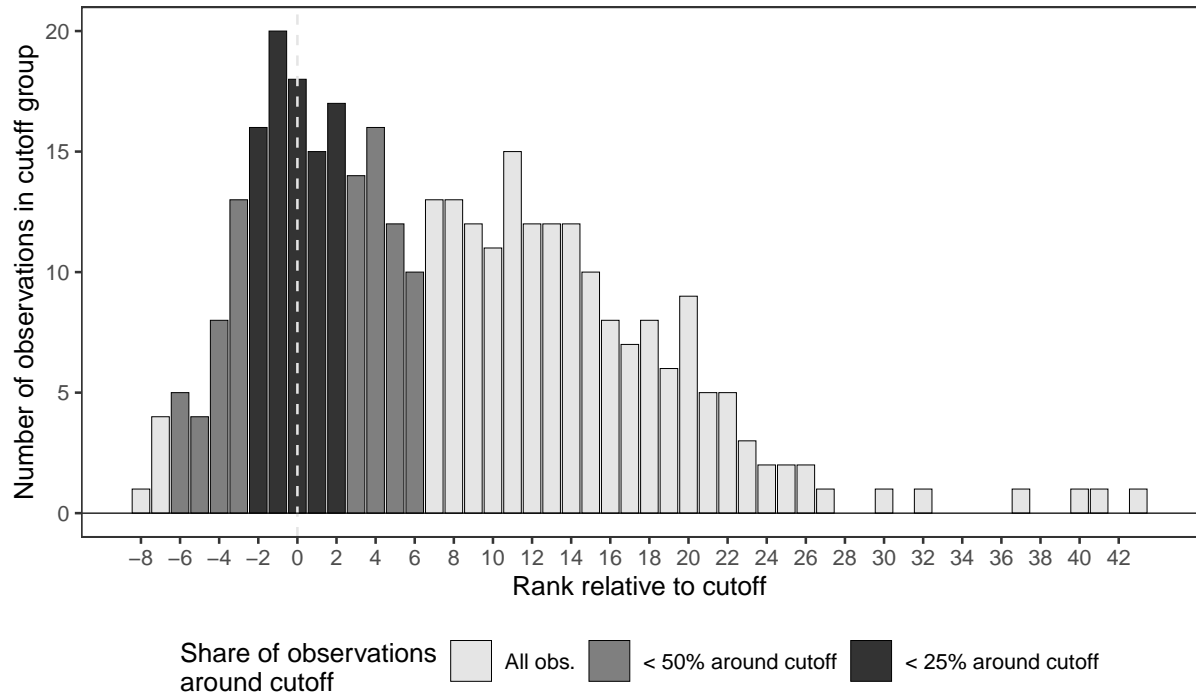
- **Population.** Falter and Hänisch (1990)
- **WW1 casualty share.** De Juan et al. (2023)
- **Protestant share.** Falter and Hänisch (1990)
- **NSDAP vote share 1930.** Falter and Hänisch (1990)
- **KPD vote share 1930.** Falter and Hänisch (1990)
- **Number of NSDAP candidates.** Own data collection.

Except for the Number of NSDAP candidates in a town, all the covariates are measured on the level of the county (*Landkreis*), since comprehensive historical information on the town-level does not exist.

SI.2 Research design

SI.2.1 Determining different bandwidths around cutoff

Figure SI 3: Bandwidths around cutoff

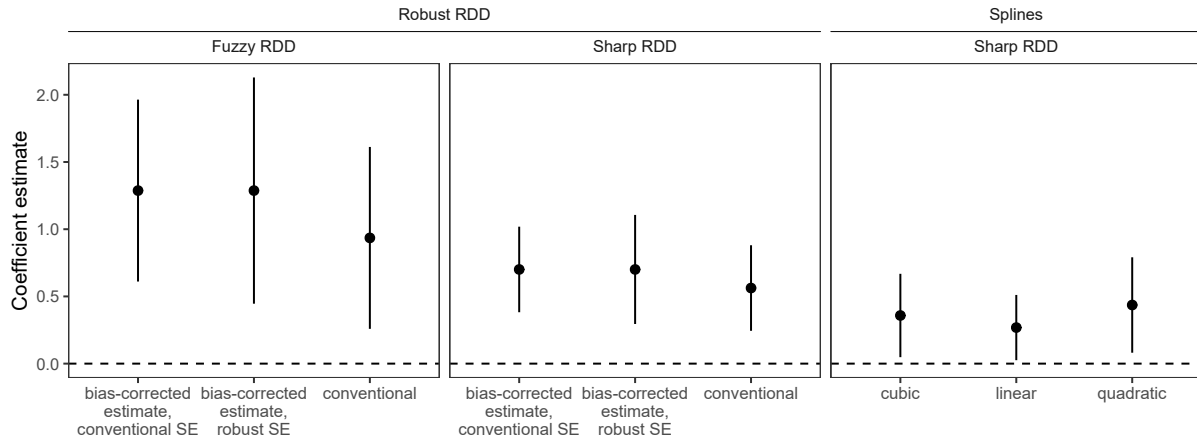


Note:

SI.3 Robustness

SI.3.1 Different RDD specifications

Figure SI 4: Varying RDD specifications



Notes: The plot displays coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals from different variants of our RDD specification. Outcome variable is occurrence of violent event in NSDAP candidate home town, treatment is being above the cutoff. All models include electoral district fixed effects and cluster standard errors at the county (*Landkreis*) level. The left two panels estimate different sharp and fuzzy specifications, using the `rdrobust` software (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2015). The `rdrobust` software automatically selects the bandwidth, uses a triangular kernel weight for observations around the cutoff, and implements a bias-correction for both estimates and standard errors. The right panel replicates our main specification, but introduces a quadratic and cubic spline for the running variable, instead of the simple linear interaction we use in our main models (which we replicate in the plot for comparison purposes). We refrain from showing higher-order polynomials as estimates can become unstable (Gelman and Imbens 2019).

SI.3.2 Covariates and outliers

Table SI 1: Covariates and outliers

	With Berlin			Without Berlin		
	Observations around cutoff			Observations around cutoff		
	All	<50%	<25%	All	<50%	<25%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Locations with MPs	0.35*** (0.10)	0.25+ (0.14)	0.79* (0.32)	0.33** (0.10)	0.21 (0.15)	0.75+ (0.38)
Population (log)	0.16*** (0.05)	0.19** (0.07)	0.26+ (0.15)	0.16*** (0.05)	0.19** (0.07)	0.28+ (0.16)
WW1 casualty share	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Protestant share	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01+ (0.00)
City (dummy)	0.05 (0.08)	0.02 (0.10)	0.06 (0.22)	0.05 (0.08)	0.02 (0.10)	0.07 (0.22)
NSDAP vote share 1930	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
KPD vote share 1930	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Num. of NSDAP candidates in town > 1	0.03 (0.06)	0.06 (0.10)	0.17 (0.22)	0.02 (0.07)	0.04 (0.11)	0.08 (0.24)
Election district FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R2	0.213	0.312	0.587	0.211	0.314	0.582
Num.Obs.	288	148	57	278	141	53

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Outcome is a dummy variable taking one if at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces occurred in a town. Coefficients for relative rank and relative rank × above cutoff are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; +p < .1.

SI.3.3 Different Spatial Fixed Effects

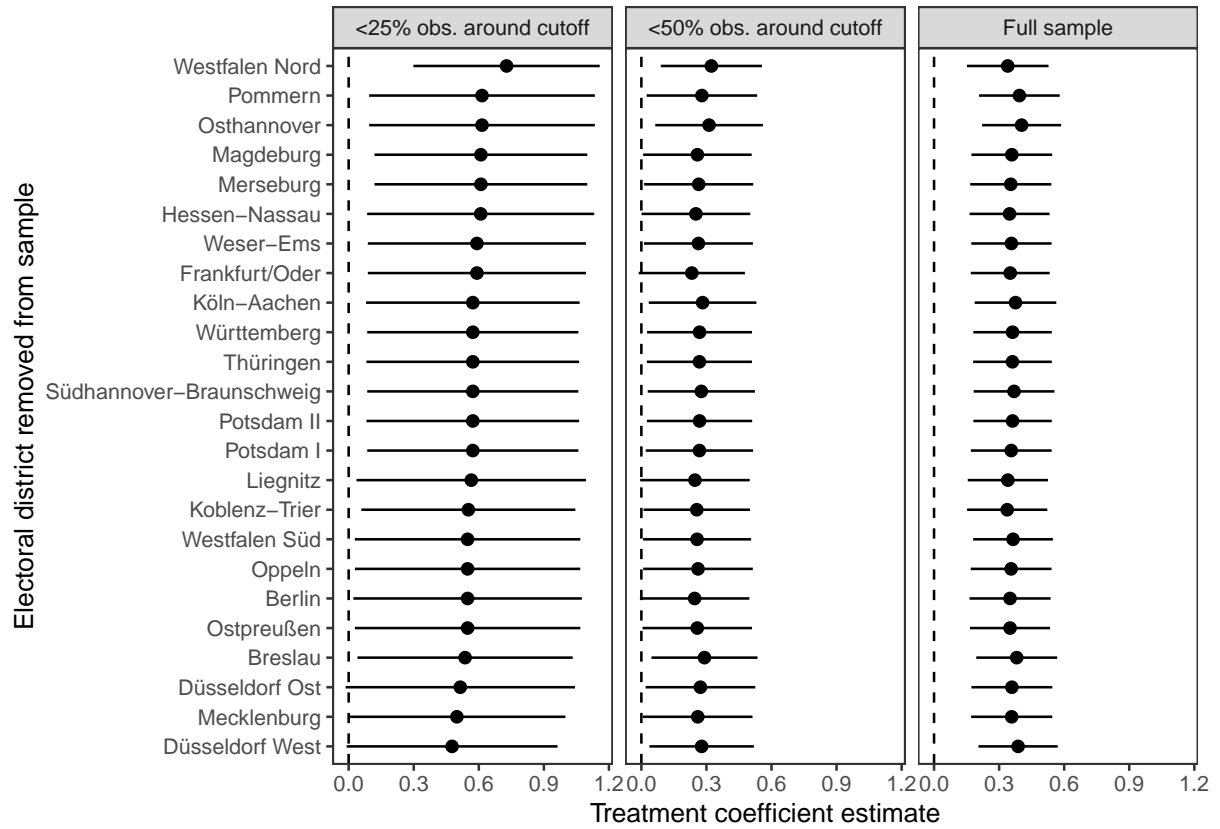
Table SI 2: Varying fixed effect specifications

	Sharp RDD			Fuzzy RDD		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Towns with MPs	0.27* (0.12)	0.31* (0.14)	0.30* (0.13)	0.33* (0.16)	0.38* (0.18)	0.35* (0.16)
Election district FE	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Governorate FE	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
SA Group FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
R2	0.211	0.252	0.279	0.180	0.213	0.242
Num.Obs.	178	181	181	178	181	181

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Outcome is a dummy variable taking one if at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces occurred in a town. Coefficients for relative rank and relative rank \times above cutoff are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .1$.

SI.3.4 Jackknife

Figure SI 5: Jackknife: leave-one-out analysis of electoral districts



Note: Facet titles indicate sample bandwidth around cutoff. Sharp RDD estimates.

SI.3.5 Placebo with 1930 election results

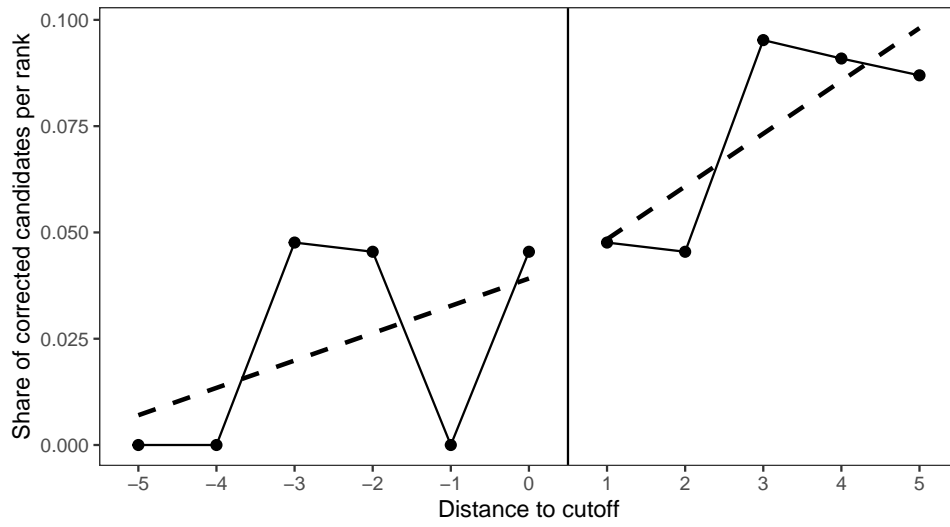
Table SI 3: Placebo with 1930 election results

	Sharp RDD			Fuzzy RDD		
	Observations around cutoff			Observations around cutoff		
	All	<50%	<25%	All	<50%	<25%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Towns with MPs	0.36** (0.11)	0.11 (0.16)	-0.13 (0.37)	0.38** (0.11)	0.14 (0.18)	0.23 (0.47)
R2	0.135	0.202	0.407	0.120	0.181	0.252
Num.Obs.	327	131	55	327	131	67

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Outcome is a dummy variable taking one if at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces occurred in a town. Relative rank is computed based on the number of NSDAP votes in the 1930 election. Coefficients for relative rank and relative rank × above cutoff are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .1.

SI.3.6 Manual rank corrections

Figure SI 6: Manual rank corrections

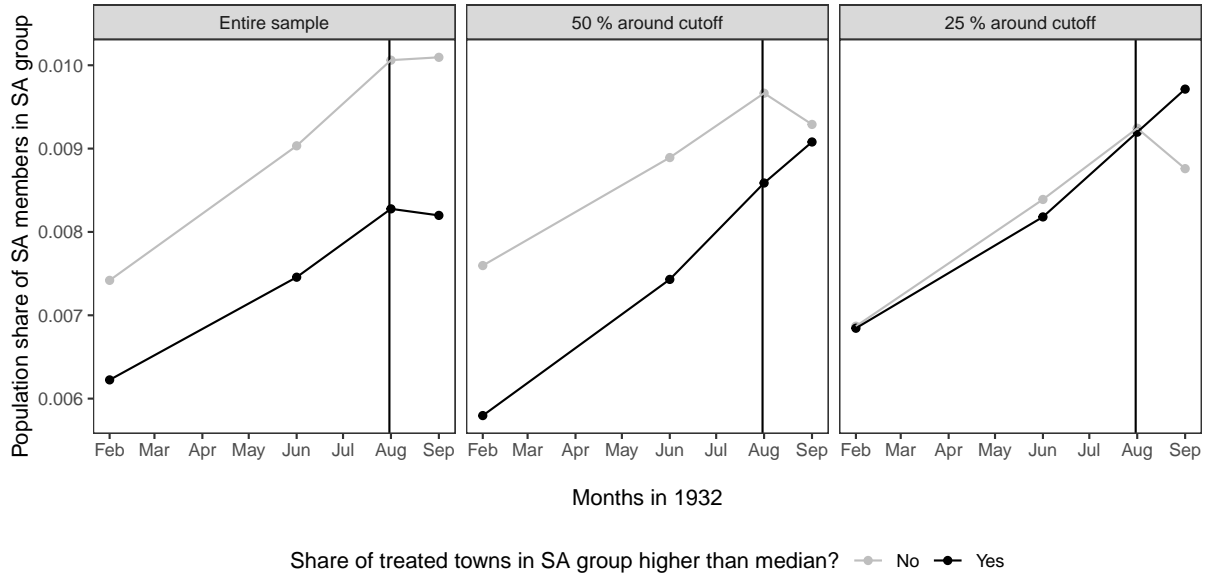


Note: For each rank relative to the cutoff we compute the average number of candidates whose position was manually corrected on the archived candidate lists.

SI.4 Mechanisms

SI.4.1 SA membership data

Figure SI 7: Resources for violence II



Note:

In order to probe the membership/funding mechanism based on alternative historical sources that are less dependent on our own qualitative coding, we draw on SA membership lists distributed by the SA leadership to the SA administration. In total, we were able to locate five lists in the German Federal Archives. These lists provide information on the number of members of SA groups and subgroups in the period between May 1931 and September 1932. We have hand-coded the lists to trace the development of membership sizes in units with or without winning SA commanders before and after the elections in July 1932. The patterns illustrated in [Figure SI 7](#) mirror our analysis of the SA mood reports: we see similar developments of membership numbers in units with and without winning SA candidates prior to the elections. However, SA groups under leadership of SA candidates that were successful in the elections, seem to have been in a better position to reduce membership losses.

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