



WIDER Working Paper 2022/157

## **The legacy of church–state conflict**

Evidence from Nazi repression of Catholic priests

Leonid Peisakhin<sup>1</sup> and Didac Queralt<sup>2</sup>

December 2022

**Abstract:** A burgeoning literature on repression against civilians argues that exposure to violence changes victims' identities by strengthening attachment to the in-group and creates downstream effects for political and social behaviour that persist across generations. In this paper, we ask whether selective repression against community elites, who are crucial in the processes of value formation and transmission, might create similar lasting effects. We test this hypothesis in the context of Nazi-era repression of Catholic clergy in Bavaria and explore whether historical repression against Catholic priests might be associated with higher support for Christian Democrats in the post-World War II period. Consistent with expectations, we find that communes where Catholic priests had been repressed by the Nazi regime are more likely to vote for Christian Democrats by comparison to those settlements where no elite repression took place. This effect is particularly strong in smaller communes where networks are tighter and where the repressed priests served for longer periods. We find that the legacy of priest repression on voting behaviour persists all the way into the present, although its magnitude wanes over time. These findings shed new light on the long-term political repercussions of the church–state relationship and suggest that selective repression of elites is capable of leaving lasting intergenerational legacies for political and social behaviour.

**Key words:** church–state relationship, elite repression, Nazi regime, Catholic clergy, Christian Democrats, Bavaria

**JEL classification:** N44, P48

**Note:** Supplementary material is available as an online appendix [here](https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/legacy-church%E2%80%93state-conflict) (<https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/legacy-church%E2%80%93state-conflict>).

**Acknowledgements:** We thank for helpful comments Margit Tavits, Vicky Fouka, Stephen Naron, and participants at workshops at NYU-Abu Dhabi, Yale, and UNU-WIDER, as well as panel participants at APSA, EPSA, and CES. We are grateful to staff at the Bundesarchiv library, Bavarian Statistical Office, and the German Bishops' conference for sharing historical data. We also acknowledge excellent research assistance by Sophia Arlt, Alexandru Frantiuc, Stefan Hee, Christian Aschenbrenner, Alex Raev, and Keshar Shahi.

---

<sup>1</sup> New York University-Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, [leonid.peisakhin@nyu.edu](mailto:leonid.peisakhin@nyu.edu); <sup>2</sup> Yale University, New Haven, USA, [didac.queralt@yale.edu](mailto:didac.queralt@yale.edu)

This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project [Institutional legacies of violent conflict](#).

Copyright © UNU-WIDER 2022

UNU-WIDER employs a fair use policy for reasonable reproduction of UNU-WIDER copyrighted content—such as the reproduction of a table or a figure, and/or text not exceeding 400 words—with due acknowledgement of the original source, without requiring explicit permission from the copyright holder.

Information and requests: [publications@wider.unu.edu](mailto:publications@wider.unu.edu)

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9267-290-4

<https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2022/290-4>

Typescript prepared by Gary Smith.

United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research provides economic analysis and policy advice with the aim of promoting sustainable and equitable development. The Institute began operations in 1985 in Helsinki, Finland, as the first research and training centre of the United Nations University. Today it is a unique blend of think tank, research institute, and UN agency—providing a range of services from policy advice to governments as well as freely available original research.

The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom as well as earmarked contributions for specific projects from a variety of donors.

Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute or the United Nations University, nor the programme/project donors.

## 1 Introduction

The Dachau concentration camp, a major hub in the machine of Nazi repression, held some 2,600 Roman Catholic priests, with about one-quarter of these from Germany. Around 15 per cent of German Catholic priests in Dachau perished in the camp (Berben 1975). The Nazi state is infamous for its large-scale extermination of Jews, determined persecution of ethnic and social minorities such as Roma and homosexuals, and euthanasia campaigns against the mentally and physically handicapped (Shirer 1960). The fact that the Nazi regime also systematically repressed the Catholic church on German soil is often glossed over. And yet, this campaign of intimidation, designed to force the church to retreat from the public sphere and cede to the Party control over the hearts and minds of its parishioners, resulted in a remaking of the country's educational system and associational life. By 1940, the Catholic church was prohibited from running elementary schools that had previously dominated in Catholic areas, all Catholic associations were banned, monastic life was almost extinguished, and, in schools, crucifixes were being replaced by portraits of Hitler (Lewy 2000). At that time, it seemed that the vibrant tradition of political Catholicism was dead.

In this paper we study the legacy effects of the repression of Catholic priests by the Nazi state on the voting patterns in predominantly Catholic areas after World War II (WWII). This repression expressed itself primarily as pressure by state authorities against the clergy to give up any attempt to promote religious life in their communities when it interfered with the Nazi way of life and entailed curtailing or rescheduling of religious festivals, ceding the pride of place to Nazi symbols, and, most importantly, remaining silent when Catholic dogma came into conflict with Nazi ideology. When the agents of the church refused to comply—which happened in some localities, but not universally—they often found themselves the targets of the regime's revenge. Punishment for standing up for the church and its teachings ranged from police warnings to death sentences. Priest activism, the primary cause of repression, was a product of the personal characteristics of a given clergyman and their convictions. Given that a cleric's political preferences and personality were not relevant to job assignments—unlike their exam scores, financial needs, and origins—the logic of state repression against priests was exogenous to the political and social characteristics of targeted settlements. This allows us to isolate the causal effect of priest repression on subsequent political behaviour within the affected municipalities.

The reason that we focus on post-war voting behaviour as an outcome is because, by the early 1930s, the Catholic church had become, rather reluctantly, a major force in German politics (Kalyvas 1996). In the mid-1880s, over 80 per cent of German Catholics—37 per cent of the Reich's population—were voting for the Catholic Center Party and its regional subsidiaries. In the last few elections before the Nazis seized power in 1933, the Center Party and its Bavarian ally still held about 15 per cent of seats in the federal parliament, and being Catholic was a good predictor for not voting for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP/Nazi) (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018).

The literature on violence against civilians demonstrates that repression leaves legacy effects that can last for multiple generations. Those who experience violence at the hands of the state and their descendants tend to develop a stronger attachment towards their in-group and to vote at a higher rate for a political party representing the in-group, or, when such a party is absent, to shun the party associated with the perpetrator (Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Rozenas et al. 2017). Given that repression of civilians has been shown to generate downstream effects on voting, in this study we explore whether violence against elites—in this instance, Catholic clergy—might create similar effects. Catholic clergy had a great deal of sway in their communities until quite recently. Thus, they are a particularly favourable case for the study of the long-term legacy of elite influence; this is an important scope condition for our argument.

On a theoretical level, this is a paper about the legacy of elite repression. Theoretical work in psychology assigns an important role to community elites in the process of value formation alongside parents and

peers (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982). We ask whether repression of elites might bring about a value shift within the affected communities that then alters political behaviour downstream. The intuition behind our argument is that in a community whose way of life is threatened by outside forces, repression of a prominent member is a trigger event that forces residents to double down in defence of their foundational cultural practices and causes a strengthening of in-group identity against outsiders. We hypothesize that this results in a lasting shift in social and political identities in the affected community that expresses itself in changed voting patterns when the in- or the out-group are represented in politics.

We study this question in Bavaria, because that region is home to the largest Catholic population within Germany. In the 1920s, 70 per cent of Bavaria's seven million residents were Catholic (Winkler et al. 1933). A little under half of all Catholic clergy in Bavaria experienced some form of repression (3,975 of around 8,500 priests) at the hands of the Nazi state between 1933 and 1945 (von Hehl 1996). Leveraging a compendium of repression of Catholic clergy compiled by the church, which contains data on both instances and intensity of state-sponsored violence against priests, we show that municipalities where priests had been repressed are more likely to vote for Christian Democrats in post-war elections by around two percentage points relative to municipalities where no clergy had been repressed. We show that these electoral effects persist into the present, although they do weaken over time. The magnitude of these effects is substantial by the standards of the literature on voting behaviour. These findings provide evidence consistent with our theoretical expectations of a political identity shift in communities that experienced repression in that we show that repression of elites has long-lasting effects, and that these effects persist well after the repressed individuals themselves pass on.

This paper contributes to two literatures. First, we make a contribution to the scholarship on the legacies of violence by showing that repression against elites is one of the mechanisms by which violence reshapes voting patterns over the long-term. To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first micro-level study of the effects of elite repression on long-term shifts in political behaviour. This is important because most state-sponsored violence is directed against elites, not civilians, whereas, in contrast, almost all literature on the legacy of violence focuses on the repercussions of civilian repression (Acharya et al. 2016; Homola et al. 2020; Rozenas and Zhukov 2019). Second, this study contributes to our understanding of the micro-foundations of church–state conflict that has been at the root of the evolution of the Western state (Grzymala-Busse 2020). Our findings suggest that attempts to forcefully remove religious elites from their communities or to weaken them can reinforce political and social identities of parishioners, thus creating a backlash against the state.

## **2 The Catholic church and the German state**

### **2.1 Background**

Repression of the Catholic church by the Nazi state is part of a long history of confrontation between religious and secular authorities over the control of the hearts and minds of laypeople. The adversarial relationship between these two sources of social authority dates back at least to the Middle Ages. Recent literature suggests that the modern state has emerged out of this tension as secular authorities either learned to respect the church's institutional freedoms in exchange for legitimation, pushed back against religious control while copying the church's administrative practices, or sought to co-opt religious institutions in the service of legitimizing state authority (Becker and Pfaff 2022; Grzymala-Busse 2020).

This struggle for control over society reached its peak as nationalism swept Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Appeal to the idea of a mythical nation created an alternative source of legitimacy for state authorities other than appeal to the divine. Where there were national churches—

offshoots of Protestant or Orthodox traditions—these were often co-opted in the service of legitimizing the new nation states. In a few rare instances where an anti-colonial struggle was ongoing against elites of a different denomination—such as in Ireland and Poland—the Catholic church successfully allied itself with nationalist movements, with far-reaching consequences for the substance of later government policies (Grzymała-Busse 2015). Generally, though, the Catholic doctrine was inherently at odds with the rising tide of nationalism. Whereas the national idea elevated the particular as a narrowly defined political and cultural space, Catholic doctrine promoted a universal communion of all peoples equal before God and a political and cultural community with the broadest possible boundaries. This tension between the parochial and the universal—between the nascent nation state and the Catholic church—had momentous political repercussions. For one, the church–state struggle spilled over into the domain of education. Traditionally, pre-secondary education was the domain of the church. It is there that the church indoctrinated the young into its moral precepts and instilled loyalties that would last a lifetime. However, with the rise of nationalism, control over schooling became of vital importance to the state as it sought to train patriotic citizenry united around a common dialect and mythology (Deutsch 1966).

The struggle for control over education was particularly intense in the *Kulturkampf* (culture war) of 1872–78 between the nascent German state and the entrenching Catholic church. As the church denounced the separation between religion and the state, successfully reinvigorated Catholic associational life, and authorized the founding of a political party (the Center Party) to represent its interests, Chancellor Bismarck of Germany made it clear that he wanted the church out of education and the legislature. Diplomatic relations were cut between Prussia and the Vatican, religious supervision over primary education was abolished, marriage was transformed into an obligatory civil ceremony, and the state gave itself the power of control over clerical training and appointments (Gross 2005; Pflanze 1990). When the *Kulturkampf* ended because Bismarck needed the support of the Center Party and the church in his battle against socialism, most *Kulturkampf* legislation was repealed and German Catholics consolidated around the Center Party. In a process explored by Kalyvas (1996) in his book on the origins of Christian democracy, the Catholic church acquired a powerful political party, strengthened an already extensive network of associations, and shored up its support among the faithful. In the last free election of 1932 before Hitler’s seizure of power, being a Catholic was a strong predictor for voting against the NSDAP because of Catholic priests’ strong advocacy for the Center Party (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018).

Hitler’s rise to power could not bode well for the Catholic church. Here were two ideologies bent on total social control arrayed against each other. Nazism was a religion in its own right, with powerful symbols, rituals, and dogmas built around the cult of the Aryan race and the German state (Evans Richard 2005; Shirer 1960). Despite Hitler’s Catholic upbringing, the Party’s elites were stridently anti-clerical. Alfred Rosenberg, the editor of the main Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* and Hitler’s deputy for spiritual and ideological training, flaunted his anti-Christian views in *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* published in 1930. That book introduced the neo-pagan cult of the Aryan race and was banned by the Catholic church. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, was an anti-clerical radical, whereas Heinrich Himmler, the head of the Schutzstaffel (SS), declared that ‘we live in an era of the ultimate conflict with Christianity’ and that it was the state’s duty to ‘give the German people ... the non-Christian ideological foundations on which to lead and shape their lives’ (quoted in Longerich 2011: 270).

Just like Bismarck, Nazi ideologues viewed the Catholic church with distrust because of its international commitments and insistence on the idea of a brotherhood of equal Christian nations. Added to that was the distaste for the church’s commitment to the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, a Jew.<sup>1</sup> And, just like in the 1870s, control over education was to become the primary arena of contestation between the Nazi state and the Catholic church. Already in 1924, the NSDAP opposed the agreement between the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Nazi state developed its own religion—positive Christianity—as an alternative to Catholicism. It was built around the cult of the Aryan race and distanced itself from the Bible while presenting Hitler as ‘the herald of a new revelation’ (Shirer 1960: 239).

Bavarian regional government and the Vatican—the Bavarian Concordat—because the state confirmed the church’s control over confessional schools (Pridham 1973). The *Kulturkampf* was about to play itself out again, but this time the state authorities were no longer concerned with the niceties of democratic procedure and had higher administrative capacity at their disposal.

Despite this, it was a devout Catholic and member of the Center Party, Franz von Papen, who, as chancellor in 1932, paved the way for Hitler to seize power. While the church vehemently opposed the NSDAP’s neo-paganism and anti-clericalism, found the Party’s insistence on the superiority of the Aryan race heretical, and would later take issue with the state’s mandatory sterilization and euthanasia policies for the terminally ill and mentally handicapped, at the same time it also strongly supported the Party’s opposition to Communism and commitment to strong authority and conservative family values (Rossi 2015).<sup>2</sup> Throughout much of the Nazi period the church was determined to find a way to cohabit peacefully with the state. While the Catholic church largely exited from the political sphere during this time, ‘on matters directly affecting the Catholic traditional “way of life” detestation of Nazi interference [would] prompt spectacular opposition’ (Kershaw 2000: 223).

## 2.2 Repression of the Catholic church

The onslaught against the Catholic church in the Third Reich proceeded in ebbs and flows. The first salvo in the state campaign of repression came just six months after Hitler’s appointment as chancellor. In June 1933, some 2,000 functionaries of the Bavarian People’s Party (BVP)—the Center Party’s regional equivalent in Bavaria—were rounded up and arrested. Regardless, the Vatican proceeded with the agreement (*Reichskonkordat*) that it had been negotiating with the state regulating the life of the church in Germany. The Concordat was signed in July 1933 and granted the Catholic church the right to manage the religious life of its parishioners in exchange for complete withdrawal from the political sphere. Accordingly, the Center Party and BVP self-dissolved along with the Catholic Teachers’ Union. Pressure was put on Catholic Action, a political movement which was the predecessor of the Christian Democrats in Germany, to wind down.

Following a brief reprieve, the Party signalled the full extent of its plans for the Catholic community in the purge of the Night of the Long Knives in the summer of 1934. While the purge was primarily an internal extrajudicial housekeeping affair aimed against the Nazi Party’s rowdy paramilitary arm (SA), it also swept up the head of Catholic Action, the editor of Munich’s influential Catholic weekly *Der Gerade Weg*, and even the national director of the Catholic Youth Sports Association (Hoffmann 1977). All of them were murdered. Following another lull and noting that Catholic associational life remained vibrant, in 1936 the state embarked on a campaign, masterminded by Goebbels himself and drawing on the lessons of the Protestant Reformation, to destroy the church’s moral reputation. In the so-called ‘immorality trials’ hundreds of monastics were dragged before courts on charges of sexual impropriety and currency manipulation. The Bavarian state government banned nuns from teaching in schools on the grounds that ‘the National Socialist State wants a school, a youth, and a form of education in harmony with the National Socialist spirit’ (Kershaw 2000: 201).

With the extent of the state’s plans for the church on display and now realizing that the Party was bent on muscling Catholicism out of schools and on strangling religious associational life, the Catholic church responded with its formidable might. In a vehement encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, published in 300,000 copies that were unprecedentedly in German and not the customary Latin, and read out in every Catholic church in Germany on Palm Sunday 1937, Pope Pius XI condemned the neo-pagan idolization of race, spoke out in defence of the rights of man as being divinely ordained in a critique of the Reich’s sterilization policies, and threatened that the church ‘would defend its rights and its freedom in the name

---

<sup>2</sup> On antisemitism the Catholic church was largely silent unless the interests of Jews who had converted to Catholicism were concerned (Lewy 2000).

of the Almighty' (Spicer 2004: 57). Several sections of the encyclical were addressed specifically to young Catholics urging them to stand firm with the church.

This led to the state redoubling its efforts. Simultaneous membership in *Hitler Jugend* and Catholic youth associations became impossible; by July 1937 the Bavarian state banned most Catholic youth organizations under its jurisdiction; and in 1939 the state declared that all Catholic confessional schools in Bavaria had been disbanded or converted to public/community schools (*Gemeinschaftsschulen*) (Evans Richard 2005; Horn 1979). In 1941, all church newspapers and periodicals were shut down, decrees were adopted to abolish school prayers and remove crucifixes from schools, and monasteries were ordered to self-dissolve (Lewy 2000). By the time the tide of war turned against Nazi Germany, and the state once again relaxed its repression of church authorities, the Catholic church had lost its schools, extensive network of associations, and vibrant periodicals. Religious life had been seemingly largely erased from the public sphere, replaced by the secular cult of the Aryan race and the Nazi state. In seeking to confine Catholic practice only to Sunday services and feast days, the state repressed thousands of powerful local agents of the church: the parish priests.

### 2.3 Life in the parish and the dynamics of priest-led resistance

From our perspective in the present, it is not easy to appreciate how significant a role priests played in Catholic Bavaria and elsewhere in Europe, especially in rural communities. Communal life was centred largely around the church, with its masses, feast days, religious festivals, associations for every generation and occupation group, and control over nurseries and primary schools. When not at school, working in the field, or resting, the youth of the village were almost certainly engaged in some activity related to the Catholic church, be it catechism classes, singing of religious songs, or hiking with other members of the association. Symbols played an important role in that life, with monumental crosses and statues of the Virgin Mary prominently located in the centre of the village and at major crossroads, and with crucifixes proudly displayed in every house and classroom. Youth associations in particular had their own distinctive uniforms, and on feast days the community came alive, with the Vatican's white and yellow flags decorating every house along the processional route.

At the centre of this vibrant communal life stood the parish priest. He was not only the heart of much of this activity, but also, and most importantly, the direct link to salvation of one's soul. To be denied communion or be refused entry into the church meant not only being severed from one's community but also to be condemned to ever-lasting damnation. An activist parish priest was not hesitant to use this awesome power. An example of Ochsenfeld in the diocese of Eichstaett is instructive. When Father Heinloth of Ochsenfeld was asked by the Secret State Police (*Gestapo*) to leave his post over some derogatory remarks he made about the community school run by Party loyalists 'he informed his parishioners that on the Bishop's orders he was taking away the Sacrament and extinguishing the sacred light in the church. A medieval-style interdict was imposed' (Kershaw 2000: 204). When villagers begged Heinloth to return, he did so illegally and was arrested. In response, villagers hurled abuse at the mayor, teachers, and the police, and parents refused to send their children to school. Eventually, SS guards were called in to protect the mayor and the teachers for more than a week. In the meantime, Heinloth was freed and transferred to a different parish. For fear of public unrest, the case against him before the Special Court that decided political cases was dropped because of 'lack of evidence' (Kershaw 2000: 204).

Everyday resistance by Catholic clergy in defence of the church's traditional sphere of authority—what Spicer (2004) termed pastoral resistance (*Seelsorge-Resistenz*)—was initially made up of a multitude of small gestures that added up for effect. Priests in Bavaria often demonstratively refused to use the 'Heil Hitler' greeting, instead resorting to the overtly religious 'Grüss Gott'. They would put out banned church flags and refuse to fly the swastika or to ring church bells for secular political celebrations. Many would not baptize babies with non-Christian names or would not take off their hats or salute

when nationalist songs were sung or Nazi symbols displayed. Pastoral letters were read out on Sundays, reminding the faithful to stand firm with the church and indirectly criticizing the Nazi state.

As the church–state conflict intensified after 1936, some parish priests purposefully scheduled religious celebrations and catechism classes to coincide with scheduled Nazi events. Attendance was usually better at church events than at ones organized by the Party (Horn 1979). Religious gatherings—and especially festivals celebrating the investiture of new priests (*Primizfeiern*)—came as close as was possible in Nazi Germany to anti-government rallies. At one such gathering, at the famed Passion Theater of Obergammau in the diocese of Munich-Freising, ‘one preacher caused unrest among his listeners by hinting that the time would come when each Catholic would have to vote whether he wished to remain a Catholic and still have a priest’ (Kershaw 2000: 197).

Bishops, protected as they were by their position, generally had greater leeway than ordinary priests. In February 1937, vexed by the state’s attacks on the church, Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich-Freising criticized the Nazis in his Sunday sermon for breaching the Concordat; his address ‘was interrupted on several occasions by cries of “down with the dictatorship”’ (Kershaw 2000: 201). Faulhaber’s colleague, Bishop Michael Rackl of Eichstätt, the most outspoken of Bavarian bishops, held forth that ‘National Socialism is not compatible with the Catholic *Weltanschauung* [world view]’ and that ‘every Catholic must decide whether he will be loyal to his Church or wants to become a National Socialist’ (quoted in Kershaw 2000: 202). The most direct critique of the regime came from Bishop Clemens von Galen of Münster, outside of Bavaria, who in 1941 labelled as state-sanctioned murder the state’s euthanasia programme of the mentally and physically handicapped; von Galen’s remarks led to public protests against the government (Friedlander 1995). The news of such remarks by senior prelates travelled fast, and local parish priests could choose to disseminate it further in their communities.

Unusually for totalitarian states, concerted community action in support of a banned religious practice at times forced state authorities to reverse their directives. At a *Primizfeier* in Mömlingen in the diocese of Würzburg, when villagers, including Party members, put out of their windows the prohibited yellow and white Catholic banners on hearing the signal of tolling church bells, the district office allowed the celebration to proceed without taking action because of the scale of public disobedience (Kershaw 2000: 197). Momentously, in 1941 the Bavarian state government reversed its decision to ban crucifixes from classrooms following mass threats from parents to remove their children from schools. The directive to ban the ringing of church bells calling parishioners to service was likewise rescinded under popular pressure in 1943 (Kershaw 2000). When, by 1938, Catholic youth associations were disbanded by order of the state, in some localities Catholic priests initiated voluntary youth instruction, calling it ‘youth communion’ or ‘religious youth weeks’ (Horn 1979: 575). All of this led the Gestapo in Bavaria to remark in their reports ‘that the churchgoing population takes at heart the side of the priests and that therefore the support for the clergy becomes greater ... the influence of the Church on the population is so strong that the National Socialist spirit cannot penetrate’ (quoted in Kershaw 2000: 201).

Clerics varied in their willingness to challenge the regime. Some, like Father Albert Willimsky, criticized the state often and openly, from the pulpit, in the classroom, in the local village inn, and even to complete strangers on public transport. Willimsky died in the Dachau concentration camp in 1940 (Spicer 2008: 75–81). Others, like Josef Fäth, the young chaplain of Leidersbach in the diocese of Würzburg, used their spiritual authority to consolidate local public opinion around themselves and then were able, at least for a time, to express their political views with vehemence and a degree of impunity. Fäth became known locally as the ‘black *Kreisleiter* [district leader]’<sup>3</sup> while the village teacher accused him of fomenting ‘popular risings’ (Kershaw 2000: 200). A small minority of Catholic priests enthusiastically supported the Nazis. Known as ‘brown priests’ and counting among themselves Archbishop Conrad Grober of

---

<sup>3</sup> Black here refers to the colour of a Catholic priest’s cassock.

Freiburg (outside of Bavaria), they advocated strongly for unity between the Catholic church and the Nazi state, and some worked as government informers (Spicer 2008). Many clerics simply stayed quiet and tried as hard as possible to create an impression of being apolitical.

The Nazi state had a low tolerance for critics, especially if they came from the Catholic milieu. Those clerics who criticized the regime, disrespected Nazi symbols, or strongly resisted the state's attempts to quash Catholic associational life were punished. The state's police apparatus, and especially the Gestapo, along with local teachers, who were almost universally strongly supportive of Nazism and anti-clerical, and local Nazi Party members and mayors kept a close watch for signs of resistance by the clergy. The level of repression fluctuated in line with the general ebb and flow of the dynamics of church–state struggle, but an activist priest standing up for Catholic values and traditions more energetically than his more docile colleagues was guaranteed to be found out.

Not every Catholic cleric who became fodder for the millstones of Nazi repression was an activist. Some were denounced on trumped-up charges by other local elites, often community school teachers, who were jealous of the priest's privileged position. Others were ratted out to the police because of local petty grievances or upsets. At times, in areas where the local administrative apparatus was more robust, priests were more likely to come under pressure from the state (von Hehl 1996). However, the historical record suggests that, on average, priests who were more energetic in pushing back against the state were the ones who were subject to repression. The history of the village of Fürstenfeldbruck, in the diocese of München-Freising, is instructive in this regard. Until 1939, Pastor Heinrich Feiler was the priest there; he 'primarily limited himself to pastoral care in the narrower sense, avoided conflicts, and seemed to give in under pressure' (Forstner 2009: 246). Father Feiler experienced no state repression of any kind. On Feiler's retirement, he was replaced by Martin Mayr, who was 'very outspoken' and had been involved in political work with BVP before 1933. Within two years, Mayr was banned from teaching, and by 1942 state authorities forced Mayr's dismissal for political unreliability (von Hehl 1996). As Kershaw remarks, 'the personality and energy of individual priests unquestionably influenced the degree of bitterness with which the Church struggle was contested' (2000: 198). It follows that, all else being equal, those who put up more of a fight were also the ones who were more likely to suffer the consequences.

### 3 Theory

Variation in repression against Catholic clergy in Bavaria provides a theoretical opportunity to test what effect repression against elites has on long-term political behaviour in the affected communities. The reason we hypothesize that there should be a long-term effect is because there is a growing body of scholarship suggesting that violence, at least when directed against ordinary civilians, tends to leave lasting community-level effects that percolate across generations. Evidence from cross-country studies on the legacies of both interstate and civil conflicts suggests that family exposure to violence in the past tends to be associated with higher in-group trust and lower trust towards out-groups among the descendants of the original victims, often traceable at least into the third generation (Grosjean 2014; Hutchison 2014; Tir and Singh 2015). Bauer et al. (2016), in their meta-analysis of studies on the effect of violence on communities, note that exposure to violence often leads to higher social cohesion and political engagement, but that this post-traumatic growth is commonly a product of an increase in the levels of in-group attachment.<sup>4</sup> This pattern of findings is confirmed in single-country studies. For instance, examining the legacy of the Spanish Civil War, Balcells (2012) finds that those from families more affected by violence have higher attachment to their ethnic identity and dislike of the perpetrator

---

<sup>4</sup> Mironova and Whitt (2016) discuss the conditions under which intergroup sociality can be reestablished, whereas Hager et al. (2019) point out that conflict that entails fighting within the in-group can leave a legacy of in-group distrust.

group. In an analysis of three generations of individuals within family units, Lupu and Peisakhin (2017) demonstrate how Crimean Tatars from families with more deaths during Stalinist deportation are more supportive of their group and less likely to vote for political parties associated with the perpetrator. This finding is also supported by evidence presented by Rozenas et al. (2017) in their study of the effects of Stalinist deportation in western Ukraine. Fouka and Voth (forthcoming) have recently shown how the memory of past violence—in their study, the memory of Nazi repression of Greeks—leads those from areas that were more subject to victimization to continue to hold negative views of the ethnic group that was responsible for the atrocities.

We seek to extend the logic of these findings about the legacy of repression against civilians to the study of targeted violence against elites. The reason that such an extension is plausible is because the literature on the formation of social and political values and identities stipulates three theoretical channels for value formation and transmission: vertical—from parents to children; horizontal—between peers; and oblique—from community elites to ordinary individuals (Bowles and Gintis 2013; Boyd and Richerson 1985; Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982). This leads us to wonder whether violence against elites, who are pivotal in the formation and transmission of values, might have long-term consequences similar to the way in which vertical transmission of preferences and behaviours from parents to offspring or horizontal between peers creates legacy effects (Charnysh and Peisakhin 2022; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017).

The logic of our argument is as follows. In an environment where entire groups are targeted for repression based on their religion, ethnicity, class, or social identity, the identity of the victimized group is in peril. Depending on the nature and duration of repression and on the strength and density of in-group bonds, this group identity can either fracture and weaken, as hoped by the perpetrator, or consolidate and strengthen in a backlash against repression. We hypothesize that relatively short-lived repression of community elites in groups that are compact and where identities are thick can serve as a trigger for the consolidation of group identity and a further strengthening of group bonds.<sup>5</sup> Given that elites are theorized to be pivotal in the formation of value systems and that the existing literature on the legacies of violence argues that victim identities have enormous staying power, we conjecture that group identities altered as a result of repression against community elites might persist overtime with important repercussions for social and political behaviour downstream.

The clergy are archetypal community elites. Especially in rural settlements where the institutional landscape is relatively sparse, priests—along with teachers, innkeepers, merchants, and senior municipal officials—constitute the elite grouping. Because of their moral authority, we expect priests to play an important role in shaping the values and identities of members of their communities. That priests do play this role is illustrated by Wittenberg, who in his *Crucibles of Political Loyalty* (2006) illustrated in another authoritarian context, that of Communist Hungary, how low-level Catholic clergy provided refuge from the regime's propaganda and helped preserve loyalties for pre-authoritarian anti-regime political parties.

The intense church–state conflict during the period of Nazi rule created enabling conditions for the transformation of community-level Catholic identities. In many communities—those where the priest shied away from conflict with the state and therefore facilitated the retreat of the Catholic way of life from the public sphere—Catholic identity weakened, or at best survived to a limited degree through private practice. In contrast, in localities where the priest stood up to the encroachment of the Nazi regime's symbols, celebrations, and values against the Catholic milieu, the priest through his actions emphasized the sharp dichotomy between 'good Catholics' and 'good Nazis', thereby strengthening the sense of the in-group among his Catholic flock. An activist priest was likely to face repressive sanctions

---

<sup>5</sup> In communities where network bonds are weak or where members are dispersed, such elite repression might have the opposite effect of weakening in-group identity. We are not able to test this theoretical implication in the empirical context of this study.

from totalitarian state authorities who did not tolerate competitors in the public sphere.<sup>6</sup> Confronted with open and obvious prosecution of their value system made painfully apparent through persecution of the parish priest by the state, we expect members of the affected Catholic community to have experienced indirect traumatization similar in its identity-shaping effects to the effects of direct repression on victims. This leads us to expect that priest repression brought about a lasting shift in the community's social and political identities as victims and resulted in a strengthened identification with the Catholic cause. We hypothesize that as priests stood up in defence of Catholic institutions and traditions when confronted by pressure from the Nazi regime to conform, they strengthened the allegiance of their parishioners to Catholicism in general and to the cause of political Catholicism in particular. We expect that the higher level of commitment to the cause of political Catholicism in localities where parish priests experienced repression under Nazism persisted into the post-war period. It would have expressed itself as heightened attachment to Catholic values and practices and a stronger sense of political Catholicism.

Moving to testable empirical propositions, we explore whether Nazi-era state repression of Catholic priests in Bavaria resulted in more votes for Christian Democrats after WWII and fewer votes for parties on the extreme right (hypothesis 1). In testing the mechanisms of transmission, we ask whether the affected communities had higher mass attendance levels in the post-war period (hypothesis 2), and whether communes where priests served for longer periods and therefore were better entrenched were more likely to have higher support for Christian Democrats (hypothesis 3). Many parish priests continued to serve in the same locality after the war, but eventually all priests in our sample passed away, and that is when the legacy effects began. Our argument suggests that smaller communities that are more tightly knit are ones where the effect of priest repression on the strengthening of in-group identity is more likely to be expressed; therefore, we also test the link between community size and the size of the electoral effect (hypothesis 4).

## 4 Data

The causal variable in this study is incidence of repression against Catholic priests in Bavaria—this includes parish priests, chaplains, teachers of religion who have priestly rank, and other clergy. The data are digitized from a unique historical compilation of Nazi-era repression against Catholic clergy commissioned by the church and compiled by German historians over several decades (von Hehl 1996). The compilation is now in its fourth edition and stands at over 3,000 pages. The entries are based on records from the Gestapo, police, court, and diocese archives, and post-war surveys of Catholic clergy. Any missingness, in so far as it exists, is largely due to the fact that some security archives were destroyed in WWII.<sup>7</sup> The data are organized in the form of brief individual biographical entries that detail the priest's name, dates of birth and death, partial service trajectory (locations where the person was repressed and positions within the church hierarchy), and a narrative section, usually consisting of three or four sentences about the specific nature of repression that the individual experienced. That section usually provides the dates of specific incidents and describes them, as well as the resultant state sanctions.

In Bavaria, approximately 50 per cent of all Catholic priests (3,975 of about 8,500) experienced some form of repression under Nazi rule. In total, allowing for the fact that larger towns had multiple priests, some 35 per cent of the 7,100 Bavarian settlements (and 43 per cent of all rural settlements) saw their parish priests repressed at some point between 1933 and 1945.

---

<sup>6</sup> Even in instances where the priest was prosecuted for reasons other than their activism, but where repressive action was a product of local denunciations motivated by jealousy or overzealousness of local authorities, there too we expect the effect of elite repression on communal identity to be similar.

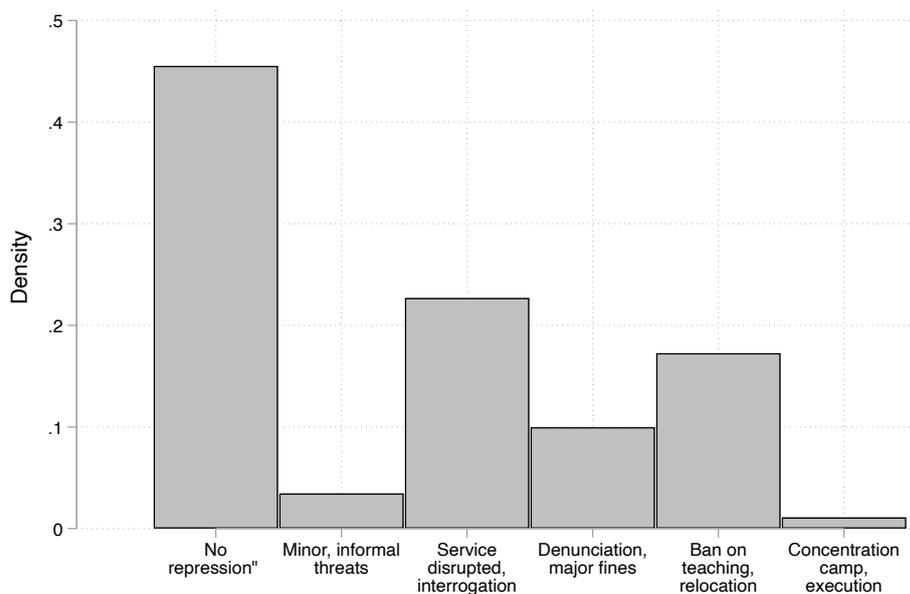
<sup>7</sup> This factor is orthogonal to a community's political and social characteristics.

The location of repression episodes is reported at the level of specific settlements. Given that the dependent variable—voting returns—is at commune (*Gemeinde*) level, we aggregate repression data to communes too. Communes are either a single larger settlement or an aggregation of two or three villages. In the countryside, because commune and parish boundaries usually coincide, it makes substantive sense to aggregate repression in this way.

The richness of the historical compendium allows us to measure repression in multiple ways. First, we construct a binary variable that takes on a value of 1 if there was at least one instance of clergy repression in that commune in 1933–45 and 0 otherwise. This coding divides all Bavarian communes into a ‘treatment’ and a ‘control’ group. Second, we capture the intensity of repression by manually coding all the repression entries in the dataset on a five-point scale where 1 refers to warnings from Party authorities or police or the priest being placed under police observation; 2 denotes interrogations, house searches, or small fines (below 50 Reichsmarks (RM) or US\$300 in present-day inflation-adjusted terms); 3 refers to denunciations in the press, moderate fines (RM50–300), or prison sentences of 1–5 months; 4 represents a ban on teaching or serving at mass, forced relocation or retirement, a major fine (RM300–1,000), or a prison sentence of 6–12 months; and 5 denotes the highest level of repression, such as prison sentences of over 12 months, ruinous fines (more than RM1,000), detention at a concentration camp, or execution.

The distribution of intensity repression scores is described in Figure 1. Interrogations, house searches, and small fines are the most common repression category. Very few priests experienced the most intense repression that entailed lengthy imprisonment or execution.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1: Intensity of Nazi repression of Catholic clergy



Source: authors' compilation.

Some communes saw more than one priest repressed, either because they had several clerics, or because different priests were repressed there at different times. In these cases, we compute the total number of priests repressed in the settlement, and for the intensity measure we keep the highest repression score for that town, as that score represents the peak of the onslaught of the Nazi state against the life of

<sup>8</sup> As a robustness check, we also build a repression sentiment score, which is used in subsidiary analyses reported in the Online Appendix. It is based on the scoring of lemmatized proper nouns in the biographical entries within the repression compendium from –3 (least repressive) to 3 (most repressive) by 13 independent German coders. Each biographical entry is then given a total repression score by summing the scores for individual nouns in that entry.

the community. The majority of repressed priests stayed put in the same parish throughout the Nazi period, and many remained there after WWII; others moved around. Among the repressed priests, 48 per cent were subject to repression in a single parish. The remainder experienced persecution in multiple parishes—some in as many as six. We hypothesized that length of tenure in a parish is associated with the strength of the legacy of the repression effect. However, the repression compendium does not provide information on how long priests served in every parish where they were persecuted. To get around this problem we collected additional data on length of parish service from diocese yearbooks (*Schematismen*) for all priests serving in the Augsburg diocese in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

The outcome variable is electoral support for the Christian Democrats, operating in Bavaria under the Christian Social Union (CSU) label. We study the effect of Nazi-era repression of Catholic clergy in every post-WWII federal parliamentary election since 1949 and until 2021 by examining the level of support for the CSU in communes where priests had been repressed compared to communes where no clergy was persecuted.<sup>10</sup> The reason that we focus on federal, and not state, elections is because the outcome of federal elections is of greater importance for policy outcomes. In addition, interwar *Landtag* (Bavarian State Parliament) election returns at commune and district levels have not survived, which makes it impossible to construct a historical control for pre-1933 voting behaviour.

Commune boundaries remained largely unchanged from the Nazi period to the early 1970s. As a result, our explanatory and outcome variables for the first six elections (1949, 1953, 1957, 1961, 1965, and 1969) are at the level of the same geographic and administrative units. We digitized the electoral results at historical commune level from official electoral reports of the Bavarian Statistical Office (BSO).

To shed light on the mechanism of persistence, we also examine variation in the levels of mass attendance at commune level. This variables gets at the strength of in-group sentiment in communes where priests had been repressed. Disaggregated mass attendance data are very difficult to locate, and with the help of the German Bishops' Conference we were only able to find these for the diocese of Munich-Freising for the years 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2010.

In the models that follow we control for pre-1933 voting patterns and potential determinants of Nazi repression. First, we control for support for Catholic parties (BVP and Center Party) in the 1928 election to allow for the fact that post-WWII votes for CSU might be a product of pre-Nazi votes for Catholic parties.<sup>11</sup> We also control for votes for the NSDAP in 1928, because in settlements where the Nazi Party was popular repression against the clergy might have been more likely.<sup>12</sup> Electoral data come from a compendium of interwar historical data on Germany by Hänisch (1989) and Falter et al. (2009). These data are available only at the district level (*Land-* and *Stadtkreise*) because all commune-level voting data for interwar elections were destroyed in WWII.

---

<sup>9</sup> Given that there are almost 4,000 repressed priests and that not all the relevant church yearbooks have been preserved, it was impossible to collect full service record data for every priest in the entire dataset. Augsburg diocese was selected because it was one of the largest and we had located multiple yearbooks for it.

<sup>10</sup> Since 1953, voters cast two votes in federal parliamentary elections: one for a specific candidate and one for a party. In our analyses, we look at the proportional tier vote for parties. In practice, party-level support is usually very similar across both election tiers. The first post-war election in 1949 only had the party vote.

<sup>11</sup> The vote for these two parties in 1928 correlates at 0.98 with their performance across four election cycles (1920–28). BVP was more autonomist, monarchist, and conservative than the Center Party. BVP's successor, the Bavarian Party (BP), was revived in 1946 and competed for votes with CSU in the 1949 and 1953 elections. By 1957 BP became irrelevant after a series of strategic blunders.

<sup>12</sup> We use the 1928 vote share because it indicates core support for the Nazi cause. Data for the 1930 and 1932 elections have a lot of missingness; 1933 elections cannot be used because of voter intimidation.

In addition, we control for Catholic associational life before 1933. Catholic associations encompassed all ages and occupations. A vibrant associational landscape might have encouraged priests to resist Nazi policies, whereas Nazi officials might have been keen to monitor these alternative centres of collective action. To measure associational life, we digitized the information on the presence of Catholic associations from church yearbooks for 1927–28 for every diocese except for Munich-Freising.<sup>13</sup> We coded whether there was at least one Catholic association in the community (0/1), the total number of the various associations present (up to six), and their types (a battery of indicator variables).<sup>14</sup>

Our models also include controls for population size in 1933 (logged) and the number of agricultural workers per capita in 1939; we digitized these data from the records of the BSO.<sup>15</sup> Small agricultural communities tended to be bastions of political Catholicism, and inclusion of these controls is another way to account for pre-1933 loyalties to the Catholic cause. Commune wealth is measured by income tax per capita in 1939, whereas we get at the state’s capacity to identify dissidents by controlling for the number of state officials per 1,000 residents. We include an additional control for the overall repressive environment, namely a measure for the number of Jews persecuted by the state. These data are from the Holocaust Survivors and Victims dataset that we obtained from the federal archives; we mapped every Jewish victim in Bavaria to their respective commune of residence.<sup>16</sup>

One might also be concerned about population movement since WWII affected the results. In our preferred specifications, we focus on rural communes where there has, generally, been very little influx of outsiders. One notable exception to this is the influx of German refugees (*Heimatvertriebene*) from territories that Germany lost to Poland in the aftermath of the war. Post-war refugees amounted to about 20 per cent of Bavaria’s pre-WWII population. Most of these refugees settled in cities and big towns, but some ended up in the countryside. To control for the presence of these migrants we use a district-level dataset compiled by Braun and Franke (2021). Analyses that include this control are relegated to Online Appendix Table A5, because this measure might be endogenous (i.e. refugees might self-sort into like-minded communities).

To allow for the fact that bishops influenced the behaviour of Catholic clergy in their dioceses—most obviously through weekly letters to parishioners, which were usually read out in church on Sundays, but also through administrative exhortations and control over appointments—we introduce diocese-level fixed effects in some of the models. This allows us to estimate the long-term effects of clergy repression within the dioceses. There are seven dioceses in Bavaria: Augsburg, Bamberg, Eichstätt, München-Freising, Passau, Regensburg, and Würzburg. Our preferred, and most restrictive, statistical model introduces fixed effects at the level of 25 historical court districts dating to the late nineteenth century. These court districts brought together territorially delimited clusters of communes with similar political and economic historical trajectories, helping us minimize unobserved heterogeneity between the units of analysis.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> The yearbook for Munich-Freising for these years does not contain the data on associations.

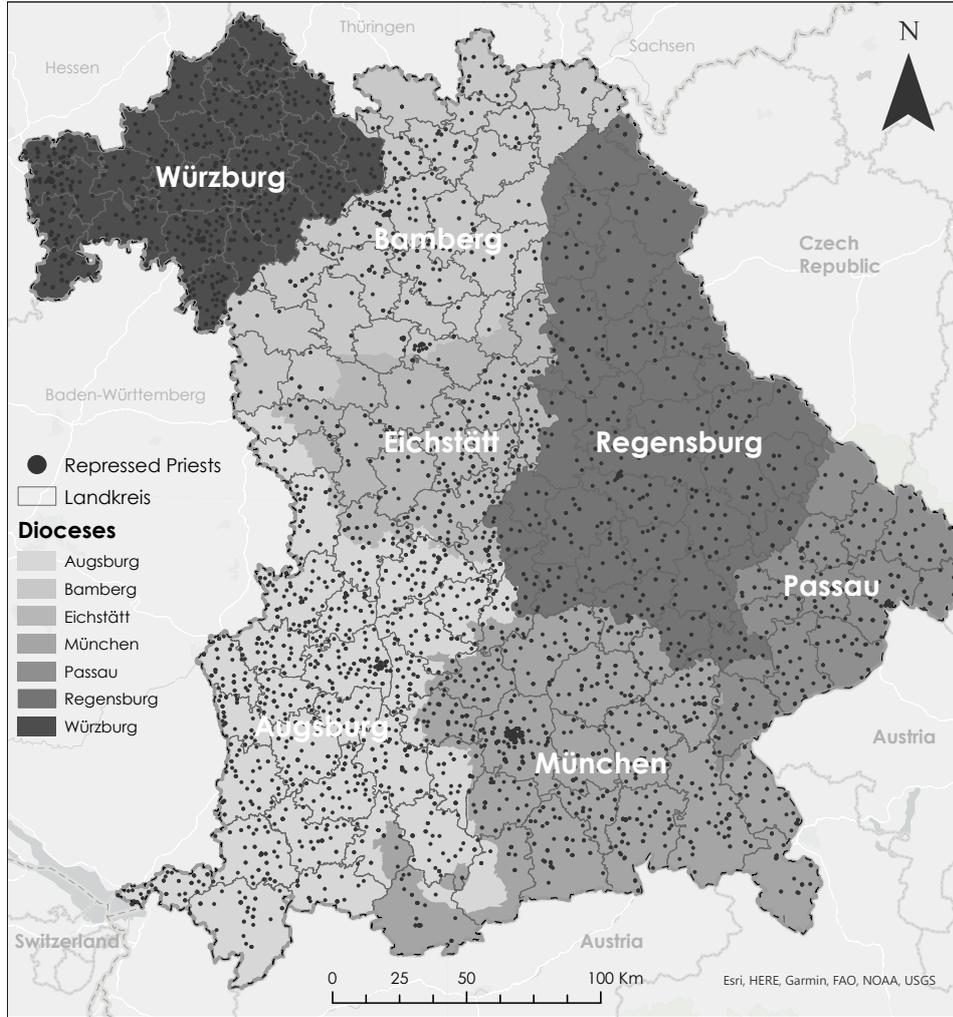
<sup>14</sup> Haffert (2022) argues that state repression of the Catholic church in the *Kulturkampf* created strong associational life and solidified support for political Catholicism. We include Haffert’s *Kulturkampf* intensity measure as a control in Online Appendix Table A3. We cannot include this measure in main analyses because it is highly collinear with our battery of fixed effects at the level of historical court districts.

<sup>15</sup> We would have preferred to only rely on the 1933 census for controls, but the 1939 census contains much more detailed information.

<sup>16</sup> For a map of the dynamics of the Holocaust in Bavaria and Germany see Figure A4 in the Online Appendix.

<sup>17</sup> Ideally, we would want to use district fixed effects. This is not possible because interwar voting controls are only available for entire districts, meaning that these crucial variables do not vary at sub-district level. The mapping between communes and court districts is drawn from Haffert (2022).

Figure 2: The geography of priest repression in Bavaria, 1933–45



Note: the figure displays the location of communes in which at least one priest was repressed during the Nazi era. Diocese and district boundaries are overlaid.

Source: authors' compilation.

The geography of priest repression is shown in Figure 2, where we plot every instance of repression (dots) against the backdrop of the seven Bavarian dioceses. A single dot may represent multiple instances of repression; this is almost always the case in large towns and cities. We model electoral behaviour for every election between 1949 and 2017 (18 in total) as:

$$\text{CSU vote share}_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Repression}_i + X_i \Gamma + \rho + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

with  $\text{Repression}_i$  denoting whether at least one priest in commune  $i$  was repressed during the Nazi era,  $t \in \{1949, 2017\}$ ,  $X_i$  controls,  $\rho$  diocese ( $N = 7$ ) or court district ( $N = 25$ ) fixed effects, and standard errors clustered at the district level ( $N = 140$ ).

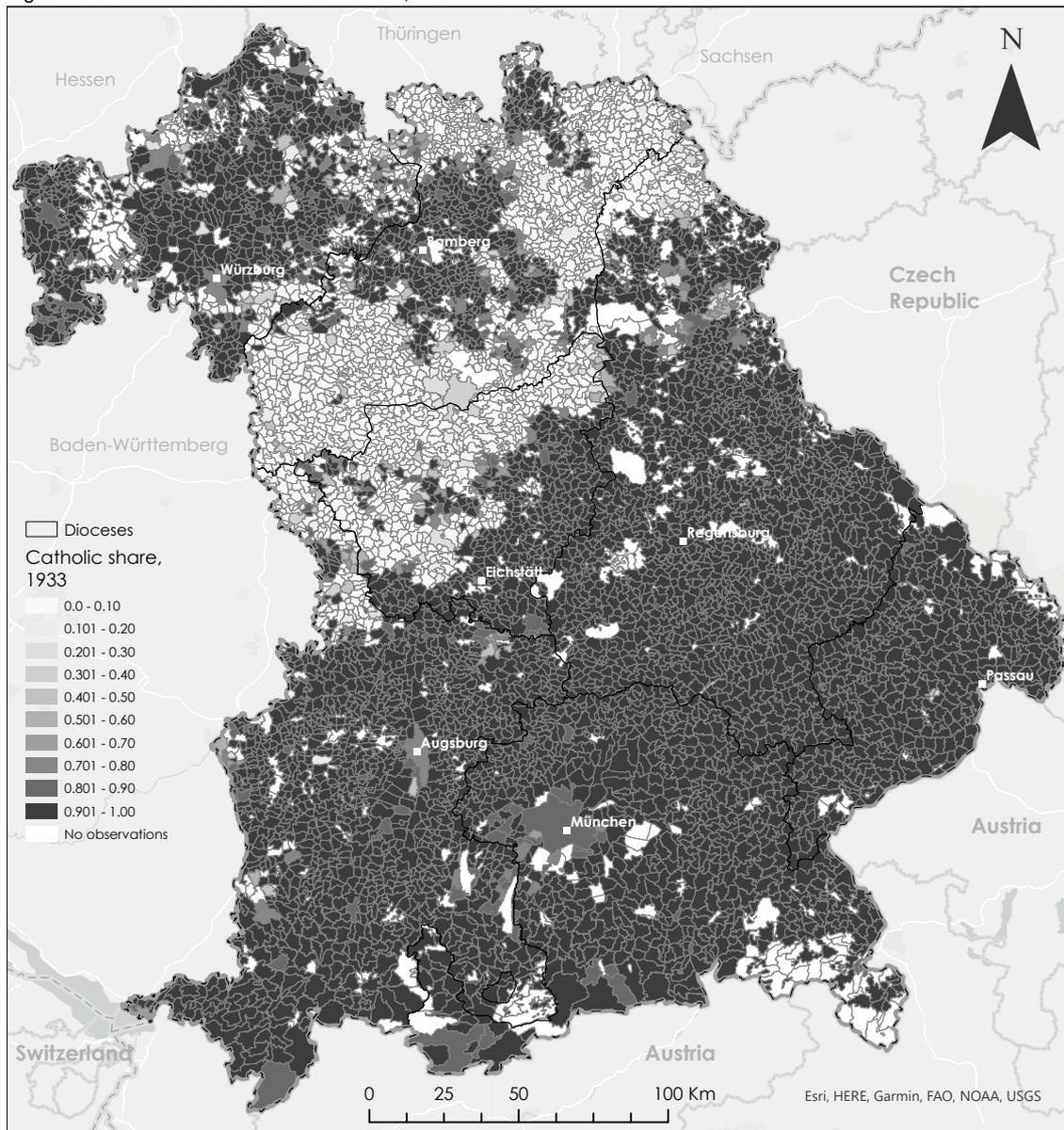
## 5 Research design

We limit all subsequent analyses to rural communes that were majority-Catholic in the 1930s. We thus exclude all communes where Protestants were more than 80 per cent of the population. Protestant communes are clustered in a belt across northern Bavaria, as can be seen in Figure 3.<sup>18</sup> Cities are

<sup>18</sup> A histogram illustrating stark denominational segregation in Bavaria is shown in Figure A3 in the Online Appendix.

excluded because they are more subject to population movement than rural settlements. The fact that many living in Bavarian cities today do not trace their ancestry to inhabitants of these settlements in the 1930s makes our theory of identity transmission inoperable there. And already in the Nazi period, greater density of social networks and high density of religious associational life in the countryside made it more likely that priest repression would have a major effect on the community. When a priest was called in for questioning by the police, it was likely that the whole village would know within days. In cities, on the other hand, where residents' mobility made networks weaker, the priest's efforts were thinly spread in larger parishes, and the church competed against secular associations, we would expect information about repression against the clergy to travel slower and leave shallower effects. Once cities and majority-Protestant communes are excluded we are left with 78 per cent of all Bavarian communes in 1933.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 3: Commune-level share of Catholics, 1933



Note: this figure includes 7,260 polygons, one for every commune, our unit of analysis. Grey areas are uninhabited areas such as forests, mountains, and large water features.

Source: authors' compilation.

<sup>19</sup> We distinguish between rural and urban communes based on the classification in the 1933 census.

Our analyses are premised on an assumption that priest activism—the causal factor that changes political and social identities in the community and leaves a lasting legacy in the realm of political behaviour—is orthogonal to the political characteristics of the parish. If, in contrast, it is the case that activist priests are appointed to especially anti-Nazi or pro-Catholic parishes, then what our analyses would pick up is simply the fact that especially anti-Nazi or pro-Catholic parishes are persistently more likely to vote for a Catholic political party.

Our reading of the historical record indicates that the logic of priest appointment had little, if anything, to do with political leanings of the priest or his potential parishioners. Priestly appointments were governed by the Clerical Legal Code of 1917. Eligibility was subject to availability of vacancies at the time of appointment and exam scores in theology. Those with better exam performance were more likely to be appointed to more desirable parishes. While older clerics were able to apply for specific positions, almost all appointments were subject to nomination by the Vicar-General and approval by the diocese’s administrative council, the *Ordinariat* (Jone 1950).<sup>20</sup>

That priest repression under Nazism is orthogonal to a settlement’s political leanings before the onset of Nazi rule is confirmed in a balance test where we compare votes for Catholic parties and the NSDAP in 1928 in communes that were to experience priest repression later and those that would not. The results are reported in Table 1. If anything, the effect is in the opposite direction from what is expected. Pre-1933 support for Catholic parties is by a small margin lower in communities where priests are repressed later, although the statistical significance of this effect disappears once controls are added. Overall there is no evidence to suggest that communities where priests are subject to repression are at the outset any different from those where repression does not take place. Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution in subsequent analyses we control for the pre-1933 vote for Catholic parties and the NSDAP.

Table 1: Prior electoral support vs. posterior repression

|                     |                  | <i>Town with a repressed priest<br/>in 1933–45</i> |        |         |
|---------------------|------------------|--|--------|---------|
|                     |                  | Yes  | No     | Diff    |
| <i>Vote in 1928</i> | Catholic parties | 44.70%   | 45.55% | -0.85** |
|                     | NSDAP            | 2.77%  | 2.73%  | 0.03    |

Source: authors’ compilation.

## 6 Results

In Table 2 we present the first cut at the results. In these analyses, we regress post-WWII CSU vote share on the total number of priests repressed at the commune level during the Nazi regime. Communes in which no priest was ever repressed receive the value of 0 and are therefore in the baseline. The analysis is limited to the first three elections after the war (1949, 1953, and 1957) and the last one before administrative reform that changed commune borders (1969).<sup>21</sup> The models include all the controls described above and standard errors are clustered at *Landkreis* or district level. Models 1–4 have diocese fixed effects and 5–6 have court district fixed effects.

<sup>20</sup> A small number of positions were subject to ‘patronage nominations’ by the state government or local nobility. Even these appointments were subject to approval by the Vicar-General and the *Ordinariat*.

<sup>21</sup> We are currently digitizing the election results for 1961 and 1965.

Table 2: Vote share of the CSU in 1949–69 Bundestag elections at commune level as a function of the frequency of priest repression

|                                     | (1)                | (2)                | (3)                | (4)                | (5)                | (6)                | (7)                | (8)                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                                     | 1949               | 1953               | 1957               | 1969               | 1949               | 1953               | 1957               | 1969               |
| Repressed priest (total, 1933–45)   | 0.68***<br>(0.17)  | 0.60***<br>(0.13)  | 0.62***<br>(0.12)  | 0.67***<br>(0.11)  | 0.76***<br>(0.19)  | 0.67***<br>(0.15)  | 0.64***<br>(0.12)  | 0.68***<br>(0.11)  |
| Population (1933, log)              | -1.21**<br>(0.60)  | -0.26<br>(0.52)    | -0.75*<br>(0.39)   | 0.27<br>(0.35)     | -0.53<br>(0.49)    | -0.22<br>(0.43)    | -0.59*<br>(0.34)   | 0.18<br>(0.33)     |
| Vote share Catholic parties (1928)  | 0.06<br>(0.04)     | 0.19***<br>(0.04)  | 0.17***<br>(0.03)  | 0.13***<br>(0.02)  | 0.14**<br>(0.06)   | 0.23***<br>(0.05)  | 0.19***<br>(0.04)  | 0.16***<br>(0.03)  |
| State officials (per th. cap, 1939) | -0.01*<br>(0.01)   | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.02**<br>(0.01)   | -0.01<br>(0.01)    | 0.02**<br>(0.01)   | 0.02**<br>(0.01)   | 0.02***<br>(0.01)  |
| Income tax (per cap, 1939)          | -0.03*<br>(0.02)   | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    | -0.01<br>(0.01)    | -0.03*<br>(0.02)   | -0.02<br>(0.02)    | -0.01<br>(0.01)    | -0.01<br>(0.01)    |
| Jewish victims (total, 1933–45)     | -0.04<br>(0.03)    | -0.04*<br>(0.02)   | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    | -0.04*<br>(0.02)   | -0.05**<br>(0.02)  | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    |
| Agricultural pop. (share, 1939)     | 0.16***<br>(0.02)  | 0.24***<br>(0.02)  | 0.35***<br>(0.02)  | 0.42***<br>(0.01)  | 0.20***<br>(0.02)  | 0.25***<br>(0.02)  | 0.35***<br>(0.01)  | 0.41***<br>(0.01)  |
| Vote share NSDAP (1928)             | -0.04<br>(0.23)    | 0.27<br>(0.22)     | 0.19<br>(0.17)     | -0.10<br>(0.15)    | 0.16<br>(0.18)     | 0.29<br>(0.17)     | 0.09<br>(0.14)     | -0.06<br>(0.12)    |
| Constant                            | 34.88***<br>(5.18) | 37.99***<br>(4.76) | 46.70***<br>(3.37) | 39.99***<br>(2.87) | 24.29***<br>(4.71) | 34.91***<br>(4.22) | 44.95***<br>(3.00) | 39.17***<br>(2.97) |
| Dioceses FE (7)                     | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |
| Court district (25)                 |                    |                    |                    |                    | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  |
| Observations                        | 5,302              | 5,289              | 5,285              | 5,220              | 5,302              | 5,289              | 5,285              | 5,220              |
| R-squared                           | 0.36               | 0.37               | 0.50               | 0.54               | 0.40               | 0.40               | 0.53               | 0.56               |

Note: unit of analysis: the commune. Robust standard errors in parentheses clustered at the *Landkreis* level. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Source: authors' compilation based on data.

The results suggest that communes where a parish priest had been repressed by the Nazis are considerably more likely to vote for the CSU in the immediate post-war elections by comparison to communes where repression had not taken place. The effects are statistically significant and large by the standards of the literature on electoral politics. A one-standard deviation increase in the number of repressed priests is associated with an increase in the CSU vote share of 2.7–3.2 percentage points. To put these effects into perspective, the CSU won 36 per cent of the vote across Bavaria in 1949, 55 per cent in 1953, and 68 per cent in 1957 and 1969. Results are also fairly similar regardless of the fixed effect battery that we consider—dioceses or court districts—and when we use a simpler dummy variable of priest repression at the commune level as the explanatory variable instead (Online Appendix Table A7). Next, we consider different threats to identification by taking into account pre-existing associational life and priest appointment decisions.

## 6.1 Pre-existing associational life

The results in Table 2 suggest that Nazi-era repression of Catholic parish priests created a sympathy vote for the CSU in the post-war elections. Now we show that our findings are robust to one relevant control, the richness of pre-1933 associational life in the community. Before the war, religious associations of every sort existed: trade unions, youth groups, religious, and press associations—all Catholic. Towns with a rich Catholic associational life could have attracted the most skilful, activist priests as well as the attention of the repressive apparatus of the state. To account for this possible selection issue, in Table 3 we include two measures of associational life at the commune level as of 1928: an indicator variable for the presence of at least one Catholic association in town (0 otherwise) and a battery of indicator variables for different association types.

Four patterns become apparent in Table 3. First, the mere presence of a Catholic association in the commune is an important predictor of post-war support for the CSU. The magnitude of priest repression

Table 3: Vote share of the CSU in 1949–69 Bundestag elections at the commune level as a function of the frequency of priest repression and controlling for associational life

|                                     | (1)                | (2)                | (3)                | (4)                | (5)                | (6)                | (7)                | (8)                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                                     | 1949               | 1949               | 1953               | 1953               | 1957               | 1957               | 1969               | 1969               |
| Repressed priest (total, 1933–45)   | 0.60***<br>(0.15)  | 0.62***<br>(0.15)  | 0.52***<br>(0.12)  | 0.55***<br>(0.12)  | 0.52***<br>(0.09)  | 0.53***<br>(0.09)  | 0.59***<br>(0.09)  | 0.59***<br>(0.09)  |
| Population (1933, log)              | -1.13**<br>(0.53)  | -0.99*<br>(0.57)   | -0.67<br>(0.49)    | -0.48<br>(0.52)    | -0.94**<br>(0.37)  | -0.87**<br>(0.37)  | -0.08<br>(0.36)    | -0.00<br>(0.37)    |
| Vote share Catholic parties (1928)  | 0.14**<br>(0.06)   | 0.14**<br>(0.06)   | 0.23***<br>(0.06)  | 0.23***<br>(0.06)  | 0.18***<br>(0.04)  | 0.18***<br>(0.04)  | 0.16***<br>(0.03)  | 0.15***<br>(0.03)  |
| State officials (per th. cap, 1939) | -0.01**<br>(0.01)  | -0.01**<br>(0.01)  | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.01<br>(0.01)     | 0.02***<br>(0.01)  | 0.02***<br>(0.01)  |
| Jewish victims (total, 1933–45)     | -0.04<br>(0.03)    | -0.04<br>(0.03)    | -0.05*<br>(0.02)   | -0.05*<br>(0.02)   | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    |
| Agricultural pop. (share, 1939)     | 0.22***<br>(0.02)  | 0.23***<br>(0.02)  | 0.28***<br>(0.02)  | 0.28***<br>(0.02)  | 0.37***<br>(0.02)  | 0.37***<br>(0.02)  | 0.43***<br>(0.01)  | 0.43***<br>(0.01)  |
| Income tax (per cap, 1939)          | -0.04**<br>(0.02)  | -0.05**<br>(0.02)  | -0.03*<br>(0.02)   | -0.04**<br>(0.02)  | -0.02*<br>(0.01)   | -0.03**<br>(0.01)  | -0.01<br>(0.01)    | -0.02<br>(0.01)    |
| Vote share NSDAP (1928)             | 0.12<br>(0.20)     | 0.09<br>(0.21)     | 0.24<br>(0.19)     | 0.22<br>(0.19)     | 0.08<br>(0.15)     | 0.06<br>(0.15)     | -0.03<br>(0.14)    | -0.06<br>(0.13)    |
| Presence of Catholic association    | 3.16***<br>(0.53)  |                    | 2.60***<br>(0.48)  |                    | 1.75***<br>(0.39)  |                    | 1.70***<br>(0.37)  |                    |
| Catholic boy association            |                    | 0.86<br>(1.05)     |                    | 0.48<br>(0.99)     |                    | 1.10<br>(0.79)     |                    | 1.88***<br>(0.72)  |
| Catholic girl association           |                    | 1.23<br>(1.19)     |                    | 0.47<br>(1.14)     |                    | 0.05<br>(1.03)     |                    | -0.32<br>(0.95)    |
| Catholic male worker association    |                    | 1.22*<br>(0.63)    |                    | 1.09*<br>(0.59)    |                    | 0.29<br>(0.53)     |                    | 0.52<br>(0.55)     |
| Catholic female worker association  |                    | 2.66**<br>(1.14)   |                    | 2.20*<br>(1.20)    |                    | 2.31**<br>(1.08)   |                    | 0.88<br>(0.99)     |
| Catholic press association          |                    | 2.70***<br>(0.63)  |                    | 2.00***<br>(0.67)  |                    | 1.73***<br>(0.60)  |                    | 1.65***<br>(0.46)  |
| Constant                            | 27.87***<br>(4.97) | 27.46***<br>(5.23) | 37.56***<br>(4.63) | 36.80***<br>(4.78) | 47.72***<br>(3.04) | 47.61***<br>(3.09) | 40.48***<br>(3.22) | 40.32***<br>(3.27) |
| Court district FE                   | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  |
| Observations                        | 4,560              | 4,560              | 4,549              | 4,549              | 4,545              | 4,545              | 4,490              | 4,490              |
| R-squared                           | 0.36               | 0.36               | 0.36               | 0.36               | 0.51               | 0.51               | 0.55               | 0.55               |

Note: unit of analysis: the commune. Catholic clubs are the excluded category in models with types of Catholic association controls. Association data exist for all diocese except Munich. Robust standard errors in parentheses clustered at the *Landkreis* level. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Source: authors' compilation.

measure declines by about 12 per cent relative to the effects estimated in Table 2, confirming a slight upward bias in the earlier table. Second, the presence of male and female Catholic trade union members is a strong predictor of the CSU vote in the first elections after the war. This pattern suggests that the CSU did particularly well in communes with a well-organized working-age Catholic population who had witnessed the persecution of Catholic leaders first-hand. Third, in the pre-reform election of 1969—some 40 years after our data on the intensity of associational life—the effect of interwar associational life in the commune is roughly 50 per cent smaller than it was right after the end of the war, and the effect is largely driven by the presence of Catholic boy associations in 1928. That is, by 1969 the CSU received strong support in communes in which then mature adults had been socialized before the war within a youth Catholic association. This result suggests that exposure to priest repression during impressionable years may exert a lasting effect on the political identity and behaviour of teenagers. Fourth and last, the presence of a Catholic press association in town is also a strong predictor of CSU support after the war. A Catholic press in the late 1920s could have helped to forge political Catholicism at least twofold: by reporting the push of Nazi authorities against Catholic leaders and organizations, and by reporting everyday acts of resistance to Nazi decisions and policy by Catholics.

## 6.2 Priest appointment to parish

Tables 2 and 3 control for a wide range of commune-level characteristics, but we might be missing some important unobservable characteristic of the local community that made it more combative towards Nazi authorities and that could have driven the type of priest appointed to that community (hence the probability of repression) and post-war CSU support. To address this concern, we conduct two tests that examine possible endogenous links between anti-Nazi community sentiment and priest appointment: one leverages the priest's age, and the other his length of service in the community.

### *Priest cohort*

Priests were generally ordained in their mid-twenties. During the first decade or so after ordainment they moved frequently between communes. They covered vacancies and helped senior clerics. As they grew older and gained seniority they relocated less often and eventually settled. After the age of 40 we observe significantly less mobility among priests. Indeed, the majority of priests over 40 in the early 1930s had been appointed to their parishes well before the rise of the Nazis, in a completely different political environment from that faced by younger priests. We can reasonably assume that priests born before 1890 (hence 40 and older by 1930) had been appointed to the commune in which they (first) experienced repression for reasons orthogonal to the dynamics of post-1933 church–state conflict.

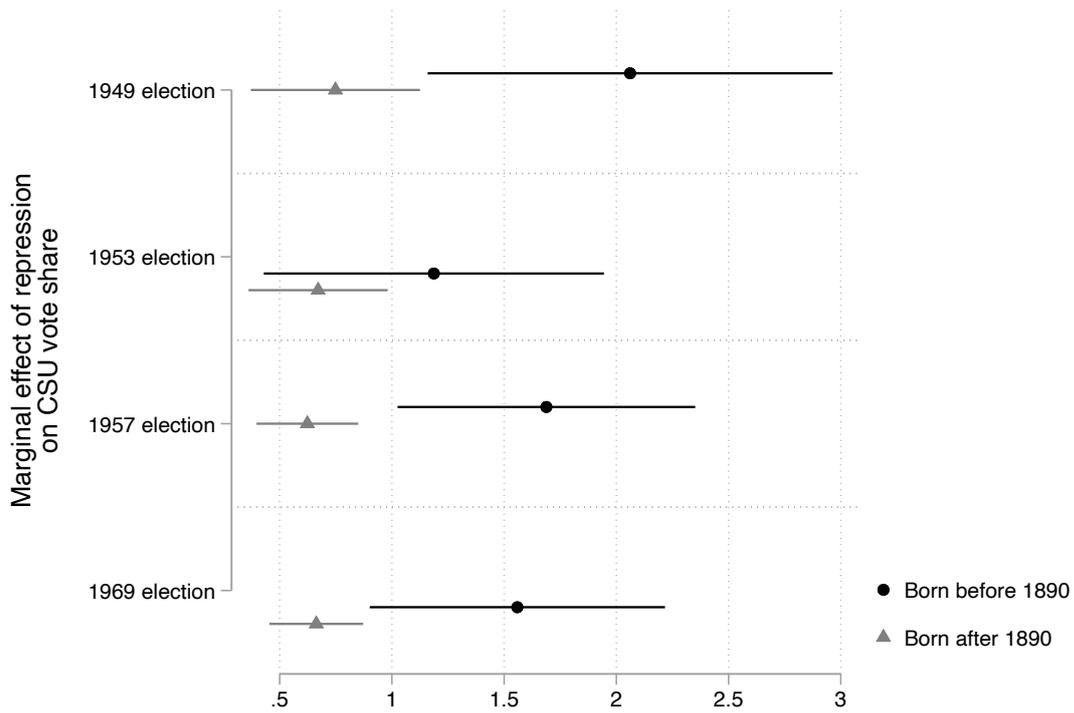
In Figure 4 we plot the marginal effect of repression of priests born before and after 1890 on electoral support of the CSU after the war. We find positive effects for both types of priests, but the effect size for the older cohort is significantly larger than that for younger generations. If selection considerations were at stake, this test would suggest that recently ordained priests were assigned to *less* militant towns as a means to limit their exposure to Nazi authorities (as opposed to more militant towns to boost Catholic activism). A more plausible explanation and one more closely aligned with our theoretical expectations is that repression of older priests had a greater effect on post-war voting behaviour because older priests had stronger links to their communities because they spent more time there. The longer a priest was present in a commune, the more the opportunities he had to become a moral compass there.

### *Date of appointment*

As an alternative to cohort effects, we are able to examine the amount of time that a priest had spent in a given commune before the rise of the Nazis by leveraging the exact date of appointment when a priest arrived at the commune where he subsequently experienced repression. This test requires finding dates of appointment of each priest and tracking priests over time across communes. We complete this demanding exercise for the diocese of Augsburg, the largest in Bavaria based on the total number of communes. Specifically, we matched 96 per cent of biographical entries in the repression compendium with the church yearbook for 1950.

We report the results of this test in Table 4, where we show the effect of repression when we consider *all* communes in Augsburg (even columns) and when we consider *only* settlements to which the repressed priest was appointed before 1933 (odd columns). The results suggest that the effect of repression is stronger for priests who had served in their communes for longer periods of time. This is consistent with our interpretation of the results in Figure 4 as being about the duration of service and not priest selection effects. It appears that the effect of repression on CSU support after the war was stronger in communes that had forged a longer relationship with the parish priest before the arrival of the Nazis.

Figure 4: Effect of repression by birth cohort of repressed priest



Note: the figure displays OLS coefficients for communes who had a priest older (younger) than 40 years repressed to communes who had no priest repressed. All models include a full set of covariates (interwar population, interwar Catholic vote, state officials in 1939, Jewish victims during the Holocaust, agricultural population in 1939, and income tax per capita in 1939), plus court district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the *Landkreise* level.

Source: authors' compilation.

Table 4: Vote share of the CSU in 1949–69 Bundestag elections in Augsburg's towns whose priests were appointed before and after and *only before* the rise of the NSDAP to power

|                                     | (1)                | (2)                     | (3)                | (4)                     | (5)                | (6)                     | (7)                | (8)                     |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
|                                     | 1949               | 1949                    | 1953               | 1953                    | 1957               | 1957                    | 1969               | 1969                    |
|                                     | All Augsburg       | Appointment before 1933 |
| Repressed priest (total, 1933–45)   | 0.72**<br>(0.30)   | 1.09**<br>(0.51)        | -0.27<br>(0.41)    | 0.67<br>(0.52)          | 0.63***<br>(0.21)  | 1.19**<br>(0.50)        | 0.82***<br>(0.22)  | 1.21***<br>(0.42)       |
| Population (1933, log)              | 0.60<br>(0.93)     | 0.61<br>(1.01)          | 0.51<br>(0.71)     | 0.16<br>(0.69)          | -0.20<br>(0.43)    | -0.16<br>(0.55)         | 1.59***<br>(0.57)  | 1.57***<br>(0.56)       |
| Vote share Catholic parties (1928)  | -0.04<br>(0.10)    | -0.08<br>(0.11)         | 0.10<br>(0.09)     | 0.08<br>(0.09)          | 0.18**<br>(0.08)   | 0.17**<br>(0.08)        | 0.22***<br>(0.04)  | 0.21***<br>(0.03)       |
| State officials (per th. cap, 1939) | -0.03**<br>(0.01)  | -0.04**<br>(0.01)       | 0.00<br>(0.01)     | -0.01<br>(0.01)         | 0.02<br>(0.02)     | 0.02<br>(0.02)          | 0.03***<br>(0.01)  | 0.03***<br>(0.01)       |
| Income tax (per cap, 1939)          | -0.05<br>(0.03)    | -0.05<br>(0.04)         | -0.05<br>(0.03)    | -0.06*<br>(0.04)        | -0.00<br>(0.02)    | -0.01<br>(0.02)         | -0.03<br>(0.02)    | -0.05*<br>(0.03)        |
| Jewish victims (total, 1933–45)     | -0.00<br>(0.02)    | 0.01<br>(0.04)          | -0.00<br>(0.02)    | 0.02<br>(0.02)          | 0.02<br>(0.01)     | 0.04*<br>(0.02)         | 0.02*<br>(0.01)    | 0.02<br>(0.02)          |
| Agricultural pop. (share, 1939)     | 0.17***<br>(0.03)  | 0.15***<br>(0.04)       | 0.15***<br>(0.03)  | 0.16***<br>(0.04)       | 0.30***<br>(0.02)  | 0.32***<br>(0.03)       | 0.45***<br>(0.02)  | 0.46***<br>(0.02)       |
| Vote share NSDAP (1928)             | 0.31<br>(0.40)     | 0.32<br>(0.55)          | 0.23<br>(0.23)     | 0.24<br>(0.31)          | -0.20<br>(0.25)    | -0.30<br>(0.34)         | -0.18<br>(0.17)    | -0.20<br>(0.23)         |
| Constant                            | 27.72***<br>(7.71) | 30.16***<br>(9.03)      | 43.28***<br>(6.70) | 45.37***<br>(6.64)      | 45.51***<br>(4.04) | 45.21***<br>(4.67)      | 26.42***<br>(4.43) | 26.90***<br>(4.09)      |
| Court district FE                   | ✓                  | ✓                       | ✓                  | ✓                       | ✓                  | ✓                       | ✓                  | ✓                       |
| Repressed towns                     | 51%                | 39%                     | 51%                | 39%                     | 51%                | 39%                     | 51%                | 39%                     |
| Observations                        | 1,228              | 990                     | 1,228              | 990                     | 1,228              | 990                     | 1,218              | 983                     |
| R-squared                           | 0.17               | 0.15                    | 0.18               | 0.16                    | 0.43               | 0.40                    | 0.58               | 0.54                    |

Note: unit of analysis: the commune. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

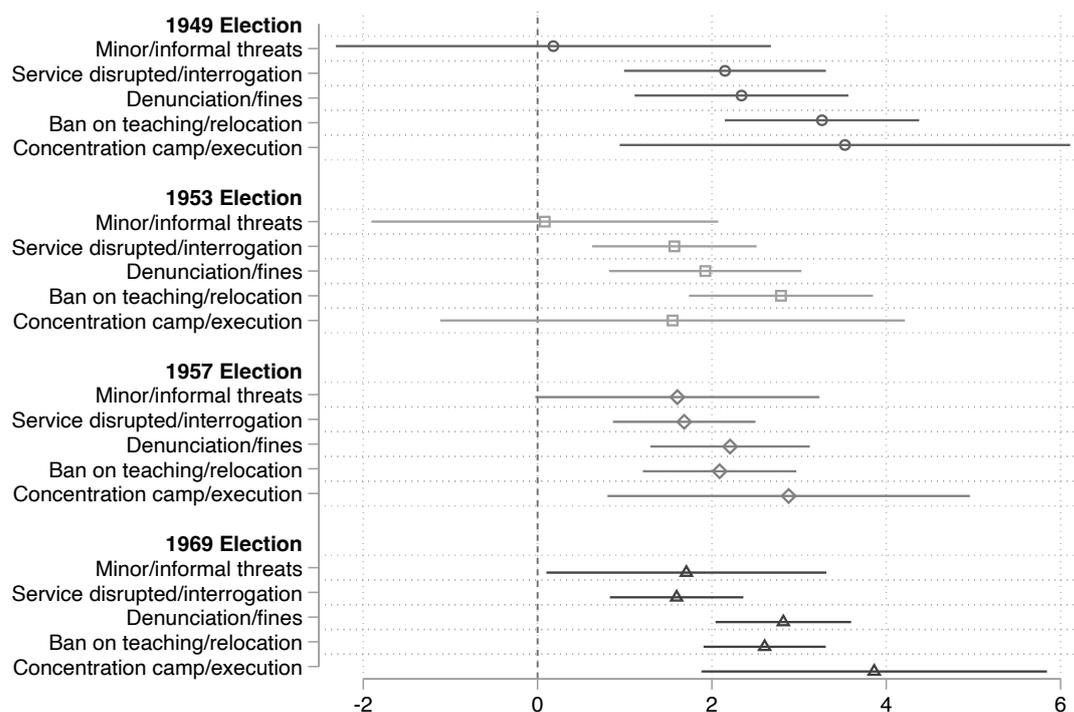
Source: authors' compilation.

### 6.3 Intensity of repression

Von Hehl’s (1996) compendium of priest repression offers detailed information about the type of accusations and sanctions levied on the clergy. We built two additional variables to capture the intensity of repression: a sentiment score (details in Online Appendix Table A6) and a five-category qualitative measure of repression experienced by each priest, in which 1 indicates a minor incident with Nazi authorities and 5 indicates relocation to a concentration camp or a death sentence (details given above).

The adaptation of our qualitative measure for the statistical analysis is not without challenges. The information in the repression compendium allows us to know whether a priest was repressed in any given commune, but not the location in which he experienced the most severe episode if he was repressed in multiple communes. This problem is compounded when multiple priests served in the same commune. Keeping these limitations in mind, we assign each commune the highest repression score among all priests that were ever repressed in that settlement. By implication, this exercise retrieves the effect of having a priest most severely repressed in town plus having a priest repressed in town who nevertheless experienced the most intense episode of repression elsewhere. We report the results of this test in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Vote share of the CSU in 1949–69 Bundestag elections at the commune level as a function of the intensity of priest repression



Note: the figure displays OLS coefficients. All models include a full set of covariates (interwar population, interwar Catholic vote, state officials in 1939, Jewish victims during the Holocaust, agricultural population in 1939, income tax per capita in 1939, and NSDAP vote share in 1928), plus court district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the *Landkreis* level.

Source: authors’ compilation.

The results are largely consistent with our expectations—that the effect of persecution on solidifying political Catholicism increases as repression becomes more severe. For every election we observe a gradual increase in the magnitude of the coefficient as the intensity of repression grows. The confidence interval of the fifth category—concentration camp/execution—is big because there are relatively few observations in that category. However, that effect is the largest of all and always different from zero. At the other end of the repression scale, minor offences and informal threats had little or no effect on

forging political Catholicism. Given the state of constant threat against the Catholic community in this period, parishioners could have grown accustomed to low-intensity threats from the state.

## 7 Examining micro-foundations

We have shown that repression of religious leaders solidified Catholic identity and political behaviour. In this section we examine the micro-foundations of this result. First, the sentiment of aggravation when a religious leader is repressed may be directly proportional to how embedded the leader is within the local community. We approximate embeddedness by the size of the commune. In small communes, priests are active members of the community, interacting on a daily basis with parishioners on issues relating to religiosity, health, education, and leisure. They assume an organizational and moral role in the community. When the relationship between priests and parishioners is tight, repression of the former can be interpreted as a personal offence, reinforcing parishioners' religious identity. As communities grow larger, that proximity with the priest is looser and their repression might not be as consequential or remain unperceived by parts of the community.

If our reasoning is correct, we should observe stronger effects of repression on political Catholicism in smaller communes than in larger ones. To test this hypothesis, we split our sample into four equally sized groups (or quartiles) based on the 1933 population census and examine the magnitude of the coefficients for each of them. We report results in Figure 6, where we observe a decay function of the effect of repression. The effect of repression is highest in the smallest communes and its magnitude decays gradually in bigger communes. The effect in the fourth quartile is half the size or less than that in smaller towns.

So far we have focused on which types of communities should experience a stronger reaction to the repression of their spiritual leader. But that shock and sentiment of aggravation needs to be channelled over time to have persistent effects. The transmission of collective memory can be channelled from one generation to another via family, peers, and schools. But in this particular context, some repressed priests themselves passed the memory of their experiences on to the parishioners after the war. Because the Nazi regime collapsed before their leaders expected, priests that were repressed and survived were allowed to continue in their posts and tell their story as they lived it. We presume that those priests used that opportunity to solidify in-group identity and safeguard it by mobilizing parishioners on election day in favour of the CSU.

To test our conjecture, we examine the effect of post-war exposure to a parish priest who had been repressed under the Nazis by coding whether they were still located in the same town where they were repressed during the war. We acknowledge that the decision to remain may be endogenous to the strength of the relationship between the parish priest and their community, hence this test is only suggestive. To determine whether repressed priests stayed put or relocated after the war, we digitized the 1950 yearbook for Augsburg and tracked the location of every priest until 1950.<sup>22</sup> We find that 75 per cent of the priests who survived remained in the same town in which they were repressed by the Nazis.

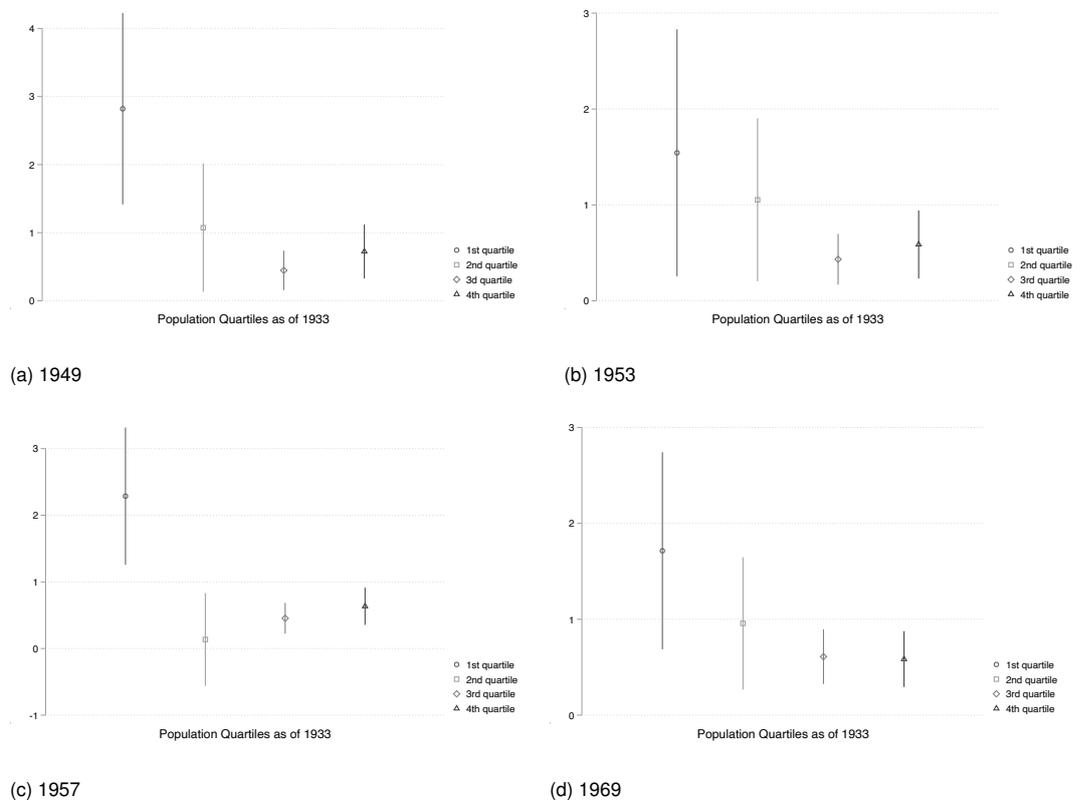
The results reported in Table 5 are largely consistent with our expectations. Communes which had the opportunity to interact with their repressed parish priest after WWII voted for the CSU at higher rates. That effect is mixed for towns which saw their parish priest leave before the end of the war (the vast majority of priests did not die but simply relocated). For these communes, some coefficients remain positive and statistically significant, but others are not different from zero (although this could be a by-

---

<sup>22</sup> We did this for only one diocese because of the complexity of this task.

product of low statistical power). This test suggests that opportunities to socialize younger generations in person helped religious elites to maintain and reinforce collective identities.

Figure 6: Vote share of the CSU in 1949–69 Bundestag elections at the commune level by municipality size and election cycle



Note: the figure displays OLS coefficients for communes of different population size as defined by the 1933 population census. Priest is measured by its frequency of occurrence at the commune level. All models include a full set of covariates (1933 population, 1928 Catholic vote, 1939 state officials per thousand capita, Jewish victims during the Holocaust, 1939 share of agricultural population, 1939 income tax per capita, and NSDAP vote share), plus court district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the *Landkreis* level. The first quartile comprises communes with up to 258 inhabitants, the second quartile between 259 and 420, the third quartile between 421 and 727, and the fourth quartile all above 728.

Source: authors' compilation.

Table 5: Vote share of the CSU as a function of long-term exposure to repressed priests after the war in the diocese of Augsburg

|   | (1)                | (2)                | (3)                | (4)                |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|   | 1949               | 1953               | 1957               | 1969               |
| Priest repressed stayed after war end (repression and stay) | 2.30**<br>(0.94)   | 0.63<br>(0.78)     | 1.26**<br>(0.64)   | 1.22**<br>(0.61)   |
| Priest repressed left before war end (repression and exit)  | 0.32<br>(1.00)     | -0.67<br>(0.89)    | 0.63<br>(0.72)     | 1.34**<br>(0.67)   |
| Population (1933, log)                                      | -0.30<br>(0.70)    | 0.22<br>(0.61)     | -0.25<br>(0.51)    | 1.46***<br>(0.47)  |
| Agricultural pop. (share, 1939)                             | 0.16***<br>(0.02)  | 0.15***<br>(0.02)  | 0.30***<br>(0.02)  | 0.45***<br>(0.02)  |
| Vote share Catholic parties (1928)                          | -0.03<br>(0.04)    | 0.10***<br>(0.04)  | 0.19***<br>(0.03)  | 0.21***<br>(0.02)  |
| State officials (per th. cap, 1939)                         | -0.02*<br>(14.57)  | 0.01<br>(11.90)    | 0.02<br>(15.82)    | 0.03***<br>(9.17)  |
| Jewish victims (total, 1933–45)                             | -0.00<br>(0.02)    | -0.01<br>(0.02)    | 0.02<br>(0.01)     | 0.02*<br>(0.01)    |
| Income tax (per cap, 1939)                                  | -0.01<br>(0.03)    | -0.04<br>(0.03)    | 0.03<br>(0.02)     | -0.00<br>(0.02)    |
| Vote share NSDAP (1928)                                     | 0.46**<br>(0.19)   | 0.34***<br>(0.12)  | -0.08<br>(0.13)    | -0.07<br>(0.11)    |
| Constant  | 31.51***<br>(5.51) | 44.08***<br>(4.79) | 44.61***<br>(4.00) | 27.02***<br>(3.69) |
| Court district FE   | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  | ✓                  |
| Observations  | 975                | 975                | 975                | 968                |
| R-squared   | 0.18               | 0.21               | 0.46               | 0.61               |

Note: unit of analysis: the commune. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Source: authors' compilation.

## 8 The long run

This section examines the legacy effects of Nazi-era repression of Catholic priests. Most of the priests alive in the 1930s were dead by the mid-1970s, and those alive had long retired. Any continuation of the effect past 1970 is consistent with a legacy effect. In this section, we examine two types of data to establish whether repression of community elites shapes the behaviour and identity of in-group members after priests retire or die. We first examine persistence in vote choice, then in mass attendance.

### 8.1 Persistence in voting behaviour

In this section we study the lasting effect of Nazi persecution of parish priests on electoral support for the CSU from 1961 to 2021. Most of the electoral records are drawn from a historical compendium of electoral results from 1961 to 2009. Crucially, all of these data are indexed at the modern commune level. Over the course of the 1970s the government undertook administrative reforms, whereby the number of communes was reduced from 7,004 in 1971 to 2,052 by 1978. Starting from the 1972 Bundestag election, all election returns are at the level of these modern communes. This introduces measurement error into our analyses because we are forced to aggregate clergy repression indicators from smaller historical communes to larger modern ones. Our ability to study the legacy effects of clergy repression are complicated by this. Up until 1965, about half of all the repressed priests were still alive, and many were working in the same parishes as in the 1930s. By the 1972 election, 70 per cent of the repressed priests were deceased, and by 1994 all priests in our sample had passed on. This means that the expansion of municipal boundaries in the early 1970s and introduction of associated measurement error coincides with the onset of legacy effects.

To adjust to the new unit of observation we map old communes into new communes and aggregate the repression variable twofold. First, for each modern commune we count the total number of old

communes which saw their priest repressed. Second, for each modern commune we compute the total number of priests repressed in the old communes during 1933–45. We also aggregate the information of our baseline controls by calculating totals or proportions at the modern commune level. To improve comparability, we dropped the 25 modern urban districts and Protestant-majority modern communes using the same 80 per cent Protestant threshold that was used earlier. Additionally, to account for any systematic differences between units, we fit a battery of modern district (*Landkreis*) fixed effects, which are twice the size of the historical districts. We report descriptive variables for the long-run analysis in Table A2 in the Online Appendix.

We run the same specification for the long-run models that we did earlier in the paper. We plot the results in Figure 7 for the two aggregated repression measures. The figure in the top panel indicates that a one-standard deviation increase in the number of *treated settlements* during the Nazi era increased the vote share of the CSU by 3.1 per cent in 1961 and that this effect diminished to 0.84 per cent by 2021. The bottom panel suggests that a one-standard deviation increase in the number of priests repressed during the Nazi era increased the vote share of the CSU in 1961 by 1.32 per cent and that effect decreased to 0.26 per cent in 2021.<sup>23</sup>

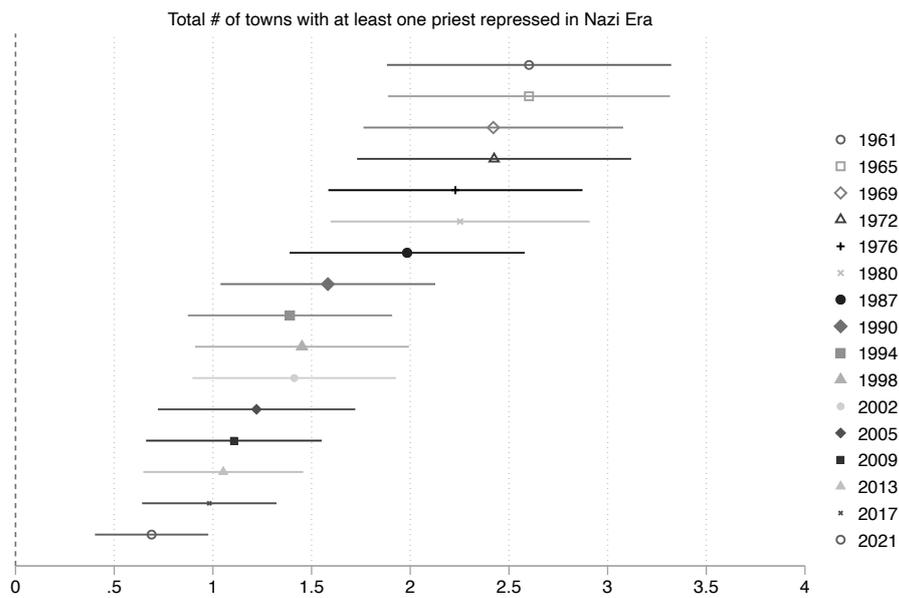
Our results show a clear decay of the effect of repression over time. This is predictable but also novel in the literature on legacy effects, which rarely documents diminishing effects over time. We draw two additional lessons from these results. First, Figure 7 reveals that the clash between the state and the church can shape the electoral landscape (and political conflict more generally) for decades even in the most favourable circumstances—that is, in a context in which the persecution against religious institutions is not renewed. We can interpret these effects as a lower-bound estimate of the backlash effects of repeated secularization attempts in the history of Western Europe and modern episodes of foreign intervention.

Second, the results also suggest that the sense of urgency that boosted political Catholicism after the war faded over time. Among other things, absence of direct contact between the repressed priests and younger generations of Catholics likely eroded collective memory. In addition, since the end of WWII Bavarian society has changed significantly: sustained economic prosperity, secularization of younger generations, and the appearance of new issues and political parties (e.g. the Greens) can help explain the gradual weakening of the effect. The decaying effects in Figure 7 remind us that history is not deterministic, and that socializing institutions—the church, schools, and family—can sustain collective memory only as long as it resonates with the daily lives and social references of younger generations.

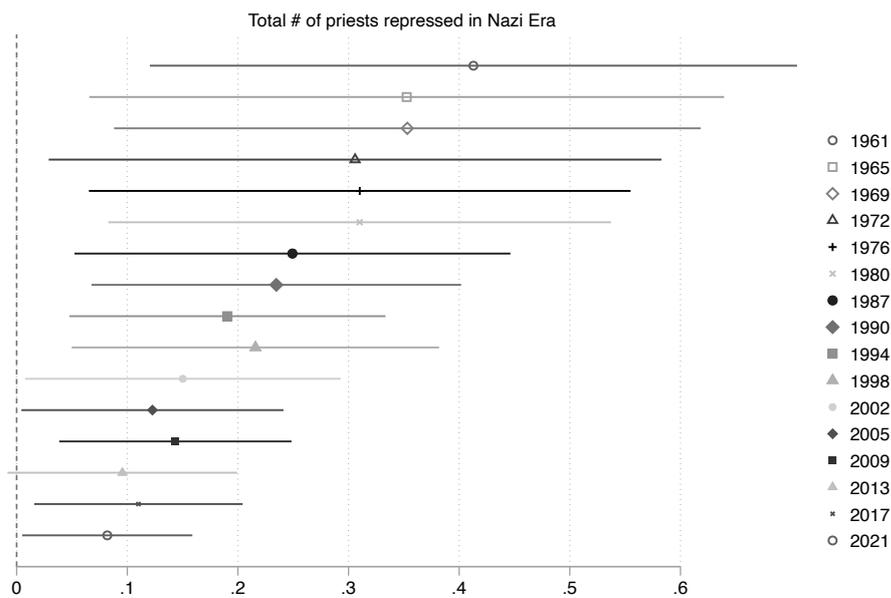
---

<sup>23</sup> The coefficient of repression in this test is stronger and more precisely estimated if the few outliers at the top of the distribution of the explanatory variable are dropped or if a logarithmic transformation is applied.

Figure 7: Effect of repression on the CSU vote share for every election between 1961 and 2021 in Bavaria



(a) Total number of communes which had their parish priest repressed aggregated at modern commune



(b) Total number of parish priests repressed aggregated at modern commune

Note: the figure displays OLS coefficients. Unit of analysis: modern-day commune ( $N = 1,640$ ). All models include a full set of covariates (1933 population (logged), 1928 Catholic vote, 1939 state officials per thousand capita, Jewish victims during the Holocaust, 1939 share of agricultural population, 1939 income tax per capita, and 1928 NSDAP vote) aggregated at the modern commune level plus modern-day *Landkreis* fixed effects ( $N = 71$ ). Standard errors clustered at the modern *Landkreis* level.

Source: authors' compilation.

## 8.2 Persistence in mass attendance

Support for the CSU is a political manifestation of Catholicism in Bavaria. The theoretical discussion in the introduction suggests that repression of political elites reinforces identification with the in-group, shaping attitudes and multiple behaviours in ways that are consistent with group membership. In the

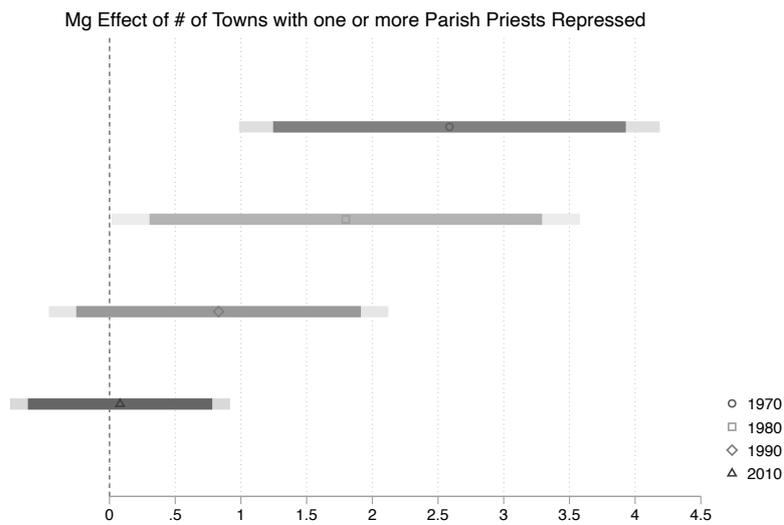
Catholic tradition, mass attendance is a good measure of conformity with Catholic dogma and group identification. Attendance at the Sunday mass is a costly action that also sends a public signal of commitment to Catholicism to the other group members. If priest repression solidified Catholic identity and these attitudes were passed from parents to children and sustained by socializing agents (e.g., elementary schools, summer camps, civic organizations) we should expect higher levels of mass attendance in communities exposed to repression during the Nazi period.

Ideally we would test the argument with mass attendance data after the war, controlling for mass attendance before the rise of the Nazis. We have not been able to locate commune-level data on mass attendance before WWII. Nonetheless, we were fortunate to obtain a slice of our ideal dataset for the post-war period. With help from the German Bishops' Conference we obtained commune-level decennial mass attendance data from 1970 to 2010 (except 2000) for the diocese of Munich-Freising. These data document a secular decline in mass attendance levels: in 1970, on average 40 per cent of Catholics attended Sunday mass, whereas only 15 per cent did in 2010. This pattern is consistent with qualitative accounts. Now we examine whether past exposure to repression made Catholic communes more resilient to the secularization process in Bavaria.

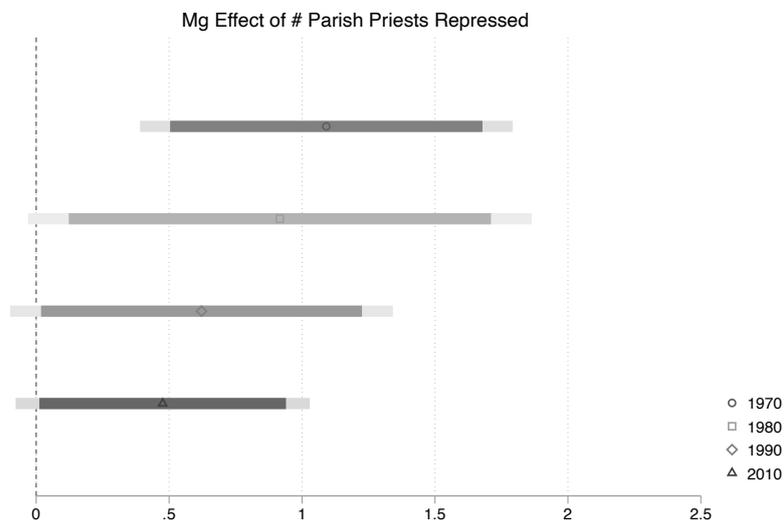
To estimate the effect of repression on commune-level mass attendance (as a percentage of the Catholic population) post-1970 we include the same controls and fixed effects as in Figure 7, but this time we fit robust standard errors (because there are too few modern-day districts within diocese boundaries). The top and bottom panel in Figure 8 also show a decay function in the strength of the historical repression effect on mass attendance levels. Priest repression boosted mass attendance in 1970 in both model specifications, but the effect gradually loses statistical significance as times goes by, particularly for the first measure.

Figures 7 and 8 are mutually reinforcing. They suggest that the lack of direct contact with direct victims coupled with the absence of new episodes of repression eroded in-group identification and its observable manifestations.

Figure 8: Effect of repression on mass attendance in the diocese of Munich-Freising for various decades



(a) Number of communes which had their parish priest repressed within modern-day commune



(b) Number of parish priests repressed within modern-day commune

Note: the figure displays OLS coefficients. Unit of analysis: modern-day commune located in the diocese of Munich-Freising ( $N = 322$ ). All models include a full set of covariates (1933 population (logged), 1928 Catholic vote, 1939 state officials per thousand capita, Jewish victims during the Holocaust, 1939 share of agricultural population, 1939 income tax per capita, and 1928 NSDAP vote) aggregated at the modern commune level plus modern-day *Landkreise* fixed effects ( $N = 71$ ). Standard errors clustered at the modern *Landkreis* level. 90 and 95 per cent confidence interval in dark and light grey, respectively.

Source: authors' compilation.

## 9 Conclusion

In this paper we set out to explore the effect of Nazi-era repression of Catholic priests in Bavaria on post-war support for Christian Democrats, the party most closely associated with the interests of the Catholic church in contemporary Germany. Drawing on insights from existing work on the legacy of violence against civilians and on literature in psychology about the role that elites play in the processes of value formation and transmission, we hypothesized that repression against priests strengthens community attachment to political Catholicism by heightening the importance of the Catholic identity to parishioners. Once the stronger Catholic in-group identity is forged in the trauma of state repression against the priest,

we hypothesized this identity to persist across multiple generation and influence, among other things, the political behaviour of community members.

Drawing on a unique compendium detailing state repression against Catholic priests and a plethora of historical and more recent social and political data that we brought together—notably, commune-level voting dynamics in 1949–2021—we found that, consistent with expectations, Nazi-era repression of Catholic clergy is associated with higher support for Christian Democrats in all the post-war elections, all the way to the present. In other words, we found that repression against elites that took place some 80 years ago continues to influence the voting behaviour of individuals residing in areas where the Nazi regime attempted to diminish the power of Catholic clergy. The magnitude of this effect has, however, been declining over time. In the immediate post-war elections, when many of the priests who had been repressed were still working in the parishes where they had been persecuted, the incidence of historical repression was associated with an increase of about 2 percentage points in the vote share of Christian Democrats. By 2021, when the repressed priests and their contemporaneous parishioners had been deceased for decades, Christian Democrats had around a 0.5 percentage point electoral advantage in communes where persecution had taken place. These are momentous effects by the standards of the literature on electoral behaviour.

In addition to exploring the overall legacy effects of priest repression, we also examine some of the mechanisms behind these. We show that the legacy effects are stronger in smaller communities where repressed priests had served for longer periods—this is consistent with our hypotheses that elites have greater influence over political identities if they are well embedded in community life, and if the community is tightly knit. In showing that mass attendance levels were higher in communes where priest repression had occurred, we also provide suggestive evidence that historical repression led to the strengthening of the Catholic social identity with subsequent repercussions for voting behaviour.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study in political science to explore the micro-foundations of the legacies of elite repression. We show how repression against elites—especially, religious elites—can backfire and strengthen community attachment to social and political values associated with those subject to repression as a result of rallying around the elite’s cause. This finding has far-reaching repercussions for our understanding of the long-term effects of church–state struggles, but also of the consequences of targeted elite repression more generally. However, it bears noting that we examine the legacies of elite repression in a particularly favourable case. Catholic clergy in Bavaria in the 1930s wielded substantial power locally not only as the arbiters of morality, but also as guides to the afterlife, and they were generally well integrated in their communities. It remains to be established whether repression of the clergy in other settings might have comparable effects and, even more importantly, whether violence against secular elites leads to a strengthened sense of in-groupness and has downstream effects on political and social outcomes.

## References

- Acharya, A., M. Blackwell, and M. Sen (2016). ‘The Political Legacy of American Slavery’. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(3): 621–41. <https://doi.org/10.1086/686631>
- Balcells, L. (2012). ‘The Consequences of Victimization on Political Identities: Evidence from Spain’. *Politics and Society*, 40(3): 311–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329211424721>
- Bauer, M., C. Blattman, J. Chytilová, J. Henrich, E. Miguel, and T. Mitts (2016). ‘Can War Foster Cooperation?’. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(3): 249–74. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.249>
- Becker, S.O., and S. Pfaff (2022). ‘Church and State in Historical Political Economy’. In J.A. Jenkins and J. Rubin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Political Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Berben, P. (1975). *Dachau, 1933–1945: The Official History*. London: Norfolk Press.
- Bowles, S., and H. Gintis (2013). *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and Its Evolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boyd, R., and P. Richerson (1985). *Culture and the Evolutionary Process*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Braun, S.T., and R. Franke (2021). ‘A County-Level Database on Expellees in West Germany, 1939–1961’. *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 108(4): 522–40.
- Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., M.W. Feldman, K.-H. Chen, and S.M. Dornbusch (1982). ‘Theory and Observation in Cultural Transmission’. *Science*, 218(4567): 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.7123211>
- Charnysh, V., and L. Peisakhin (2022). ‘The Role of Communities in the Transmission of Political Values: Evidence from Forced Population Transfers’. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1): 238–58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000447>
- Deutsch, K.W. (1966). *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Evans Richard, J. (2005). *The Third Reich in Power*. New York: Penguin.
- Falter, J.W., T. Lindenberger, and S. Schumann (2009). *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik: Materialien zum Wahlverhalten, 1919–1933*. Munich: Verlag C.H.Beck.
- Forstner, V.T. (2009). ‘Römisch-Katholische und Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Fürstenfeldbruck 1933–1945’. In F. Kramer and E. Latzin (eds), *Fürstenfeldbruck in der NS-Zeit: eine Kleinstadt bei München in den Jahren 1933 bis 1945*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner.
- Fouka, V., and H.-J. Voth (Forthcoming). ‘Collective Remembrance and Private Choice: German–Greek Conflict and Behavior in Times of Crisis’. *American Political Science Review*.
- Friedlander, H. (1995). *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Grosjean, P. (2014). ‘Conflict and Social and Political Preferences: Evidence from World War II and Civil Conflict in 35 European Countries’. *Comparative Economic Studies*, 56(3): 424–51. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ces.2014.2>
- Gross, M.B. (2005). *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.17623>
- Grzymała-Busse, A.M. (2015). *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2020). ‘Beyond War and Contracts: The Medieval and Religious Roots of the European State’. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1): 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050718-032628>
- Haffert, L. (2022). ‘The Long-Term Effects of Oppression: Prussia, Political Catholicism, and the Alternative für Deutschland’. *American Political Science Review*, 116(2): 595–614. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001040>
- Hager, A., K. Krakowski, and M. Schaub (2019). ‘Ethnic Riots and Prosocial Behavior: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan’. *American Political Science Review*, 113(4): 1029–44. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305541900042X>
- Hänisch, D. (1989). ‘Inhalt Und Struktur Der Datenbank “Wahl-und Sozialdaten Der Kreise und Gemeinden des Deutschen Reiches von 1920 Bis 1933”’. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 14: 39–67.
- Hoffmann, P. (1977). *The History of the German Resistance, 1933–1945*. London: Macdonald and Janes.
- Homola, J., M. Pereira, and M. Tavits (2020). ‘Legacies of the Third Reich: Concentration Camps and Out-Group Intolerance’. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2): 573–90. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000832>

- Horn, D. (1979). 'The Struggle for Catholic Youth in Hitler's Germany: An Assessment'. *The Catholic Historical Review*, 65(4): 561–82.
- Hutchison, M.L. (2014). 'Tolerating Threat? The Independent Effects of Civil Conflict on Domestic Political Tolerance'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58(5): 796–824. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713478566>
- Jone, H. (1950). *Gesetzbuch der lateinischen Kirche. Bd. 1. Allgemeine Normen und Personenrecht*. Paderborn: F. Schöningh.
- Kalyvas, S. (1996). *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501731419>
- Kershaw, I. (2000). *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933–1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewy, G. (2000). *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Longerich, P. (2011). *Heinrich Himmler: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lupu, N., and L. Peisakhin (2017). 'The Legacy of Political Violence Across Generations'. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4): 836–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12327>
- Mironova, V., and S. Whitt (2016). 'The Evolution of Prosociality and Parochialism after Violence'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 53(5): 648–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316648204>
- Pflanze, O. (1990). *Bismarck and the Development of Germany: Vol 2, The Period of Consolidation, 1871–1880*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400861095>
- Pridham, G. (1973). *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923–1933*. London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon.
- Rossi, L. (2015). *Wehrmacht Priests: Catholicism and the Nazi War of Annihilation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674286382>
- Rozenas, A., and Y.M. Zhukov (2019). 'Mass Repression and Political Loyalty: Evidence from Stalin's "Terror by Hunger"'. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2): 569–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000066>
- Rozenas, A., S. Schutte, and Y. Zhukov (2017). 'The Political Legacy of Violence: The Long-Term Impact of Stalin's Repression in Ukraine'. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(4): 1147–61. <https://doi.org/10.1086/692964>
- Shirer, W.L. (1960). *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Spenkuch, J.L. and P. Tillmann (2018). 'Elite Influence? Religion and the Electoral Success of the Nazis'. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(1): 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12328>
- Spicer, K.P. (2004). *Resisting the Third Reich: The Catholic Clergy in Hitler's Berlin*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Spicer, K.P. (2008). *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501757150>
- Tir, J., and S.P. Singh (2015). 'Get Off My Lawn: Territorial Civil Wars and Subsequent Social Intolerance in the Public'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 52(4): 478–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343315571008>
- von Hehl, U. (1996). *Priester unter Hitlers Terror: Eine Biographische und Statistische Erhebung*. Paderborn: F. Schöningh.
- Winkler, W., E. Kohlrausch, W. Kaskel, and A. Spiethoff (1933). *Grundriss der Statistik. II. Gesellschaftsstatistik*. Berlin: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-90724-1>
- Wittenberg, J. (2006). *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510465>