The Two Hindenburg Elections of 1925 and 1932:
A Total Reversal of Voter Coalitions

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE two Weimar presidential elections of March and April, 1925 and 1932, are among the most fascinating and historically significant elections of modern German history (see Table 1). They are fascinating for the electoral historian and the generalist alike because of the virtually total reversal between 1925 and 1932 of the voting coalitions that backed and brought to power the aged Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg. And they are historically extremely significant because it was von Hindenburg who at least encouraged if not sustained the creeping process of deparlimentarization after 1930, a process that finally brought Hitler into power. It may be readily speculated that another president, e.g., Wilhelm Marx, who as the candidate of the Weimar coalition parties was Hindenburg’s chief opponent in 1925, would not so easily have dismissed Reich Chancellor Heinrich Brüning in May of 1932. And Marx undoubtedly would not have appointed the right-wing Center party dissident, Franz von Papen, as Brüning’s successor.

Astonishingly, these two really important Weimar elections have yet to be adequately investigated by electoral historians. An analysis of these elections therefore virtually has to start from scratch. The outcome does not, perhaps, necessarily add something new to what has been assumed by historians about the two Hindenburg elections. The significance of the following analysis lies more in the fact that it provides statistical confirmation for some more or less commonly held but never sufficiently corroborated hypotheses. In the following, I will turn first to the 1925 election in order to find out where—i.e., what parties—the Hindenburg voters came from, and what role was played by the decision of the Catholic Bavarian People’s Party (BVP)
to back Hindenburg instead of the candidate of the Catholic Center Party, Wilhelm Marx. Then I will examine the transition from 1925 to 1932. I will ask what statistical relations may be observed between these two elections and, from a complementary perspective, what social groups supported Hindenburg in 1925 and 1932, respectively. In a third and final step I will try to find out if there really was a significant voter fluctuation between the Communist candidate Ernst Thälmann and Adolf Hitler from the first to the second ballot of 1932, as is so often alleged in contemporary and historical analyses of the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

2. FROM WHAT PARTIES DID THE 1925 HINDENBURG VOTERS COME, AND TO WHAT PARTIES DID THEY GO IN SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS?

Of course this question cannot be answered directly or beyond any reasonable doubt, since we do not have any methodologically reliable and representative opinion polls for the Weimar period. What we can do, however, is to look first at the statistical relationship between the Hindenburg vote and the vote of other parties and candidates at the level of the 1,200 German counties and cities of that period. The results are statistically sound if we restrict the verbal interpretation of our findings to the territorial, that is, the county, level. Since we are, however, much more interested in individual-level relationships, I will try, in a second—statistically somewhat risky—step, to discern the underlying (but unknown) "true" voting transitions to and from Hindenburg by means of multiple ecological regression analysis.1

2.1. Some party-vote correlations of the 1925 Hindenburg vote

Table 2 presents two statistically more or less equivalent pieces of information: percentage distributions and correlation coefficients. Since percentage distributions may be more readily understood by most

1. This analytical tool was first proposed by the German statistician Fritz Bernstein ("Über eine Methode, die soziologische und bevölkerungsstatistische Gliederung von Abstimmungen bei geheimen Wahlverfahren statistisch zu ermitteln," Allgemeines Statistisches Archiv 22 [1932]: 253–56). It was reinvented some 20 years later by Leo A. Goodman, "Ecological Regressions and the Behavior of Individuals," American Sociological Review 43 (1953): 557–72. For a comparison of the two versions of ecological regression see Jan-Bernd Lohmöller and Jürgen W. Falter, "Some Further Aspects of Ecological Regression Analysis," Quality and Quantity 20 (1986): 109–25. Still one of the best introductions to ecological regression analysis for historians is an article by Morgan Kousser, "Ecological Regression and the Analysis of Past Politics," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 4 (1973/74): 237–62.
TABLE 1: RESULTS OF THE TWO WEIMAR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1925 AND 1932

|                  | 1925 1st Ballot | 1925 2nd Ballot | 1932 1st Ballot | 1932 2nd Ballot |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Jarres (Nationalist) | 38.8            | -               | -               | -               |
| Held (Bavarian Cath.)  | 3.7             | -               | -               | -               |
| Ludendorff (Völkisch)  | 1.1             | -               | -               | -               |
| Braun (Social Dem.)   | 29.0            | -               | -               | -               |
| Marx (Center Party)   | 14.5            | 45.3            | -               | -               |
| Hellpach (Left Lib.)  | 5.8             | -               | -               | -               |
| Thälmann (Communist)  | 7.0             | 6.4             | 13.2            | 10.2            |
| Hindenburg           | -               | 48.3            | 49.5            | 53.0            |
| Duesterberg (National.)  | -               | -               | 6.8             | -               |
| Hitler (Nation. Soc.) | -               | -               | 30.1            | 36.8            |
| Winter (Right Lib.)   | -               | -               | 0.3             | -               |
| Other               | 0.1             | 0.0             | 0.0             | 0.0             |

Cell entries: percent of valid vote

Turnout: 68.9, 77.6, 86.2, 83.5

Historians, I will concentrate on the former. In order to get an idea at the county level of how the Hindenburg vote of 1925 corresponds to the strength of other parties and candidates, the approximately 1,200 counties of Weimar Germany (regrouped into 831 county units in order to cope with numerous administrative boundary changes) are split up into quintiles according to the strength of the 1925 Hindenburg vote. We thus get five categories with an equal number of counties in each. For each category we assess the percentage of voters won by other parties or candidates than Hindenburg in a series of elections between December 1924 and July 1932. If there is a low percentage of votes for the other parties and candidates in the first quintile (where the Hindenburg vote was lowest) and a growing percentage of votes in the following quintiles (where Hindenburg fared better), we have a positive statistical relationship between the two votes. The correlation coefficient therefore is positive in sign and rather high in magnitude. This is the case for the statistical association between the Hindenburg vote on the one hand, and the vote for the German National

2. For some formal aspects of this data set which contains about 1,200 cases and more than 700 variables see Dirk Hänisch, "Inhalt und Struktur der Datenbank 'Wahl- und Sozialdaten der Kreise und Gemeinden des Deutschen Reiches von 1920–1933,'" Historical Social Research 14 (1989): 39–67. The ICPSR data set on Weimar elections unfortunately has some serious shortcomings which make it not advisable to use it without major revisions. See Jürgen W. Falter and Wolf D. Gruner, "Minor and Major Flaws of a Widely Used Data Set: The ICPSR 'German Weimar Republic Data 1919–1933' under Scrutiny," Historical Social Research 6 (1981): 1–26.
TABLE 2: SOME PARTY-VOTE CORRELATES OF THE 1925 HINDENBURG VOTE

| PARTY VOTE | HINDENBURG VOTE (QUINTILES) | ALL | R  |
|------------|-----------------------------|-----|----|
|            | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |     |    |
| Dec. 1924  |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Nationalists | 6.5 | 12.7 | 16.5 | 21.3 | 32.4 | 16.2 | .76 |
| Nat.-Socialists | 0.7 | 1.7  | 2.8  | 4.1  | 4.6  | 2.4  | .55 |
| Right Liberal | 4.9  | 8.1  | 9.6  | 9.5  | 7.0  | 8.0  | .22 |
| Left Liberal | 3.7  | 5.8  | 5.9  | 4.6  | 3.4  | 5.0  | .02 |
| Splinter Parties | 4.5  | 5.5  | 7.1  | 5.3  | 7.7  | 5.9  | .13 |
|            |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| First Ballot 1925 |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Jarres (DVP/DNVP) | 11.8 | 22.4 | 30.2 | 35.1 | 45.5 | 26.6 | .87 |
| Held (Bav. Cath.) | 1.6  | 2.8  | 3.2  | 3.2  | 1.8  | 2.6  | .03 |
| Ludendorff (Völk) | 0.4  | 0.6  | 0.7  | 1.8  | 1.0  | 0.7  | .27 |
| Braun (SPD) | 14.5 | 20.7 | 25.0 | 22.4 | 15.6 | 19.9 | .20 |
| Marx (Cath.) | 27.7 | 9.5  | 3.2  | 1.9  | 2.2  | 9.9  | -.69 |
| Hellpach (DDP) | 3.2  | 5.0  | 4.8  | 3.3  | 2.3  | 4.0  | -.04 |
| Thälmann (Comm.) | 5.1  | 6.2  | 4.4  | 4.0  | 1.9  | 4.8  | -.21 |
| Nonvoters | 35.7 | 32.6 | 28.5 | 28.9 | 29.7 | 31.1 | .19 |
| May 1928    |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Nationalists | 5.0  | 8.5  | 10.3 | 12.9 | 23.6 | 10.8 | .63 |
| Nat.-Socialists | 0.9  | 1.8  | 2.1  | 3.1  | 2.6  | 2.0  | .29 |
| Right Liberal | 4.4  | 6.8  | 7.7  | 7.7  | 5.6  | 6.6  | .19 |
| Left Liberal | 2.6  | 4.3  | 4.3  | 3.4  | 2.7  | 3.7  | .06 |
| Splinter Parties | 7.9  | 9.1  | 11.8 | 11.8 | 14.2 | 10.6 | .27 |
| September 1930 |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Nationalists | 3.4  | 4.8  | 5.2  | 6.7  | 11.9 | 5.7  | .47 |
| Nat.-Socialists | 9.3  | 13.9 | 16.1 | 18.6 | 20.3 | 15.0 | .63 |
| Right Liberal | 2.6  | 4.1  | 4.2  | 4.2  | 2.9  | 3.9  | .10 |
| Left Liberal | 2.6  | 3.5  | 3.8  | 2.8  | 2.2  | 3.2  | -.00 |
| Splinter Parties | 8.0  | 9.1  | 11.8 | 11.8 | 14.2 | 11.3 | .37 |
| 2nd Ballot 1932 |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Hindenburg | 51.9 | 45.2 | 43.2 | 40.3 | 32.2 | 8.6  | -.59 |
| Hitler | 18.9 | 27.4 | 33.7 | 36.8 | 45.6 | 30.9 | .82 |
| Thälmann | 9.6  | 10.2 | 8.1  | 6.9  | 3.9  | 44.5 | -.29 |
| July 1932   |    |    |    |    |    |      |    |
| Nationalists | 3.0  | 4.2  | 4.9  | 6.3  | 8.7  | 5.2  | .57 |
| Nat.-Socialists | 18.7 | 28.3 | 34.9 | 37.7 | 45.4 | 31.4 | .79 |
| Right Liberal | 0.7  | 1.1  | 1.2  | 1.1  | 0.8  | 1.0  | .10 |
| Left Liberal | 0.5  | 1.1  | 1.0  | 0.8  | 0.5  | 0.8  | .04 |
| Splinter Parties | 2.2  | 2.7  | 2.9  | 2.1  | 2.9  | 1.7  | .05 |

*Cell entries: percent of total electorate (eligible voters).*

Nationalists: DNVP; Nat.-Socialists: NSDAP (1924: NSFB); Right Liberal: DVP; Left Liberal: DDP (1932: DStP).

*Reading example: In July 1932 the NSDAP share of the electorate was 18.7% in the first quintile, i.e. those 20 percent of the 831 county units where the 1925 Hindenburg vote was lowest; in the fifth quintile (i.e. where the Hindenburg vote was highest) the 1932 Nazi vote was 45.4 percent.*

Party (DNVP) or the völkisch-Nazi coalition in the late-1924 parliamentary elections. A positive correlation also exists between the Hindenburg vote and the vote for the joint presidential candidate of the DNVP and the right-liberal DVP on the first ballot of 1925, Karl Jarres. In other words, the higher the Hindenburg vote of 1925 was
in a county, the higher, on the average, the DNVP or Jarres vote was in that same county. The opposite applies to candidates who won relatively more votes in the first than in the subsequent Hindenburg quintiles, as is the case with Wilhelm Marx, his close competitor of 1925. The correlation coefficient still is comparatively high, but now of course negative in sign.

We thus find out that German Nationalists and the 1924 coalition of völkisch and national-socialist splinters, as well as Jarres, displayed the same distribution of votes as Hindenburg did: they fared much better, on the average, in counties where Hindenburg was strong than in counties where Hindenburg was weak. For example, in the 165 counties of the first quintile, the Jarres vote amounted to not more than 11.8 percent of the electorate, while in the fifth quintile, the Jarres vote was up to 45.5 percent. In addition, there is a slight, curvilinear relationship between the Hindenburg vote and each of the following: turnout; the vote for the first-ballot candidate of the völkisch Right, Erich von Ludendorff; and, quite unexpectedly, the vote for the first-ballot presidential candidate of the Social Democrats, Otto Braun.

2.2. Some ecological regression estimates of the “true” voter fluctuations to and from Paul von Hindenburg in 1925

It would be quite hazardous to interpret these findings in terms of individual or group relationships—to assume, that is, that all or most Hindenburg voters were necessarily former Jarres and DNVP voters. So-called ecological fallacies, such as the erroneous assumption that the relationships of one level of analysis would be equivalent to the other, could (but by no means necessarily must) result from such a tacit assumption of congruence. To get somewhat better estimates of voter fluctuations, one has to take into consideration the development of the other parties or candidates as well. This is done by multiple ecological regression analysis—a powerful but somewhat dangerous statistical technique that bases its estimates on rather “strong” distributional premises such as linearity, non-contextuality of relationships, etc. Only if these premises are met by the data (which we cannot fully know) can the estimates of ecological regression equations be inter-

3. See Hayward R. Alker, Jr., “A Typology of Ecological Fallacies,” in Mattei Dogan and Stein Rokkan, eds., Quantitative Ecological Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 69–86. W. S. Robinson, “Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals,” American Sociological Review 40 (1950): 351–57.
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Table 3: From what parties did the Hindenburg voters come, and to what parties did they go? Some results of ecological regression analysis

| FROM/TO     | RT24B/PR25B | PR25B/RT28 | PR25B/RT30 | PR32B/RT32A |
|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| NSFB/NSDAP  | 73          | 2          | 20         | 21          |
| DNVP        | 86          | 17         | 7          | 4           |
| DVP         | 74          | 7          | 4          | 1           |
| DDP         | 30          | 4          | 3          | 1           |
| Z/BVP       | 20          | 0          | 0          | 24          |
| SPD         | 13          | 29         | 25         | 21          |
| KPD         | 16          | 7          | 9          | 11          |
| Other       | 67          | 13         | 14         | 3           |
| Nonvoters   | 19          | 23         | 18         | 15          |

Cell entries: Transition probabilities, estimated by multiple regression analysis; county level data. "From" = percentage of party electorate switching to Hindenburg; "To" = percentage of Hindenburg voters switching to one of the indicated parties.

Abbreviations: RT = Reichstag election; PR = Presidential election; RT24B = Reichstag election December 1924; PR25B = Presidential Election, April 1925 (second ballot); RT28 = Reichstag election 1928; RT32A = Reichstag election, July 1932, etc.

interpreted as "true" individual level fluctuations. If not, they still represent a good aggregate level estimate of the statistical relationship between the development of the Hindenburg vote and the vote for other parties and candidates. Since we cannot completely know if all assumptions of the method are really met, we should restrict our interpretation of the findings to differences of magnitude.

Tables 3 and 4 report some ecological regression estimates of the voter fluctuations to and from Hindenburg. The cell entries represent percentages. The first column of numbers of Table 3 informs about the transition probability of the December 1924 Reichstag voters from the parties indicated at the left of the table to Hindenburg. According to these estimates, between three-quarters and four-fifths of all right-wing voters (i.e., NSFB, DNVP, DVP, and various splinter parties) of December 1924 seem to have supported their joint second-ballot presidential candidate, Hindenburg. From the other parties and the nonvoters, only a rather insignificant minority seems to have voted for Hindenburg. The flux of voters from the various candidates of the

4. To control for the effect of nonlinear, contextual influences in the following an extension of multiple ecological regression analysis with product variables is used. For details see Jan-Bernd Lohmüller et al., "Unemployment and the Rise of National Socialism: Contradicting Results from Different Regional Aggregations," in Peter Nijkamp, ed., Measuring the Unmeasurable (The Hague, 1985), 357-70. Also Jürgen W. Falter and Reinhard Zintl, "The Economic Crisis of the 1930's and the Nazi Vote: An Attempt at Explanation by Means of a Rational Choice Approach and Ecological Regression Analysis," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 19 (1988): 55-85.
TABLE 4: VOTER FLUCTUATIONS BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND BALLOT OF THE TWO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1925 AND 1932

| PR25A/PR25B To Hindenburg from | PR25B/PR32A From Hindenburg to | PR32A/PR32B To Hindenburg from |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Jarres 95                      | Duesterberg 12                  | Duesterberg 15                  |
| Ludendorff 45                  | Hindenburg 20                   | Hindenburg 94                   |
| Braun 4                        | Hitler 52                       | Hitler 4                        |
| Marx 9                         | Thälmann 5                      | Thälmann 5                      |
| Hellpach 22                    | Winter 0                        | Winter 16                       |
| Thälmann 15                    | Other 0                         | Other 45                        |
|                                | Nonvoting 10                    | Nonvoting 13                    |

Cell entries: Transition probabilities, estimated by multiple ecological regression analysis. Reading example: Almost 100 percent of the Jarres voters switched to Hindenburg during the second ballot of the 1925 presidential elections; and about 50 percent of the 1925 Hindenburg voters seem to have voted for Adolf Hitler in the first ballot of the 1932 presidential elections.

first ballot to Hindenburg which is reported in the first column of Table 4 seems to follow the same pattern: almost all of the Jarres supporters joined the Hindenburg camp in the second round, while almost no fluctuation existed between Braun and Marx on the one hand and von Hindenburg on the other.

2.3. Where did the Hindenburg voters go after 1925?

Tables 2-4 also suggest where Hindenburg’s voters went after 1925. At the aggregate (that is, the county) level there is a rather strong positive relationship between the Hindenburg vote of 1925 and the later vote of the DNVP; there is also a much smaller but still positive relationship with the splinter parties in 1928 and 1930 (which, in turn, were mainly defectors from the German Nationalists). But already in the Reichstag election of 1930, the NSDAP clearly overtook the DNVP in statistical “closeness” to the Hindenburg vote of 1925. And the correlation between the Hindenburg vote of 1925 and the Hitler second-ballot vote of 1932 \( (r = 0.82!) \) is among the highest encountered in the whole data set: indeed, in this ballot, Hitler got less than 19 percent of the electorate in that 20 percent of the counties where the 1925 Hindenburg vote was lowest, but gathered more than 45 percent in the highest quintile. The accompanying graph, a so-called scatterplot, strikingly illustrates the remarkably close fit between the 1925 Hindenburg and the 1932 Hitler constituencies: where Hindenburg got many votes in 1925, Hitler tended to poll a significantly

5. See Falter and Zintl, “The Economic Crisis of the 1930’s and the Nazi Vote,” also Jürgen W. Falter, “The National Socialist Mobilisation of New Voters: 1928–1933,” in Thomas Chil- ders, ed., The Formation of the Nazi Constituency 1919–1933 (London, 1986), 202–31.
above-average vote in 1932, and where Hindenburg fared poorly in 1925, so did Hitler in 1932 (see Chart 1).

If we assume for the moment that we can fully trust our ecological regression estimates, about every sixth Hindenburg voter of 1925 voted DNVP in 1928, and every fourth seems to have voted SPD. The latter result, which at first sight looks quite contraintuitive, was probably due to the influx of new voters into the SPD in 1928—voters who, according to other ecological regression findings, seem to have voted DNVP in 1924 (and consequently Hindenburg in 1925) and probably defected to the Nazis after 1928. The current findings suggest that about 20 percent of former Hindenburg partisans voted for the Nazis in 1930—a number that accounts for almost half of the NSDAP electorate of that year. Other parties, with the quite plausible exception
TABLE 5: THE CORRELATION OF THE HELD VOTE WITH THE HINDENBURG AND MARX VOTE IN BAVARIA

| 1st Ballot | 1924B BVP Vote (Quintiles) | 1925A Held Vote (Quintiles) | 2nd Ballot |
|------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Jarres     | 27 18 9 7 6                | 44 37 33 40 40              | 1         |
| Marx       | 3 2 2 1 1                  | 32 26 20 16 16              | 2         |
| Thälmann   | 3 2 1 1 1                 | 3 2 1 1 1                  | 3         |
| Nonvoting  | 35 42 51 50 48 47         | 21 34 46 43 43 58           | 4         |
| Braun      | 23 15 9 8 5               | 1925A Held Vote             | 5         |
| Marx       | 3 2 2 1 1                 | 44 37 33 40 40              |           |
| Hellpach   | 3 2 1 1 1                 | 32 26 20 16 16              |           |
| Ludendorff | 2 3 2 1 1                | 3 2 1 1 1                  |           |
| Held       | 4 16 25 32 37 92          | 21 34 46 43 43 58           |           |

Cell entries: percent of electorate and Pearson correlation coefficient; county data, weighted by number of eligible voters.

Reading example: In those 166 counties where the BVP (and Held) vote was highest only 6 percent of the electorate voted for Jarres during the 1st ballot, but 40 percent voted for Hindenburg during the second ballot.

of the splinter parties, were not able to gain substantial numbers of Hindenburg’s 1925 voters.

2.4. A closer look at the contribution of former Held and Thälmann voters to the electoral success of the Hindenburg ticket

In some accounts of the 1925 presidential election, Hindenburg’s second-ballot victory is attributed either to the refusal of the Communists to withdraw their candidate, Ernst Thälmann, or to the decision of the Catholic Center’s Bavarian sister party, the BVP, to support the arch-Prussian Protestant Hindenburg instead of the Rhenish Catholic Marx. Either the KPD or the BVP is thus held responsible for taking away the approximately 500,000 swing votes that would have assured victory to Wilhelm Marx. Putting the blame upon the Communists seems to me a bit farfetched: given the explicit enmity of this party toward the Weimar “capitalist state,” it would have been completely unrealistic to expect the KPD to support the candidate of the Weimar system. On the other hand, the BVP’s decision to support Hindenburg instead of Marx may indeed have been crucial. It is therefore worthwhile to analyze how many votes the Bavarian party’s decision might have cost the candidate of the Weimar coalition.

In Bavaria, Hindenburg outpolled Marx by more than 15 percentage points, as compared to only 3 points in the Reich as a whole.6 Table 5 reports percentage distributions and correlation coefficients

6. Regional results in Jürgen W. Falter et al., Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik: Materialien zum Wahlverhalten 1919–1933 (Munich, 1986), 46, 73–79.
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TABLE 6: VOTING TRANSITIONS IN BAVARIA FROM THE 1ST TO THE 2ND BALLOT OF THE 1925 REICHSPRÄSIDENT ELECTIONS (ECOLOGICAL REGRESSION ESTIMATES)

| 1st Ballot | Second Ballot | Nonvoting | All 1st Ball. |
|------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| Jarres     | Hindenburg    | Marx      |              |
| 85         | 13            | 0         | 15.5         |
| Held       | 60            | 22        | 19.8         |
| Braun      | 10            | 68        | 13.5         |
| Marx       | 33            | 40        | 1.7          |
| Nonvoting  | 21            | 13        | 43.9         |
| All 2nd Ballot | 38.9  | 23.5  | 35.7 |

Cell entries: Transition probabilities estimated by multiple ecological regression analysis; county data.
Reading example: about 60 percent of the 1st ballot Held voters seem to have voted in favor of Hindenburg at the 2nd ballot, and only about 22 percent for the Catholic Center candidate Marx.

Last column: percent of valid votes won by Jarres, Held, etc. in the first ballot of the 1925 Presidential elections; last row: percent of valid votes won by Hindenburg and Marx in the second ballot of the 1925 Presidential elections.

for Bavaria, while Table 6 displays transition probabilities. The effects of the BVP’s recommendation for Hindenburg are clearly discernible. On the first ballot, Jarres got only 6 percent of the eligible voters in that 20 percent of the Bavarian counties where the BVP vote of the previous December was highest; the overall correlation coefficient is rather strong and negative in sign (−0.74). By contrast, Hindenburg was able to collect 40 percent of the electorate in the heaviest BVP (and first-ballot Held) precincts. By the same token, Marx won many fewer votes here than might have been expected. Table 6 indicates that approximately 60 percent of the first-ballot Held partisans followed their party’s recommendation and voted for Hindenburg on the second ballot, compared to only about 20 percent who switched to Marx. This would indeed imply that about half a million votes could be attributed to the BVP’s unfortunate recommendation. In the light of Hindenburg’s past political record, the BVP’s electoral policy may be characterized as shortsighted if not frivolous.

3. THE 1932 HINDENBURG ELECTION

It is well known that Hindenburg’s presidential record was far better until 1930, or even March 1932, than many liberal and socialist commentators had expected. In 1932, the Weimar coalition parties even regarded the Field Marshal as the only chance to keep Hitler and the NSDAP from power. Thus, at the age of 85, much against his own
intention (he would have preferred either to head a right-wing ticket or to be the “nonpolitical” candidate of the whole people), Hindenburg changed political camps in regard to the political parties supporting him. It is interesting to explore the voters’ reactions to this change of coalitions and to investigate the parallels and differences between the Hindenburg electorates of 1925 and 1932.

Another look at Table 2 shows that Hindenburg’s electoral success in 1932 was highest in those counties where he was least successful in 1925. Hitler, on the other hand, was able to draw much more electoral support in the old Hindenburg strongholds than Hindenburg himself (see also Chart 2). If the transition probabilities in Table 4 are indeed

7. See Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtzerfalls in der Demokratie* (Villingen, 1955), 443–80.
unbiased, Hitler was able to get the support on the first ballot of about 50 percent of the 1925 Hindenburg voters (and about 60 percent on the second ballot, when many of the conservative first-ballot Duesterberg voters switched to the Nazi leader). From the perspective of voter fluctuations, Hindenburg seems to have lost his old constituency. He was reinstated in office by his former opponents, the followers of the Catholic Center Party, the Social Democrats, and the few remaining left-liberals of the DDP/DStP.

The social correlates of the vote of the two main contenders of 1925 and 1933, as displayed in Table 7, reveal the radical rearrangement undergone by the Hindenburg voting coalition. In 1925, the Hindenburg vote was lower in predominantly Catholic, in urban, industrialized districts, and in regions where unemployment was above average. By contrast, the Hindenburg vote of 1932 increased with the number of Catholics and self-employed in the district. And Hitler’s constituency of 1932, like Hindenburg’s of 1925, was located in predominantly Protestant counties, in rural areas, and in districts with lower than average unemployment rates.8

The information presented in Table 7 is bivariate in character: only two variables are compared at one time. The real world, however, is

8. Quite unexpectedly the Nazis fared much better in districts with low levels of unemployment. On the average, the unemployed seem to have been clearly underrepresented among Nazi voters. See Jürgen W. Falter, “Unemployment and the Radicalisation of the German Electorate 1928–1933: An Aggregate Data Analysis with Special Emphasis on the Rise of National Socialism,” in Peter Stachura, ed., Unemployment and the Great Depression in Weimar Germany (Houndsmill/London, 1986), 187–208, and Jürgen W. Falter, Hitlers Wähler (Munich, 1991), 292–314.
different: nobody is only Catholic or Protestant, only young or old, only farmer or blue-collar worker. The same is true for the territorial units which form the basis of the analysis: county units are Catholic and rural and predominantly agrarian, etc. To account for this mix of social characteristics, one may combine some of the most important explanatory properties of the counties in a tree comparison (Table 8). In order to construct such a “tree,” we first divide the 831 county units of the Reich into three subgroups according to the percentage of Catholics living in these counties (religious denomination is by far the most important predictor of the Hitler and Hindenburg vote in 1932!). For these three subgroups of counties, we calculate the average percentage of Hindenburg, Hitler, and Marx voters. In the next step the three denominational county classes are then divided according to their degree of urbanization. Again the average percentage of Hindenburg, Hitler, and Marx voters is calculated for each of the resulting six groups. We thus find, for example, that the Hindenburg vote was far below average in rural Catholic areas in 1925 (23 percent); in 1932, however, Hindenburg was able in these very same counties to mobilize 59 percent of the eligible voters, while Adolf Hitler was able to win only 19 percent of the electorate in this branch of our tree. In the next and final step, the resulting six county classes are again divided into three sub-classes each, according to the prevalent economic sector, so that we are now looking at 18 different county categories which are socially and politically more homogeneous than the less differentiated branches of the tree above this last level. We then determine the share of the vote in each of the eighteen branches for the three main contenders of the two elections under consideration.9

While space constraints prohibit a detailed description, one can readily see from the “tree” that the Hindenburg voting coalition underwent a radical change: the distribution of Hindenburg votes in 1932 is much closer to that of the Marx vote of 1925 than to the first Hindenburg vote. Likewise, the Hitler vote of 1932 closely matches the Hindenburg vote of 1925: in those socially defined subgroups where Hindenburg’s showing was strong in 1925, Hitler gathered an above-average share of the votes in 1932, and vice versa. From this perspective, the conservative and right-wing voter coalition that

9. Analogous “trees” for all major parties and Weimar elections are presented in Jürgen W. Falter et al., Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik, 194–203.
TABLE 8: A TREE COMPARISON OF THE SOCIAL CORRELATES OF THE 1925 AND 1932 PRESIDENTIAL VOTES

| Whole Reich | 25B | 32B |
|-------------|-----|-----|
| M           | 35  | 44  |
| vH          | 37  | 30  |

| Catholic | 25B | 32B |
|----------|-----|-----|
| M        | 41  | 57  |
| vH       | 24  | 19  |

| Mixed | 25B | 32B |
|-------|-----|-----|
| M     | 41  | 46  |
| vH    | 30  | 27  |

| Protestant | 25B | 32B |
|------------|-----|-----|
| M          | 31  | 39  |
| vH         | 44  | 34  |

| Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 25B   | 32B   | 25B   | 32B   | 25B   | 32B   | 25B   | 32B   |
| M     | 42  | 59  | vH   | 40  | 53  | vH   | 42  | 46  | vH   | 40  | 47  | vH   | 28  | 25  |
| vH    | 23  | 19  | H    | 26  | 19  | H    | 26  | 19  | H    |

| Agrarian Service | Urban | Agrarian Service | Urban | Agrarian Service | Urban | Agrarian Service | Urban |
|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| 25 32            | 25 32 | 25 32            | 25 32 | 25 32            | 25 32 | 25 32            | 25 32 |
| 40 60            | 51   | 54               | 16  | 54               | 22   | 62               | 44   | 51               | 33   | 55               |
| 24 19            | vH   | 19               | 42   | 21               | 35   | 19               | 20   | 18               | 39   | 21               |

Cell entries: percentage of total electorate (rounded).

"M" = Vote for Wilhelm Marx, April, 1925; "H" = vote for Adolf Hitler, April, 1932; "vH" = Vote for Paul von Hindenburg, April 1925 and April 1932.

"Catholic" = Catholic >66.6%; "Mixed" = Catholic 33.3 to 66.6%; "Protestant" = Catholic <33.3%. "Rural" = <50% of county population living in communities with more than 5000 inhabitants; "Urban" = >50% living in communities >5000 inhabitants. "Agrarian" = a relative majority of the county population is employed in the agrarian sector of the economy, etc.

Reading example: In 1925 in predominantly rural Catholic counties with a dominance of the agrarian sector only 24 percent of the electorate voted for Hindenburg; in 1932 in these very same counties exactly 60 percent did so.
brought Hindenburg into power in the first Weimar presidential election may indeed be described as the harbinger of the electoral triumphs of the NSDAP of 1932 and 1933. It therefore may be interpreted as the first effective gathering of the antirepublican forces that would later bring the Weimar Republic to an end.10

4. DID INDEED MANY THÄLMANN VOTERS OF THE FIRST BALLOT VOTE FOR HITLER IN THE SECOND BALLOT OF THE 1932 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?

It is often suggested that the increase in Hitler’s constituency (about 2 million votes) during the second ballot of the 1932 presidential election may have been largely due to defections from the Communist leader Ernst Thälmann, who lost about 1.2 million votes. This hypothesis, which is based mostly on local impressionistic evidence (the proverbial Communist tavern which changed colors overnight), is rooted in the widespread conviction that ultimately the totalitarian extremes were not so terribly far apart and that the step from the Communists to the Nazis was much more readily taken than ideology or propaganda might lead one to expect. This idea of the proximity of the extremes finds additional theoretical endorsement in the conviction that many, if not most, of Hitler’s and Thälmann’s followers were unpolitical, socially uprooted products of mass society, so-called protest voters who could easily be seduced by unrealistic promises and who therefore fell prey to the totalitarian temptations of the time.11 However, little quantitative evidence has ever been provided that would either prove or disprove this transition hypothesis.

In Table 9A, the statistical relationship between the percentage point change of the Thälmann and Hitler vote between the first and second ballot of the 1932 presidential election is scrutinized. Again, quintiles and correlation coefficients are examined. In contrast to Tables 2 and 5, however, we are now looking at so-called change variables, i.e., percentage-point differences of the vote between the first and second ballot. What we find is a near-perfect independence of the develop-

10. In fact in the multivariate model the Hindenburg vote of 1925 (which in turn may be interpreted as a proximity measure of a right-wing political tradition) is the second best predictor of the Nazi vote (after the religious composition of the counties)! See Jürgen W. Falter and Dirk Hänisch, “Die Anfälligkeit von Arbeitern gegenüber der NSDAP bei den Reichstagswahlen 1928–1933,” Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 26 (1986): 179–216.

11. See Alfred Milatz, Wahlen und Wähler in der Weimarer Republik (Bonn, 1965), 138–39, 141.
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TABLE 9: THE TRANSITION BEHAVIOR OF THE THÄLMANN VOTERS IN REGARD TO HINDENBURG AND HITLER (A: CHANGE VARIABLES AND B: ECOLOGICAL REGRESSION ESTIMATES)

9A: CHANGE VARIABLES AND CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS AT THE COUNTY LEVEL (BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS)

| Change of: | 1932 Thälmann Vote (Quint.) | r | 1932 Hitler Vote (Quint.) | r |
|------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
|            | 1 2 3 4 5                   |   | 1 2 3 4 5                |   |
| Hindenburg |                             |   |                         |   |
| Hitler     | 2.6 2.2 1.4 0.9 1.5         | 12| 1.5 1.6 1.0 1.2 2.5     | 11|
| Thälmann   | -0.5 -1.2 -1.9 -2.8 -4.8   | 100| -2.2 -3.4 -3.1 -2.9 -2.6| 01|
| Duesterbg. | - - - - -                    | -16| -1.9 -3.3 -4.5 -6.6 -12.7| -83|

Cell entries: percentage point change and Pearson correlation coefficients, county level data.

Reading example: In those 20% of the counties where (the Communist candidate) Ernst Thälmann lost most (=an average of 4.8 percentage points in comparison to the first ballot), the Hindenburg vote increased by 1.5 percentage points in the second ballot of the 1932 presidential elections, etc.

9B: ECOLOGICAL REGRESSION ESTIMATES

| FIRST BALLOT | SECONd BALLOT |
|--------------|---------------|
|              | Hindenburg    | Hitler        | Thälmann      | Nonvoters |
| Hindenburg   | 94            | 2             | 1             | 3         |
| Duesterberg  | 15            | 50            | 7             | 28        |
| Hitler       | 4             | 96            | 0             | 0         |
| Thälmann     | 5             | 13            | 62            | 21        |
| Nonvoters    | 13            | 2             | 3             | 82        |

Cell entries: Transition probabilities, estimated by multiple regression analysis; counties weighted by number of eligible voters.

Reading example: 50 percent of the 1st-ballot Duesterberg supporters voted for Hitler in the 2nd ballot of the 1932 presidential election, etc.

ment of the Hitler and Thälmann vote. There is absolutely no linear relationship at the county level between the increase of the Hitler constituency and the decrease of the Thälmann electorate. In those 166 counties where the increase of the Hitler vote was strongest (9.2 percentage points on the average), Thälmann lost only 2.6 percentage points; and in those other 166 counties where the increase of the Hitler vote was smallest (0.4 percentage points), the decline of the Thälmann electorate was about the same as in the highest quintile (2.2 percentage points). The correlation coefficient accordingly is zero (0.01). Hence, at the (bivariate) aggregate level there is no empirical basis for the old Thälmann-to-Hitler transition hypothesis.

If we take into consideration the development of the other candidates, however, we get somewhat different results. In a multiple re-
gression analysis of the percentage-point change of the Hitler vote, we detect a small but significant positive relationship: the increase of the Hitler vote from March to April 1932, was somewhat higher where the Thälmann vote was above average in the first ballot or declined more strongly from the first to the second ballot, as the standardized regression coefficients of the following two equations show:

\[
\text{DiffHitl} = 0.797 \% \text{Duesterberg} + 0.114 \% \text{Thälmann} - 0.067 \% \text{Hindenburg} - 0.090 \% \text{Nonvoters}.
\]

and, when using change variables on both sides of the equation:

\[
\text{DiffHitl} = -0.941 \text{DiffDuesterberg} - 0.111 \text{DiffThälmann} - 0.245 \text{DiffHindenburg}.
\]

The ecological regression estimates amount to about 13 percent of former Thälmann voters switching to Adolf Hitler in the second ballot (see Table 9b). This would imply that almost 30 percent of the new Hitler voters would indeed have been former Thälmann followers. Another 20 percent of the Thälmann supporters seem to have abstained during the second round of the presidential election. But according to the same ecological regression findings, the vast majority of the new Hitler voters of April 1932—about 60 percent—were former Duesterberg supporters. Again, the voter fluctuation seems to have been more complex and differentiated than is normally assumed. If these ecological regression estimates are correct, then there were a few hundred thousand first-round Thälmann voters who joined the ranks of the Hitler coalition. While they made up neither a majority of Thälmann defectors nor of new Hitler recruits, they are sufficiently numerous to give credence to the local events and personal experiences reported in the biographical literature.