

Comparative historical social research on European fascist movements: who were the fascists?

Botz, Gerhard; Myklebust, Jan Petter

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Botz, G., & Myklebust, J. P. (1981). Comparative historical social research on European fascist movements: who were the fascists? *Historical Social Research*, 6(2), 27-32. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.6.1981.2.27-32>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

current research

COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH ON EUROPEAN FASCIST MOVEMENTS: WHO WERE THE FASCISTS ?

The vast body of literature up to 1970 on fascist movements in Europe in the mid-war years, ranged from biographies on fascist leaders, traditional historical narrative accounts and detailed studies on fascist ideologies. (1)

In the comparatively few sociological works presented, the focus was limited to electoral studies on the major movements, especially the NSDAP, with Lipset's pathbreaking study on the German elections through the Weimar Republic as a watershed, published in 1960 as a part of his influential Political Man. (2) There was, however, and still is, a lacunae in the research efforts: empirical and comparative studies on the support from rank-and-file citizens to the different fascist movements, especially at the membership level. (3)

The access to the membership files, stored in governmental agencies in the different countries, was facilitated after 1970, and also research potentials considerably. Research was also stimulated by the spread of quantitative and social scientific methods and by the use of computers among historians, which caused a still growing interest in historical mass data. (4) At the same time sociology in Europe rediscovered the historical dimension of society. Vast data files were now constructed by a growing number of social scientists and the empirically oriented historians, and the help of modern technology made analyses on this material a possible task.

In some countries for a variety of reasons this research material is embargoed. In Italy severe restrictions upon the contemporary historical sources in the state and the regional archives and a special non-quantitative inclination of most "bourgeois" and "marxist" historians help explain that there are no comprehensive data files on the social composition of fascism in Italy. Only a "census" of more than 150.000 members of the fasci, originating from 1921, was handed down through most of the successive studies. Further data files, e.g. from the individual fascist executive committees, from the fascist trade unions (5), and on the regional level have not yet been elaborated.

Though the situation in the archive sector had long been much better in Western Germany than in Italy, empirically founded historical research on the social composition of the Nazi party membership and the militant organization had rarely been undertaken before 1970. (6) Nevertheless the Berlin Document Center has stored millions of membership cards of the NSDAP, hundreds of thousands of SS- and SA-files and of other followers of the Nazi movement. (7) Even if one uses sampling techniques, which are not very common among historians, the German files are of such a magnitude that shifting through and systematizing them, represents a workload requiring considerable resources over a period of several years. (8)

As the Berlin Document Center also stores membership files from German Nazis outside the "Altreich", research on fascist movements mainly in Austria (9), Czechoslovakia, the Baltic countries and partly in Denmark (10) can be based on the same sources.

In the case of the archives stored in Eastern Europe it will probably take considerable time before Western historians will be able to use them for quantitative analyses mainly because of the alleged transfers from the fascist parties to the communist parties after the World War II, which represents potential dangers for people who are still alive and still influential in these countries. The same is true for the post-war registration files of the Austrian Nazis.

Even worse, is the situation with regard to the composition of "The British Union of Fascists", a movement highly interesting in a sociological perspective. Its archives were seized in 1940, and closed by the order of the Lord Chancellor under section 5 b of the Public Record Act until the year 2040!

This short and selective review on the possible data bases on historical social research on fascist movements indicates that the request to get access to archives on fascist movements, which are to day closed by governmental decrees, should be brought to the agenda on forthcoming international meetings for historians, in order, perhaps, to launch a co-ordinated effort for their release. Scholars also have to pay attention to the confining effects of the data protecting legislation in several countries.

The project reported on here, was to a great extent a result of an extreme good data basis. In Norway, the Court Proceedings on war collaborators after the war have produced an archive of documents of 92.000 cases investigated by the police in the period 1945-1950. For each of these cases the essential vitae of each member is given, such as the date of birth, the place of birth, occupational status, date for joining the Norwegian Nazi party - Nasjonal samling - and conviction, if sentence was passed.

In 1969, steps were taken for the transfer of this information on the Nazi members in the file (not all were NS-members, a lot were economic fortune hunters or war criminals) to computer-readable cards, giving the essential vitae of each NS-member. This process of data-transfer including data-clearance, coding etc. took several years, and was done mainly by employing a group of 20 students for the hard work.

The result was, however, highly stimulating: a research tool represented by an EDP-file of 54.651 registered members of the Nasjonal Samling during its period of existence from 1933 to 1945.

This file was initially constructed to fill a variety of research purposes, and the first of analyses appeared in the form of M.A. theses in history and the social sciences at the University of Bergen 1971-1974. (11)

It soon became clear that the archive, because of its magnitude, possessed enormous potential for research. In Bergen, Professor Stein Rokkan had worked since 1966 on the implementation of several computerized data archives for social science research purposes. The main work centered on the building of an ecological archive on the Norwegian communes for the period from 1868 till today. (12)

At the time of the implementation of the Nazi membership archive on individuals, the ecological archive on social structure for the period 1905-1940 was also undergoing final preparations before implementation. (13)

A possible linking of the two archives, the NS-archive on individuals and the ecological archive, making operationalizations of social structure a possible task, was considered a fascinating scholarly opportunity, not least from a methodological point of view. The regional analyses of the Norwegian political alignments in this century proposed earlier by Rokkan (14) had disclosed a marked regional contrast within the country, with regard to socio-structural development and political responses. The question of how an extremist political alternative fitted the political alignments established by his research, could now be arrived at in a multi-methodological design, utilizing both survey-like techniques and ecological methods on the spatial aggregates.

Initially, the Bergen-group - consisting of Stein U. Larsen, Jan Petter Myklebust, Bernt Hagtvet and others - had established contacts with similar projects on the sociology of fascist movements in the Netherlands, in Denmark and Ireland. In 1970 an application was filed with UNESCO under The Participation Programm, calling for a conference on the sociology of fascist movements within a cross-national perspective to confront the results found so far and to discuss further methodological problems, realizing that the endless German debate on the definition of fascism and other conceptual clarifications (15) had probably hampered the possibilities of concentrating research efforts to find out something from the facts of what had happened.

After being granted moderate support from UNESCO, steps were taken to establish contacts with similar projects elsewhere in Europe, with a particular effort to attach researches from the minor, less-known fascist movements, because of the judgement that here were the deepest lacunae in the research. The response was overwhelming: from Eastern Europe, from Austria, the USA and from Israel came a stream of requests of further information on the conditions for participation. It soon became evident that the core of the project team had hit a chord, and that the time was now ripe for furthering the international cooperation of empirical studies on fascism.

The Conference on comparative European fascism was held in Bergen on June 19 - 21, 1974, and 65 participants from a dozen countries had the impossible task of discussing some 40 papers with a total of more than 1000 mimeographed pages in a 3 day schedule. The three main themes of the conference were:

- I.) Who became members of fascist /Nazi movements/ parties in Europe before and during World War II?
- II.) Why did they become members?
- III.) What happened to them afterwards?

In addition to these main problems some background information on the historical and socio-political context of each national fascist/Nazi movement was requested from the authors of papers. Information on the data and archive situation and the status of research in each country should be given too.

The conference brought a series of interesting discussion, especially since the confrontation of research style and methodology immediately was brought to the agenda through the different fields represented: economists, historians, cliometricans, sociologists, political scientists and some few philosophers. One positive effect of this conference was, no doubt, that an exchange of relevant information on the historical-sociological subject and on methods among the single researchers was promoted. It is to be supposed that some long term projects in Europe and the USA got valuable empirical and theoretical impulses and were strengthened in their arguments by similar or differing research results, presented at the conference. Some of these studies have been published in the meantime. (16)

It cannot be regarded as mere accident that most of the contributors missed the goal of dealing successfully with the IIIrd main theme of the conference. Whereas many of them had been able to cover question I and II, the problem of the de-nazification/de-fascistification of former Nazis/fascists is still subject to further conferences.

An editorial committee was appointed at the conference to work out the procedures for the possible publication of the proceedings, concentrating on the work of bringing the contributions into a kind of order. Also it soon became clear that revisions were necessary and that some contributions had to be excluded. It also became evident that lacunae still existed. Throughout 1975/76 scholars were approached for the possible contributions for countries that were not covered at the conference. Contributions on fascism in Portugal, Belgium, Greece, Italy and some Scandinavian countries are the result from this second round.

The editors then decided to organize the revised papers for publication in seven parts:

- 1.) Theoretical studies of fascism in comparative perspective (this sector should give a strong theoretical linkage between the single nation centered studies);
- 2.) varieties of fascism in Austria (as a country, which gave the socio-political and cultural ground for the origin of national socialism and which laid exactly in the overlap of the two main types of fascism, being the subject of the following sector);
- 3.) the fascist core countries: Germany and Italy;
- 4.) fascism in Eastern Europe (which provides important case studies on the transformation of an epochal social phenomenon by local influence into a special type of fascism);
- 5.) the diffusion of (the Italian and German version of) fascism in Southern and Western Europe;
- 6.) fascism and national socialism in the Nordic countries (as the starting area of this research project); and
- 7.) a sector "comparing fascist movements", which figures out some empirical results on the international level.

Thus the end result of the Bergen conference provides a wide coverage for theoretical issues and an almost complete coverage of fascism in the European nations as of the 1930's. It has been published some months ago. (17)

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Surveys are given by W. Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, London: Wildwood House 1976; H.-U. Thamer and W. Wippermann, *Faschistische und neofaschistische Bewegungen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft 1977.
- 2) S.M. Lipset, *Political Man. The Social Basis of Politics*, New York: Doubleday 1960 (German ed.: *Soziologie der Demokratie*, Neuwied a.Rh.: Luchterhand 1962).
- 3) This trend is now shifting, see W. Schieder (ed.), *Faschismus als soziale Bewegung. Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich*, Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe 1976; R. Mann (ed.), *Die Nationalsozialisten. Analysen faschistischer Bewegungen*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1980; see also E. Henning, *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Faschismus in Deutschland. Ein Forschungsbericht*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1977; St. G. Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press 1980.
- 4) See J.M. Clubb and E.K. Scheuch (eds.), *Historical Social Research. The Use of Historical and Process-Produced Data*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1980.
- 5) See R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista: I. La conquista del potere 1921-1925*, Torino: Einaudi 1966, pp. 6-12; W. Schieder, *Der Strukturwandel der faschistischen Partei Italiens in der Phase der Herrschaftsstabilisierung*, in: Schieder, op. cit., pp. 79-80; J. Petersen, *Nachwort: Zum Stand der Faschismuskussion in Italien*, in: R. De Felice, *Der Faschismus, Ein Interview von Michael A. Ledeen*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1970, p. 128; I. Granata, *Storia nazionale e storia locale: alcune considerazioni sulla problematica del fascismo delle origini (1919-1922)*, in: *Storia contemporanea* 11. 1980, pp. 503-544.
- 6) For one of the few exceptions see M.H. Kater, *Zur Soziographie der frühen NSDAP*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 19. 1971, pp. 124-159; cfr. also: *Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP* (ed.), *Partei-Statistik. Stand 1. Januar 1935*, vol. 1-3, (Munich); W. Schäfer, *NSDAP. Entwicklung und Struktur der Staatspartei des Dritten Reiches*, Hannover 1956.
- 7) See: *Who was a Nazi? Facts about the Membership Procedure of the Nazi Party*, Compiled by 7771 Document Center OMGUS, (Berlin) 1947; G.C. Browder, *Problems and Potentials of the Berlin Document Center*, in: *Central European History* 5. 1972, pp. 362-380.
- 8) Some projects on this data basis are going to be finished, above all see: Michael H. Kater, Toronto (on party members) and Mathilde Jamin, Bochum, (on the SA), see Mann op.cit., pp. 84-97, 155-185; cfr. also G.C. Boehnert, *An Analysis of the Age and Education of the SS Führerkorps 1925-1939*, in: *Historical Social Research* 12. 1979, pp. 4-17).
- 9) G. Botz is doing a project on the social composition of National Socialism (see Mann, op. cit., pp. 98-136).

- 10) M. Djursaa (cfr. also *ibid.*, pp. 137-154) has finished her Ph. D. thesis on the basis of excellent data material in the Danish State Archives: Danish Nazism: The Membership of "Danmarks National-Socialistiske Arbejder Parti", 1930-1945, Univ. of Essex 1979 (as book forthcoming: DNSAP. Danske Nazister 1930-1945, Copenhagen).
- 11) See the following M.A. dissertations, Univ. of Bergen: F. Hestvik, *Nasjonal Samling i Salten under Okkupasjonen* (The NS in Salten during the Occupation), 1972; H. Hendriksen, *Mennesker uten Makt* (People without Power), 1972; S. Rognaldsen, *NS medlemmene i Bergen 1940-1945* (The NS Members in Bergen 1940-1945), 1971; B. Wold-Johnsen, *Nasjonal Samling i Stavanger 1933-1937*. (The NS in Stavanger 1933-1937), 1972; A.O. Aune, *NS Riksledelse 1940-1945. Organisasjon og rekruttering* (The NS National Executive 1940-1945. Organization and Recruitment), 1975; N. Nordberg, *Kvinner i Nasjonal Samling. En undersøkelse i Bergen* (Woman in the NS. A Local Study of Bergen), 1977; T. Tunshelle: *NS i Sogn og Fjordane 1933-1945* (The NS in Sogn og Fjordane 1933-45), 1972.
Main Results are published in R. Danielsen and St.U. Larsen (eds.), *Fra idé til dom* (From Idea to Sentence), Bergen 1976.
- 12) St. Rokkan and F. Aarebrot, *The Norwegian Archive of Historical Ecology*, in: *Social Science Information* 1. 1969.
- 13) J.P. Myklebust et.al., *Kommunearkivet 1905-1940* (The Ecological Archive 1905-1940), in: *Norwegian Social Science Data Services*, Publ. No. 6, 1976.
- 14) St. Rokkan, *Geography, Religion and Social Class: Cross-cutting cleavages in Norwegian Politics*, in: S.M. Lipset and St. Rokkan (eds.) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York: The Free Press 1967; St. Rokkan and H. Valen, *The Mobilization of the Periphery*, in: St. Rokkan (eds.), *Citizens, Elections, Parties. Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Process of Development*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1970, S. 181-225.
- 15) For a harsh critique cfr. K.D. Bracher, *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen. Um Faschismus, Totalitarismus, Demokratie*, Munich: Piper 1976.
- 16) See for example J.J. Linz, *Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective*, in: Laqueur, op. cit., pp. 3-121; Payne, op. cit.; research projects of Bruce F. Pauley, Oviedo, Fl. on nazism in Austria and Czechoslovakia and of Gerhard Botz, Salzburg (see note 9) have not yet been finished.
- 17) St.U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J.P. Myklebust (eds.), *Who were the Fascists. Social Roots of European Fascism*, Bergen: Universitetsforlaget 1980, 816 pages.

Gerhard Botz
Universität Salzburg
Institut für Geschichte
Mirabellplatz 1
A - 5020 Salzburg 1

Jan Petter Myklebust
University of Bergen
Psychological Institute
Postboks 25
N - 5014 Bergen - U.