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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Falter, J. W. (2013). The young membership of the NSDAP between 1925 and 1933: a demographic and social profile [1996]. *Historical Social Research, Supplement*, 25, 260-279. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-379949>

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## The Young Membership of the NSDAP between 1925 and 1933. A Demographic and Social Profile [1996]

Jürgen W. Falter\*

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**Abstract:** »Jugend-Mitgliedschaft der NSDAP zwischen 1925 und 1933. Ein demographisches und soziales Profil«. This article considers the youthful composition of the NSDAP between 1925 and 1933. This article not only challenges Michael Kater's previous analyses on the young party by finding the average age of members in the early years of the party to be younger than previously thought, but also examines information about the young recruits including: age, regional background, religious denomination and occupation. While previous research has shown the NSDAP movement to be one of the middle class, this article finds that, amongst the young members, the skilled working class is more heavily represented, thus challenging many commonly held notions about the party membership. This article also takes into consideration the high turnover rate of the NSDAP, while also analyzing which members subsequently re-joined after leaving the party, a quite common phenomenon.

**Keywords:** NSDAP, Berlin Document Center, membership, recruits, youth.

The NSDAP was regarded even by its contemporaries as an unusually young party.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, making due allowance for the fact that the average person in the Weimar Republic appears older to modern eyes, the image it presented in the films of party conventions and contemporary weekly newsreels is positively youthful. The official NSDAP Partei-Statistik of 1935 also points with some pride, although only on the basis of a few districts, to the contrast with the SPD whose 'extreme aging' it emphasises with great satisfaction. The adherents of most other parties at the end of Weimar may in fact have been on average ten

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\* Revised version of: Falter, Jürgen W. 1996. The Young Membership of the NSDAP between 1925 and 1933. A Demographic and Social Profile. In *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany*, ed. Conan Fisher, 79-98. Providence/Oxford: Berg-hahn. This chapter first appeared as 'Die Jungmitglieder der NSDAP zwischen 1925 und 1933. Ein demographisches und soziales Profil' in *Politische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Wolfgang R. Krabbe, Dortmund, 1993, 203-21. It appears here by kind permission of the author. Translated by Mary Fischer.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans Neisser, 'Sozialstatistische Analyse des Wahlergebnisses', *Die Arbeit*, 7, 1930, 654-9; Hans Gerth, 'The Nazi Party: Its Leadership and Composition', *American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 1940, 529; Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party. A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945*, Cambridge, MA, 1983, 138ff.

to fifteen years older than those of the NSDAP.<sup>2</sup> This impression, of a relatively youthful NSDAP, has since been extensively confirmed by academic research. The German-Canadian specialist on Nazism, Michael Kater, for example, reports in his exceptionally important study of the NSDAP's members and leaders that after the reestablishment of the party in 1925 the average age of its new members was around 29, although there were significant local deviations above and below this figure. Before its first major electoral success in 1930 there was a clear overrepresentation of people under 30 in the party. Between 1930 and 1932 the average age rose to barely 32, so that taking the entire period between the reestablishment of the movement and Hitler's nomination as Chancellor the average age of new recruits to the party was just above 31.<sup>3</sup>

Kater bases his calculations on a proportionally adjusted sample from the largely intact NSDAP central membership files, now known as the Berlin Document Center Master File. However, this procedure is only suitable up to a point for the first four or five years after the reestablishment of the party. Since the great majority of NSDAP members (more than nine-tenths) did not join up until after the so-called seizure of power, there is only a very limited exploitable data base for the period before 1930. Because of the statistical problems associated with numerically small samples, the utility of his study for this period is, therefore, limited. When dealing with party entrants from these early years he either has to work within very large margins of error, which scarcely permit meaningful interpretation or, in adopting more-or-less acceptable margins, has to accept considerable statistical uncertainty. Kater therefore bases his assertions on the party's age structure before 1930 on another source, an unpublished American dissertation by J. Paul Madden. However its sampling methods and its linguistic weaknesses when classifying professions also present certain problems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP (ed.), *Partei-Statistik*, Stand 1. Januar 1935, 1: Parteimitglieder, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Kater, *Nazi Party*, 140. Kater's figures are based entirely on entrants to the party, not on the membership at any particular time or over the period as a whole. This results in the exploitation of the NSDAP Central Membership File being on a gross basis; that is to say, the File contains an index card for every individual recruit, but, unfortunately, Kater pays no attention to the recording of subsequent resignations and rejoining recorded on these cards. This prevents him from being able to calculate net membership figures.

<sup>4</sup> Kater exploits an unpublished United States dissertation from the year 1976 when examining the period 1925-29. This dissertation evaluates significantly more cases than he himself: J. Paul Madden, 'The Social Composition of the Nazi Party, 1919-1930', Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1976. Madden's data and results, however, raise certain problems. For one thing he exploits an unorthodox sampling technique in that he selects the following initial letters of NSDAP members' surnames: C, D, E, I, P, R, U, V, Z. This can create discrepancies since particular surnames were concentrated in particular regions. For another, a series of linguistic misunderstandings have led to highly comical translations of occupational categories into English (for instance he translates the occupational term *Stepperin*, that is sewing machinist, as 'step dancer!'), which put in question the validity of his whole system of

It was the quality of existing research, particularly unsatisfactory for the years 1925-1930 but also patchy for the period 1930-1933, which led the author to create, in collaboration with the American sociologist William Brustein, another, substantially more comprehensive sample of over 42,000 cases from the Berlin Document Center's NSDAP membership files.<sup>5</sup> The following account is based on the Berlin part of this new sample with 13 024 cases only. In contrast to Kater's and Madden's samples, this investigation exploits both sets of membership files kept in the Document Center: the one Kater used, which was originally compiled geographically (but unfortunately rearranged alphabetically after the war), and the somewhat smaller one used by Madden which had always been arranged alphabetically. Based on so-called nonproportionate methods of classification, this new sample nonetheless contains so many cases for every year following the reestablishment of the party that quite precise and statistically reliable statements on the joiners during each of these years become possible.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, both the teams involved in the new survey did not merely ascertain from the records the year in which individuals joined the party, but also, in contrast to Kater, the exact entry date as well as dates on which people left and then rejoined the party. It is consequently now possible to pronounce on the actual members and membership trends within the party at any particular time one might wish, or within any given period.<sup>7</sup>

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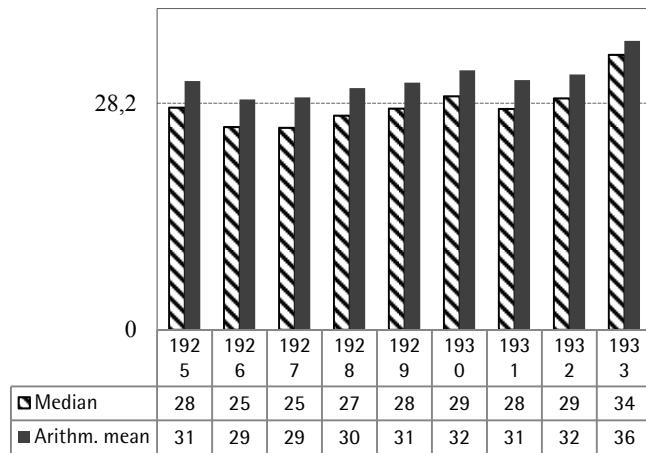
occupational categorisation. This might explain how, in a later published essay, he arrives at a figure of only 3.7 percent skilled workers within the working population. See J. Paul Madden, 'The Social Class Origins of Nazi Party Members as Determined by Occupation, 1919-1933', *Social Science Quarterly*, 68, 1987, 263-80. The real proportion was in fact about seven times as high. See *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, 402, III.

<sup>5</sup> This extensive sample was not, of course, compiled by myself and William Brustein alone. Two sampling teams, the so-called Minnesota group and the Berlin group, directed by us, worked in the BDC for around three months each and then transferred the information obtained from membership cards onto computer. Financial support was provided by the National Science Foundation, Washington and by the Free University, Berlin. Cf. on the construction, execution and accuracy of the sample: D. Torsten Schneider-Haase, 'Beschreibung der Stichprobenziehung zu den Mitgliedern der NSDAP vom 27. März- 7. September 1989 im Berlin Document Center', *Berliner Arbeitshefte und Berichte zur Sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, 62 (published as journal article in *Historical Social Research*, Cologne, 1992). I would like here to thank the two Directors of the Berlin Document Center, Daniel Simon and David Marwell for their generous support during the compilation of the two NSDAP samples. The following analyses are exclusively based on the Berlin sample, since we recently discovered some nasty mistakes in the Minnesota sample which so far we could not completely eliminate. The original publication was based on both samples. For this reprint we recalculated all figures using the (hopefully) uncorrupted Berlin sample.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, in the total sample (i.e. the Minnesota and Berlin sample combined) some 2,264 accessible cases are available for the year 1925, around 2,359 for 1926, exactly 8,081 for 1932, etc.

<sup>7</sup> This is dependent, naturally, on the exact recording of resignations and reentries, as the frequency alone of both events in the two data sets indicates. The following analysis consti-

Fig. 1: The average age of people joining the NSDAP, 1925-1933



BDC sample; N = 13024.

Median 1925-1932: 28.2 years; arithmetical mean 1925-1932: 31 years.

Looking first at the age of new Nazi Party members, the median value between 1925 and 1932 was slightly above 28.<sup>8</sup> This shows the NSDAP to be even younger than Kater estimated, although he probably uses the arithmetical average age of members when they joined the party. This is however not the most appropriate measure for this present investigation since the distribution has a lower limit of 18, the age at which people became eligible to join the party, but in principle no upper limit. Figure 1 shows that the average age of new members gradually increased after 1927 and reached 29 in the year before the 'seizure of power'.

The average age of all party members was of course somewhat higher, since the new members who remained in the party obviously grew older with the passage of time (compare with Figure 2). According to our calculations the average age of Nazi Party members in 1932 was around 29. There is a remarkable rise in age in 1933 when, especially after the last more-or-less free Reichstag elections of 5 March 1933, there was a veritable rush to join the party. More older people could also be found among the so-called March Converts (Märzgefallenen) of 1933, that is those who joined the party mainly for opportunistic reasons and who included numerous civil servants, professionals and

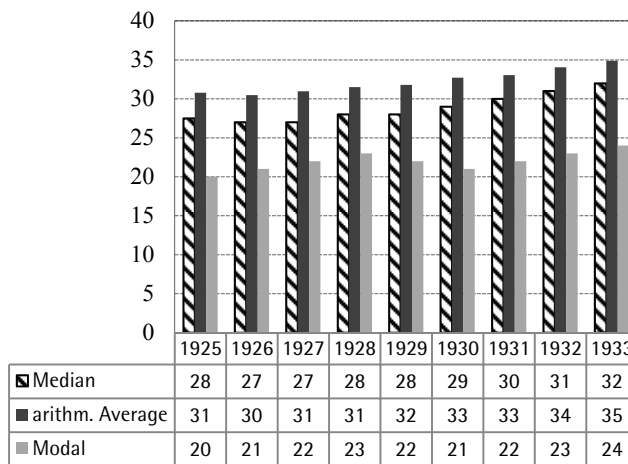
tutes the very first evaluation of these new data. Further pieces by Bill Brustein and myself will follow.

<sup>8</sup> The median is a unit of measurement for determining insensitive mean values derived from statistical sampling.

self-employed. This led as early as 1935 to official concern at Party Headquarters in Munich over the possibility of the NSDAP becoming too old and to fear that its political vigour would decline as a result. The Chief of National Organisation, Robert Ley, complained unequivocally in the *Partei-Statistik*: 'that in a number of *Gaue* the membership has already become too old'.<sup>9</sup> The party of the 'Era of Struggle', that is the time before the so-called 'seizure of power', was nevertheless, as can clearly be seen from Figure 2, young; indeed to a significant degree even a youthful movement. Expressed in modal terms, the most frequently occurring age in the party during the years before the 'seizure of power' lay between 22 and 24!

The following discussion concentrates on the young members of the party, by which is understood all those who had not attained the age of majority when they joined, that is men and women under the age of 21.

Fig. 2: The average age of NSDAP members, 1925-1933



BDC sample; N= 13024.

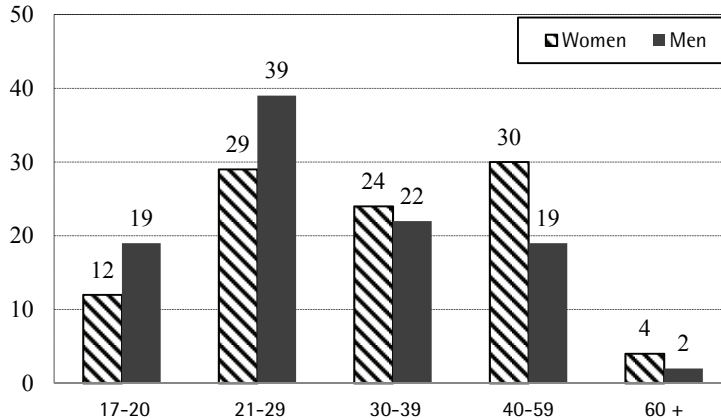
Table 1: Male and female recruits to the NSDAP according to age, 1925-1932

	17-20	21-29	30-39	40-59	60+	All
Men	95	94	92	88	85	92
Women	5	6	8	12	15	8

BDC sample; N=13024. Proportion of men and women joining the NSDAP according to age during the period under investigation.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Reichsorganisationsleiter, *Partei-Statistik*, 1:160 and esp. 208.

**Fig. 3:** The distribution of male and female entrants to the NSDAP by age, 1925-1932



BDC sample; N= 13024.

*Guidance for readers:* 19% of male and 12% of female NSDAP entrants, 1925-1932, were under 21 years old, etc.

**Table 2:** The average age of entrants to the NSDAP by gender, 1925-1932

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Men	27.8	16.2	88.1
Women	33.8	18.0	79.6
All	28.2	16.2	88.1

BDC sample; N= 13024. Figures: age (in years) upon entry to the NSDAP. Median. Minimum/maximum: youngest/ eldest party member in sample on date of entry into the NSDAP

In comparison to the structure of the overall population, men were heavily overrepresented in the young membership at around 95 percent, while women on the other hand were considerably underrepresented at 5 percent (see Table 1). The extremely weak representation of women among new members of the NSDAP was slightly less stark among older age groups, but pronounced here too (see Table 1). However, one must be aware in interpreting these figures that at that time, and not only in Germany, women in general were far less often active in political parties than today when, even under fundamentally altered political and social circumstances, men remain overrepresented within the membership of practically all parties – with the exception of the Greens.<sup>10</sup> Even on the left in the Weimar Republic men constituted the lion's share of party membership. The extremely marked underrepresentation of women in their ranks does not seem to have particularly disturbed the National Socialists as the

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Herbert Tingsten, *Political Behaviour*, Totowa, 1964. First publ. London, 1937.

following quote, again from Robert Ley and not intended for public consumption, shows: ‘The low number of female members can simply be explained by the fact that the party’s character is combative and political and consequently it has attracted male activists as a matter of course’.<sup>11</sup>

As Table 2 shows, the new male members were on average even slightly younger than the female members. In spite of the official minimum age of admission having been set at 18 after the re-establishment of the NSDAP, the youngest male party member in our sample was just over 16.2 years old, the eldest 88.1. Over half of the NSDAP’s members from the period 1925 to 1932 had been born just after the turn of the century. These were people whose first political memories would typically have stretched back to the time of the Kaiser. This group went through its politically formative years, however, primarily at the time of the outbreak of war, the initial military successes, and the defeat in the First World War, which took many of them by surprise.

**Table 3:** Resignations from the NSDAP by young members according to year of entry

Year of Resignation	Year of Entry							
	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
1925	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1926	17	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
1927	24	27	11	-	-	-	-	-
1928	4	19	26	8	-	-	-	-
1929	3	7	14	20	6	-	-	-
1930	7	4	6	12	22	8	-	-
1931	4	1	5	6	14	19	7	-
1932	2	1	3	6	7	11	16	7
1933	1	3	3	1	3	3	5	12
1925-44	75	71	76	60	58	49	40	35

BDC sample; young members only, i.e. members who were younger than 21 years old upon first joining the NSDAP. Percentages rounded. Figures reflect initial resignation without reference to any subsequent re-joining.

*Guidance for readers:* Of young members who joined the NSDAP for the first time in 1925, 9% resigned from the party in the same year, a further 17% left in the following year, etc. In the entire period between 1925 and 1944 three-quarters of the young members who had joined the party for the first time in 1925 had subsequently resigned from the NSDAP on at least one occasion.

Other formative influences could well have been the November Revolution of 1918, the Treaty of Versailles, perceived by most as an unjust imposition (Diktat) by the victor powers, with its territorial losses and seemingly fraudulent reparations demands, the hyperinflation of 1922/23 and the serious political

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Reichsorganisationsleiter, Partei-Statistik, 1:12.



and social upheavals from the Spartacus Revolt to the Munich Putsch which threatened the Weimar Republic during the first years of its existence.

During its early years the NSDAP was characterised by an exceptionally high turnover in membership. Among the young members<sup>12</sup> who joined between 1925 and 1927 in particular, the rate of wastage at around 75 percent appears exorbitant at first sight; and even taking those who joined the party in 1930, nearly half left in the period up to 1944 (see Table 3). This apparently huge turnover rate is diminished by the fact that in the period under consideration considerably more membership numbers were issued than there were members in the party. Furthermore, as we shall see, these are actually gross figures and the real wastage rate is much lower when re-joining is taken into consideration. Even today one still occasionally comes across interpretations which equate the actual number of members in a given year with the tally of membership numbers issued up to that date and assume a total of around 14 million party members in 1944; however such lines of reasoning overestimate the size of the party's membership considerably. Even by the end of 1932, our sample reveals, membership numbers above one million were being issued, yet, according to our calculations, the total of members actually organised within the NSDAP amounted only to around half a million.<sup>13</sup> Typically the wastage rate in the first year after joining was around 10 percent. In the first two years after joining it stood between a quarter and a third, but after 1930 it fell to around a fifth. After the party's surprising successes in the September 1930 elections – its vote rose from a previous 2.6 percent to 18.3 percent the percentage of those leaving it showed a corresponding decrease. The average age of those resigning stood at about 31, rising from around 29 in the initial years after the reestablishment of the party. As can be seen in Table 4, the age of those resigning only began to rise more strongly during the war years.

It should be noted, as Table 5 shows, that it was by no means always the case that people left permanently. The overwhelming majority of those who left quickly rejoined the party, so that the long-term or net loss between 1925 and 1933 was only just 13 percent, even among young members, in spite of the above average wastage rate which is apparent in Figure 4.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Young members' are defined here as members of our sample who had not yet reached their 21st birthday when they joined the NSDAP. There were about 7,200 such cases, that is over a sixth of the total sample. This high incidence of young members is a further indication of the relative youthfulness of the NSDAP as discussed above.

<sup>13</sup> These calculations are based on a second, proportional sample of 27,000 cases from the period 1925-1933. This was compiled in order to determine the actual pattern of membership development within the NSDAP and also to calculate weighted mean values for the period 1925-1932.

**Table 4: The Average Age of Members Resigning from the NSDAP**

Year of Leaving	Age	Year of Leaving	Age
1925	25,4	1935	33,2
1926	28,9	1936	34,8
1927	30,6	1937	34,3
1928	29,5	1938	36,1
1929	29,6	1939	39,9
1930	31,8	1940	39,8
1931	30,9	1941	54,1
1932	30,2	1942	44,9
1933	30,7	1943	55,4
1934	32,2	1944	56,3

BDC sample; N= 13,024. Average age (arithmetical mean) upon resigning from the party for the first time.

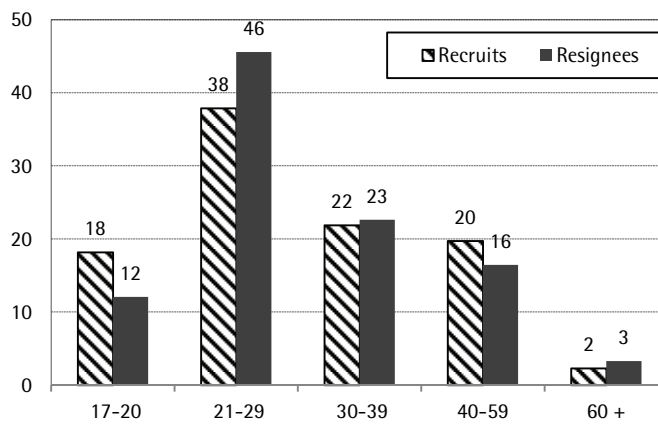
**Table 5: Young Members of the NSDAP who Subsequently Left the Party Permanently, By Year of Entry**

	Year of Entry									
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	Total
Resigned Permanently										
No	55	59	56	67	65	71	77	82	99	87
Yes	45	41	44	33	35	29	23	18	1	13
Numbers	135	150	125	165	361	317	414	359	221	2247

BDC sample. Only members aged under 21 upon joining. Resignations qualified by re-entries to party. All figures: weighted mean 1925-1932.

*Guidance for readers:* Of young members who joined the NSDAP in 1925, nearly half had resigned from the party without subsequently rejoining up to 1933.

**Fig. 4: The age distribution of recruits to the NSDAP, 1925-1932 (%)**

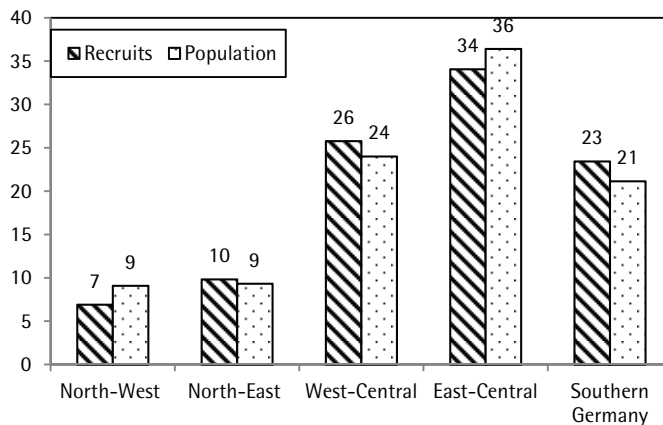


*Guidance for readers:* Eighteen percent of recruits to the NSDAP and 12% of those resigning during the period 1925 to 1932 were younger than 21, etc.

Thus the net fluctuation in NSDAP membership cannot have been so unusually large in comparison with the other Weimar parties, but unfortunately we do not have such detailed studies of their memberships.

Next we shall consider the question of where the young new members of the NSDAP came from. The BDC data bank contains a series of interesting pieces of information on this issue; for example for each member it gives the name of his local branch, his parish, place of birth and National Socialist administrative region (Gau). From this it is possible to deduce, albeit with considerable expenditure of effort in deciphering the information, the region they came from, the size of the community and the professional and religious context within which the new members lived.<sup>14</sup> Figure 5 shows that between 1925 and 1932 nearly half of the young membership came from southern and western Germany, that is the present-day Federal states of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, the Rhineland-Palatinate and North-Rhine Westphalia. The areas south of the River Main were in this context slightly overrepresented in comparison with the distribution of the population as a whole, while the areas north of the Main and west of the Rhine were distinctly underrepresented.

Fig. 5: Young recruits to the NSDAP by region (%)

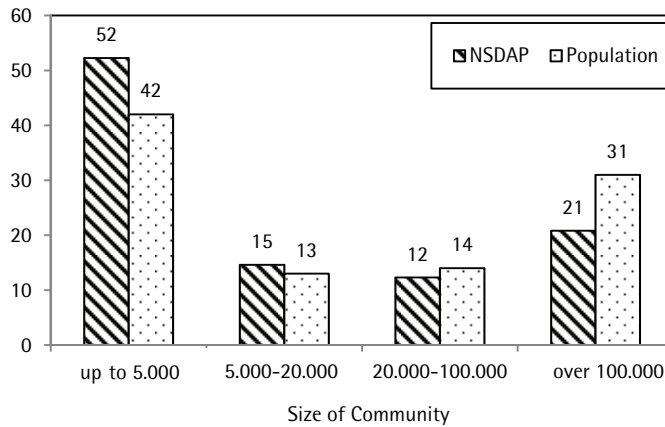


BDC sample; N = 2274. *Guidance for readers:* T BDC sample; N = 2247.

*Guidance for readers:* Ten percent of young recruits to the NSDAP during the period 1925-1932 came from the north-eastern region (territories east of the Rivers Oder and Neisse), etc.

<sup>14</sup> This would in fact require quite literally years of work, which could not be completed in a reasonable space of time by an individual scientist. Miracles have been accomplished in the geographical, occupational and sociological categorisation of membership data by collaborators attached to my professorial post who have been engaged on this project since 1989 in both Berlin and Minneapolis - in particular Torsten Schneider-Haase and Achim von Malotki.

Fig. 6: Recruits to the NSDAP by size of community (%)



BDC sample N=2247. Members aged under 21 upon joining party.

*Guidance for readers:* Twenty-one percent of young recruits to the NSDAP during the period 1925-1932 were from cities (>100,000) in which 31% of the total population lived, etc.

Furthermore more recruits entered the party than could be expected with reference to the size of the population alone in northern Germany (the Federal states of Lower Saxony, Bremen, Hamburg and Schleswig- Holstein) as well as in south-central Germany (Saxony, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt). By way of contrast, inhabitants of north-central Germany (Berlin, Brandenburg and both Mecklenburgs) were slightly underrepresented within the young membership, while in eastern Germany, that is to say the regions of the old Reich which now belong to Poland, there were no great disparities between the relative size of the population and membership of the NSDAP.

Figure 6 demonstrates that relatively speaking, most NSDAP members, that is to say over half, came from villages and smaller communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. In this type of community the NSDAP's young membership was overrepresented by about ten percentage points. In small towns with 5,000 to 20,000 inhabitants on the other hand, contrary to the expectations of many observers, the proportion of young members (about 13 percent) accorded with the proportion of the population found there. In the medium-sized towns too (communities with between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants), the NSDAP's capacity to organise was almost as great as one would expect given the proportion of the population found in such towns. Finally, in the cities, the NSDAP had a tough time of it. Only 21 percent of the new members came from cities during the period under investigation, although approximately 31 percent of the population lived in these cities. If one traces trends over a period of time, it becomes apparent that the proportion of new members from the

villages and small towns increased between 1925 and 1932, that from the middle-sized towns stayed about the same, while in the cities it slowly but steadily declined. If one turns by way of comparison to the NSDAP's electorate, discrepancies are confined to the scale of events: while the NSDAP became markedly stronger in elections in the smaller communities, there was a somewhat less pronounced rise in numbers of new members. In the cities, on the other hand, electoral and membership trends ran a parallel course.<sup>15</sup>

As we know from electoral research, by far the most important explanatory factor accounting for the NSDAP's success or lack of it in national and presidential elections between 1924 and 1933 was religious denomination. The NSDAP consistently had a much harder time of it in Catholic areas than in Protestant districts. In the July 1932 national elections it only won about half as many votes in Catholic as in predominantly Protestant areas. It could not be deduced from the data available whether the denominational factor impinged similarly upon people's willingness to join the party, since the NSDAP central membership files unfortunately do not contain any direct information on the denominational background of individual party members.<sup>16</sup> From the locations named on the membership cards, however, it is possible to ascertain at least the religious context, that is the denominational character of the place of residence and place of birth, for each individual in our sample.<sup>17</sup> We aim here to outline some findings on the denominational environment within which young recruits to the party lived. As can be seen in Figure 7, the NSDAP fared considerably worse, not just in winning electors but also new members, in the predominantly

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<sup>15</sup> With reference to voters cf. Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, Munich, 1991.

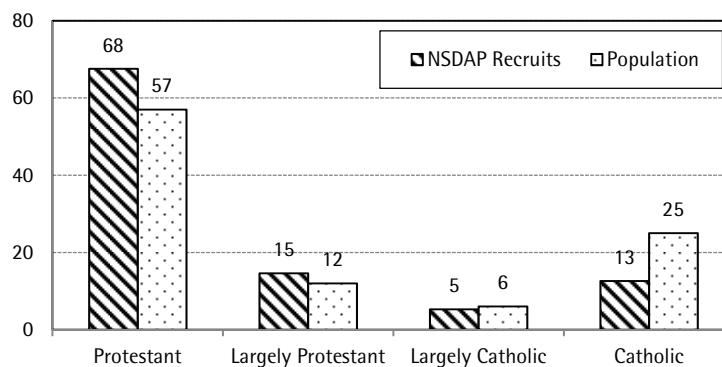
<sup>16</sup> However, a membership survey undertaken in 1939 with the help of a standardised questionnaire, of which a few local components (including Greater Berlin) remain intact, did contain a question on denominational background. An assessment of its contents demonstrates a lower proportion of Catholics in the local NSDAP than in Berlin itself. Cf. the assessment of the Greater Berlin files, also housed in the Document Center by: Jürgen W. Falter and Christa Niklas-Falter, 'Die Partei-Statistische Erhebung der NSDAP 1939. Einige Ergebnisse aus dem Gau Groß-Berlin' in *Festschrift für Ernst Nolte zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Nipperdey et al., Berlin, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of the denominational factor has been made possible by combining our BDC sample with my Weimar Republic electoral and social data which has been compiled over the last decade, at the communal level. To achieve this each individual commune in the membership sample had first to be identified and then given the relevant identification code number from the electoral and social data set. This task was not made any easier by the fact that there were an awful lot of Neustadts, a lot of Rodings and Hausens, and plenty of other names that were repeated at least once. The matching of the two data sets therefore came to resemble the labours of Sisyphus, work carried out by collaborators attached to my chair in Berlin: Bettina Husemann, Manuela Dörnenburg, and again Achim von Malotki. I would like to thank them here for their perseverance and their sorely tried patience.

Catholic communities than they did in predominantly Protestant districts.<sup>18</sup> If in 1933 about 25 percent of the population lived in communities which were more than 75 percent Catholic, these same areas provided only 13 percent of young NSDAP members. On the other hand in places which were less than 25 percent Catholic, in which roughly 57 percent of the population lived, the 68 percent of young members of the NSDAP to be found there were clearly overrepresented. And even in the mixed areas where Protestants were in the majority, there is a perceptible overrepresentation of young NSDAP members. Whether this really represents a greater willingness to join the party among young Protestants cannot, however, be decided conclusively on the basis of these data.

For a long time there was an almost cast-iron consensus among historians and social scientists that the NSDAP was largely, if not almost exclusively, a middle-class movement. As representative of this view we need only quote the well-known words of the American sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset defining fascism as 'extremism of the middle'.

Fig. 7: Recruits to the NSDAP by Denominational Environment (%)



BDC sample; N = 2247 young members.

Guidance for readers: Thirteen percent of the NSDAP's young members as against 25% of the population stemmed from predominantly Catholic communities, etc.

Even when Michael Kater, in his extensive study of the members and leadership of the NSDAP, found that according to his data one-third of the new members came from the working class in the years before 1933 – which for a

<sup>18</sup> Within the context of this enquiry this is taken to be parishes with a population which was at least 75 percent Catholic, while the predominantly Protestant parishes contained fewer than 25 percent Catholics. The two 'mixed' categories contained 25-50 percent and 50-75 percent Catholics respectively.

non-Marxist party at that time might have been regarded as a rather high percentage – he interpreted the result as a clear confirmation of the middle-class hypothesis.<sup>19</sup> Other, albeit regional, studies of the NSDAP's members have in the meantime discovered that the proportion of workers in the party might even be somewhat higher than Kater assumed. Our figures, too, point in this direction.<sup>20</sup>

Here, however, we are not concerned with the party as a whole, but with the occupations of its young members. Determining these turned out to be a huge, utterly exhausting undertaking, since our sample alone contained several thousand different job descriptions, which had first to be identified and then classified into larger, theoretically meaningful groups. This classification was executed within the parameters of several different interpretative models, including Kater's.<sup>21</sup> An initial division of the young members into workers, new middle class (salaried staff and civil servants), and old middle class (professionals and self-employed, including family helpers) revealed that about 61 percent of the young membership came from the working class, 15 percent from the new middle class and approximately 17 percent from the old middle class; 7 percent of the new members younger than 21 had no occupation (see Figure 8). In comparison to the population as a whole (age group 18-20) this would mean an overrepresentation – even if only a slight one – of workers, of the new and old middle class. This overrepresentation of workers and the middle class (although in reality given their youth we are naturally dealing primarily with family helpers rather than independents here) becomes more pronounced if we distinguish between female and male young members as in Figures 9 and 10.

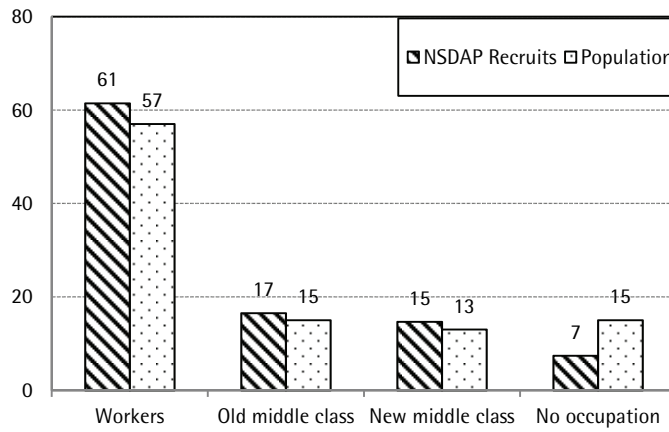
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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kater, *Nazi Party*, 236 where he states that since he has demonstrated an overrepresentation of middle-class party members it would be foolish to abandon the middle-class hypothesis.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers. Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement*, London, New York, 1991. Within our own, significantly larger, sample the working-class element (after due weighting for the period 1925- 1932) constitutes around 40 percent of all entrants (not just the young members) to the NSDAP nationally. According to certain methods of classification the figure could be slightly higher still. Whether one can characterise a party with so many working-class members as a middle-class movement is in my opinion questionable. The majority of recent electoral studies also tend to emphasise in passing the socially heterogeneous character of the NSDAP. Cf. Richard Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?*, Princeton, 1982; Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter*, Chapel Hill, 1983; See also Jürgen W. Falter, as in note 15.

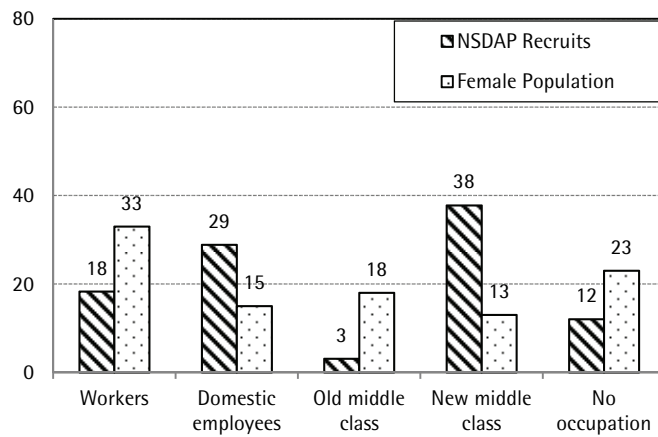
<sup>21</sup> The classification of occupations was undertaken by Torsten Schneider and Achim von Malotki over more than a thousand working hours and partially replicated for purposes of validation by Jürgen Winkler and Monika Fenzau.

**Fig. 8:** The NSDAP's Young Members According to Occupation (%), 1925-1932



BDC sample; N = 13024, of whom approximately 2247 were under 21 years old

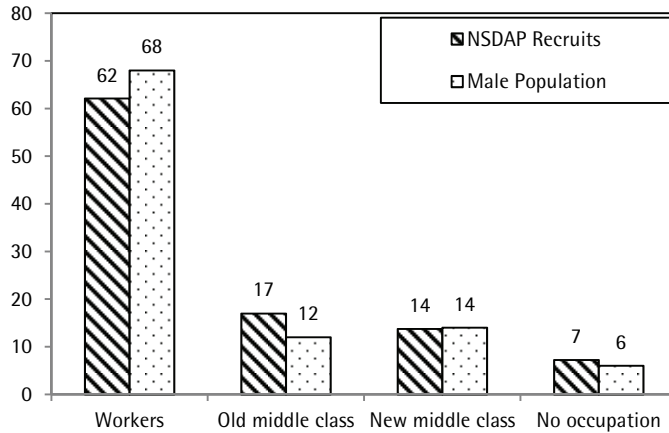
**Fig. 9:** The NSDAP's female young members by occupation (%), 1925-1932



BDC sample; N = 13024, of whom approximately 2247 were under 21 years old.



Fig. 10: The NSDAP's male young members by occupation (%), 1925-1932



BDC sample; N = 13024, of whom approximately 2247 were under 21 years old.

For, as we have seen, nearly 95 percent of the young members were men, and this age group included very few independents and of course no civil servants and consequently all the more workers. Approximately two-thirds of this age group belonged to the working class. Looking at female young members, the relationships turn out somewhat differently. They included a particularly large number of individuals who did not work in their own right as well as a relatively large number of domestic employees who were of course in those days classified for unemployment insurance purposes as workers. The overrepresentation of workers in our group is, therefore, unmistakable. Although this does not apply to the membership as a whole and to the electorate, it must not be allowed to ignore the fact that more than 60% of all the young members before the so-called seizure of power pursued a working-class occupation.

That is unusual inasmuch as the tendency to join a political party generally correlates strongly with formal education and in practically all parties – even in the classic workers’ parties – workers are therefore greatly underrepresented in comparison with their presence in the electorate. With regard to its young members at least, the NSDAP – for all the social imbalances within its rank – was neither a purely middle-class party nor even one containing a preponderance of middle-class elements. Before 1933 the so-called petty bourgeoisie, which was grouped together in the old middle class (small businessmen, retailers, master craftsmen and farmers along with their family helpers), made up little more than 15% of young party members, and even if we tally up the old and new middle classes together, members of the middle classes constitute no larger a share of young party members than did the workers. (See Table 6 on

this point which employs an occupational classification schema which accords closely with the official census and comes to essentially similar conclusions.)

**Table 6:** The Occupations of Young Members of the NSDAP, 1925-1932, Categorized According to the 1925 census

Class, Occupation	% in NSDAP	% in Population
I. Old Middle Class	16.0	14.4
11 Independents in general incl. family helpers	15.9	14
12 Tenant farmers	0.1	0.01
13 Directors, managers, sen.civ. servants	0.5	0.01
14 Home workers	-	0.2
42 Home workers' family helpers	-	0.05
II. New Middle Class	14.2	13.4
20 Salaried staff and civil servants	0.6	-
21 Technical salaried staff and civil servs	4.6	2.1
22 Foremen, supervisory staff	0.4	0.03
23 Sales staff, office staff	8.6	11.3
III. Workers	59.5	57.3
31 Workers in characteristic occupa	43.5	33.3
32 Manual workers, unskilled labourers	0.3	2.7
33 Other workers	14.0	14.0
50 Domestic personnel	1.7	7.3
IV. Others	-	-
60 No occupation or none given	7.4	4.9
V. Illegible, no information, etc.	3.1	-

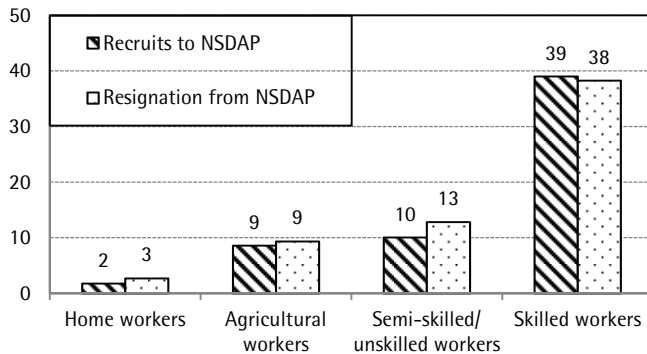
Social and occupational categories according to *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, 402, III, 452-53. Only young NSDAP members aged under 21. The figures represent the percentage averages for those joining the NSDAP for the first time in the period stated (excluding resignations and reentries) and the comparable element in the general population (18 to 20 years old). The figures preceding the occupations are from our occupational classification system. The slight variations from the values given in Figure 8 and 11 are caused by the use of slightly differing occupational categories.

*Guidance for readers:* Of young members who joined the NSDAP for the first time between 1925 and 1932, 59.5% were workers (43.5% workers in so-called characteristic occupations, most of them skilled, 14% other workers, most of them semi-skilled and unskilled workers, etc.), 16% were from the old middle class, 14.2% from the new middle class, etc.

Some analysts have tried to account for this tendency towards social heterogeneity by classifying the workers in the NSDAP as atypical representatives of their class, who lived in preponderantly middle-class environments and thought along petty-bourgeois lines. They were, it was implied, mainly home and agricultural workers and only in exceptional cases industrial workers; they were predominantly unskilled and semi-skilled, hardly ever skilled, they tended to work in the crafts sector and were not workers in industry or mining.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heinrich August Winkler, 'Extremismus der Mitte? Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 20, 1972, 175-91. Thomas Childers, *Nazi Voter*, 253ff.

Fig 11: The NSDAP's Working-Class Recruits (%), 1925-1932



BDC sample; N =2247 young members. Categories according to Mühlberger (1991).

Figure 11 provides a breakdown, limited again to young members, of the workers who joined the NSDAP between 1925 and 1932 and throws up yet another astonishing fact; over 60% of the workers who joined the NSDAP were skilled, a sixth were semi-skilled or unskilled, and only 15% were agricultural workers. From this perspective at least there is nothing discernibly atypical about the young working-class members of the NSDAP. The analysis of all young members and also working-class party members provided in Table 7 makes further differentiation possible. Approximately three-quarters of the workers aged under 21 who joined the NSDAP between 1925 and 1932 were from the secondary sector of the economy (industry and crafts), only a quarter – in almost equal proportions – from the agricultural and services sectors combined. Within the secondary economic sector employees from largely artisanal trades were by no means as dominant as might have been expected given the atypical worker theory. Instead, among the young members of the NSDAP, there were many workers from the branches of industry dominated by big business (mining, iron and steel concerns, chemicals, paper and printing, machine and vehicle building, etc.) and the mixed industrial/crafts economic groups (metal goods, textiles, leather, etc.).<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, workers from the above groups were if anything underrepresented in the NSDAP, while workers from the more craft-related areas (food processing, building and allied trades, etc.) were on average overrepresented in the party, even though there were exceptions such as the clothing industry. As Table 7 demonstrates, this is also true of some mixed industrial/crafts trades and in this context the party's low rate of success among textile workers is very evident. Employees from communal welfare

<sup>23</sup> Here I am using the categories proposed by Childers, *Nazi Voter*, 273-76.

services do not seem to have been very strongly represented before 1933 among young members of the NSDAP. Later studies will have to find out whether this pattern is repeated among members older than 21. The greater number of individual cases contained in the overall sample will also make it possible to make even finer distinctions when analysing the material.

**Table 7: The NSDAP's Young Membership by Economic Sector**

	All Young Members	Workers in the NSDAP	Workers in the Population
<b>Agrarian Sector</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>21,5</b>
Agriculture; gardening and livestock	19.1	14.8	21.2
Forestry and fishing	0.2	0.2	0.4
<b>Industry and Crafts</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>75.8</b>	<b>68.5</b>
Mining	0.2	0.3	3.5
Quarrying	0.7	1.1	3.8
Iron and metal production	0.1	0.1	2.3
Machinery; producer goods, vehicles	3.4	5.4	6.6
Chemical industry	-	-	1.1
Paper and printing industry	1.0	1.4	3.0
Rubber and asbestos industry	-	-	0.3
Water, gas, electricity	-	-	0.4
Building and allied trades	6.1	9.0	7.9
Woodworking, woodcarving	5.0	8.0	6.1
Musical instruments/toys	0.1	0.1	0.5
Food processing	9.7	15.1	6.1
Clothing	3.3	5.3	9.7
Metal goods production	8.3	13.3	6.7
Electronics, precision mechanics, optical industry	1.5	1.8	3.1
Textile industry	0.6	0.7	6.5
Leather and linoleum industry	1.4	2.1	0.9
Remaining industry and crafts (all categories combined)	8.1	12.0	-
<b>Tertiary Economic Sector</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.9</b>
Trade – general	15.8	0.9	2.7
Insurance	0.1	-	0.01
Transport	1.4	1.8	1.8
Hotels and catering	1.3	1.3	2.0

<i>Table 7 continued...</i>			
Administration and army	0,4	-	0.03
Churches and education	0.1	-	0.1
Legal profession	0.4	-	0.02
Artistic occupations	0.8	-	0.1
Health care	3.3	2.4	1.6
Domestic personnel	2.0	2.9	1.5
No Occupation or None Given	6.0	-	1.1

Young members who joined the NSDAP for the first time 1925-1932. Classifications and values for workers aged 18 to 20 according to: Statistik des Deutschen Reiches, 402, III, 431,458ff.

With regard to its under 21-year-old membership, the NSDAP once again refuses to conform to many preconceived notions, current social theories and the ad-hoc hypotheses that have been formulated to rescue older explanatory models. Future research will have to identify the modifications to the received picture of the NSDAP made necessary by our new research material, which has been evaluated here for the first time. The more recent electoral and membership studies, however, depict an NSDAP characterised by greater heterogeneity and complexity than has long since been assumed by a social history usually too keen on differentiation. The newer picture urgently requires more adequate theories on the mass basis and preconditions for success of the NSDAP, hitherto the most inhuman of all totalitarian parties.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This line is adopted with particular emphasis by Richard Hamilton in his forthcoming book *The Social Misconstruction of Reality. Studies in Historical Sociology*, chaps. 5 and 6 where he presents a more strongly sociological explanatory model for National Socialist electoral successes based on that developed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld et al. In his forthcoming book, *The Logic of Evil*, William Brustein offers an alternative explanatory model for National Socialist success in attracting voters and members which leans more heavily on economic, rational choice theory.