

*Elections, Mass Politics, and  
Social Change in  
Modern Germany*

NEW PERSPECTIVES

*Edited by*  
LARRY EUGENE JONES  
*and*  
JAMES RETALLACK

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE  
*Washington, D.C.*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© German Historical Institute, 1992

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1992

First paperback edition 2002

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Elections, mass politics, and social change in modern Germany / edited  
by Larry Eugene Jones and James Retallack.

p. cm. – (Publications of the German Historical Institute,  
Washington, D.C.)

Papers from a meeting of the German History Society, held in  
Toronto in Apr. 1990.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 41846 1 – 0 521 42912 9 (pbk.)

1. Political participation – Germany – History – Congresses.
2. Elections – Germany – History – Congresses. 3. Political culture –  
Germany – History – Congresses. I. Jones, Larry Eugene.
- II. Retallack, James N. III. German History Society (Great Britain)
- IV. Series: Publications of the German Historical Institute.

JN3838.E44 1992

323'.42'0943–dc20 91-33086 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41846 1 hardback

ISBN 0 521 42912 9 paperback

# Contents

Preface	page ix
Contributors	xi

Introduction: Political Mobilization and Collective Identities in Modern German History <i>Larry Eugene Jones and James Retallack</i>	1
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

## PART ONE ELECTORAL POLITICS IN AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

1. Interpreting Wilhelmine Elections: National Issues, Fairness Issues, and Electoral Mobilization <i>Brett Fairbairn</i>	17
2. Antisocialism and Electoral Politics in Regional Perspective: The Kingdom of Saxony <i>James Retallack</i>	49
3. The Liberal Power Monopoly in the Cities of Imperial Germany <i>Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann</i>	93
4. Reichstag Elections in the Kaiserreich: The Prospects for Electoral Research in the Interdisciplinary Context <i>Peter Steinbach</i>	119

## PART TWO GENDER, IDENTITY, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

5. Women, Gender, and the Limits of Political History in the Age of "Mass" Politics <i>Eve Rosenhaft</i>	149
6. Gender and the Culture of Work: Ideology and Identity in the World Behind the Mill Gate, 1890–1914 <i>Kathleen Canning</i>	175

7. Serving the Volk, Saving the Nation: Women in the Youth Movement and the Public Sphere in Weimar Germany *Elizabeth Harvey* 201
8. Modernization, Emancipation, Mobilization: Nazi Society Reconsidered *Jill Stephenson* 223

PART THREE  
LOCAL DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL  
CULTURE

9. Democracy or Reaction? The Political Implications of Localist Ideas in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany *Celia Applegate* 247
10. Communist Music in the Streets: Politics and Perceptions in Berlin at the End of the Weimar Republic *Richard Bodek* 267
11. Weimar Populism and National Socialism in Local Perspective *Peter Fritzsche* 287
12. Political Mobilization and Associational Life: Some Thoughts on the National Socialist German Workers' Club (e.V.) *Roger Chickering* 307

PART FOUR  
THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:  
CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES

13. 1918 and All That: Reassessing the Periodization of Recent German History *Stuart T. Robson* 331
14. Generational Conflict and the Problem of Political Mobilization in the Weimar Republic *Larry Eugene Jones* 347
15. The Social Bases of Political Cleavages in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933 *Jürgen W. Falter* 371
16. The Formation and Dissolution of a German National Electorate: From Kaiserreich to Third Reich *Richard Bessel* 399

- Index 419

*Introduction:*  
*Political Mobilization and Collective*  
*Identities in Modern German History*

LARRY EUGENE JONES AND JAMES RETALLACK

One hundred years ago a Prussian diplomat named Count Carl von Dönhoff reported from Dresden on a Saxon election campaign. His observations reflected a deep concern felt about the rise of mass politics in Germany. “Those who support the parties of order,” he wrote, “are apathetic and weary of elections.” The Reichstag in Berlin was attracting the public’s exclusive attention, he noted, whereas “interest politics” were intruding at the local and regional levels of German political life. “From this,” he concluded, “arises the fear that men who represent only a narrow circle of interests and who have no understanding for the issues of state that bear on the general welfare of the people will enter the [Saxon] Landtag.”<sup>1</sup>

For many Germans who lived through the historic events of 1989–90, the electoral “game” seemed as tiresome and unrewarding as it had to Count von Dönhoff a hundred years earlier. In March 1990 voters in the German Democratic Republic gave a resounding “yes” to unification, though apparently to little else. They appeared to do so again in the all-German elections of December 1990. Yet over this period the process of political mobilization became the subject of intense and contentious debate. Although it is true that apathy was hardly a prominent characteristic of either election in 1990, Germans still reacted as negatively to the same features of mass politics identified a century earlier: the political mobilization of special interests draped in the mantle of national consensus; the sudden intrusion of highly organized party machines into previously uncontested political terrain; the preference for immediate economic solutions over a broader reform agenda; the ascendance of a “managerial” style over

1. Count Carl von Dönhoff, Prussian envoy to the Kingdom of Saxony, to Chancellor Leo von Caprivi, report no. 122, 24 Sept. 1891, from the files of the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry, Bonn, I A Sachsen (Königreich), Nr. 60, Bd. 3.

true statesmanship; and the fracturing of a national vision between the hammer of social inequality and the anvil of regional particularism. Hence, even in the midst of postwar Germany's greatest achievement, the Germans remain "reluctant modernizers." Their accommodation to what one prominent historian has called "politics in a new key" appears to be as equivocal and problematic as ever.<sup>2</sup>

None of these events could have been forecast when preparations began for the first North American conference of the German History Society.<sup>3</sup> In early 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of the two German states were events that few, if any, observers could conceive, much less anticipate. However, by the time thirty-five specialists in modern German history had gathered at the University of Toronto in April 1990 for a conference on "Elections, Mass Politics, and Social Change in Modern Germany," all the participants were aware that the themes under discussion had both historical and contemporary relevance. In the eyes of its organizers, the purpose of the conference was threefold. First, it would bring together and encourage dialogue among those who represented different approaches and subdisciplines within the historical guild – for example, social historians and political historians. Second, it would foster an exchange of ideas and findings from scholars in Canada, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Third, it would bring younger scholars – some of whom had just entered the historical profession – together with more established scholars in the field. To achieve these ends, all papers were written and circulated before the conference, leaving ample time for discussion in each of the six sessions. Those sessions were introduced by commentaries on the papers and questions for further discussion prepared by David Blackburn, Jane Caplan, Thomas Childers, Geoff Eley, Robert Moeller, and Peter Steinbach.<sup>4</sup>

Virtually all of the twenty-one papers discussed in April 1990 were written exclusively for the conference. Only fourteen of these papers, plus two others solicited after the conference, could be published here because of limitations of space, but each of the sixteen was revised in the light of the Toronto discussions and now represents the

2. The phrase was coined by Carl Schorske in his *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980), 126–80.

3. On the conference itself, see the detailed report by Elizabeth Harvey in *German History* 8 (1990): 325–33.

4. The editors wish to thank these colleagues for their special contribution; some of the points they raised at the time have been incorporated in the following remarks.

author's latest thoughts on the themes of elections, mass politics, and social change.<sup>5</sup> In selecting the papers for publication, the editors sought to provide a fruitful mix of viewpoints by choosing (1) papers representing important theoretical contributions to an understanding of the themes around which the conference was organized; (2) papers offering new and promising methodological departures, particularly with respect to quantification; and (3) papers based on new and important empirical research. The editors meanwhile discovered a logical symmetry that argued for the organization of the papers into four parts. Although the sequence of papers provides a broad chronological progression through the volume from the *Kaiserreich* to the Third Reich, it is immediately apparent that most papers transcend at least one political caesura (i.e., 1914, 1918, 1933) and all of them address more than one theme identified in the title of the volume. The following comments are intended to illustrate this and, at the same time, to bring the papers into closer proximity with one another.

The four essays in Part One demonstrate the various ways by which the success or failure of political mobilization in an authoritarian regime may be measured. Although each contribution recognizes the importance of Bismarck's departure from office in 1890 as a watershed in German electoral history, each also reaches back to the 1870s and 1880s to identify early shocks to the traditional "politics of notables," or *Honoratiorenpolitik*, in Imperial Germany. The first and last essays do this by raising important methodological questions. In his essay on the Reichstag elections of 1898 and 1903, Brett Fairbairn argues that although elections in the *Kaiserreich* were about power, they also involved representation and issues. Through examples drawn from these two critical elections, Fairbairn shows that on the political right "fragmentation" went hand in hand with "coalition building," often with only minimal intervention from the government. The parties of the left, on the other hand, were better able to adapt to "politics in a new key." "Fairness issues" such as taxes, tariffs, and franchise laws provided them with stirring exam-

5. The other conference papers were David Crew, "*Alltagsgeschichte: A New Social History 'From Below'?*"; Robert Hopwood, "Casting a Local Polity: Kulmbach, 1880-1900"; Rudy Koshar, "Against the 'Frightful Leveler': Historic Environments and German Political Culture, 1890-1914"; Adelheid von Saldern, "The Old *Mittelstand* 1890-1939. How 'Backward' Were the Artisans?"; Jürgen Schmäddeke, "Reichstag Elections in Wilhelmine Germany: 1890-1912"; Irmgard Steinisch, "Labor Relations in Imperial and Weimar Germany: The Case of the Steel Industry in the Ruhr Valley"; and Zdenek Zofka, "The Nazi Appeal in the Countryside (Bavaria)."

ples of the inequality and discrimination that were built into the social and political fabric of Imperial Germany, enabling them to hammer away at the privileged position of elites in one election after another. Over time, concludes Fairbairn, these parties accomplished far more in terms of changing the political culture of the *Kaiserreich* than historians have been willing to admit.

James Retallack takes up Fairbairn's point about the need for more research on regional elections by examining electoral politics in the Kingdom of Saxony. He makes use of unpublished diplomatic reports written by the Prussian envoy in Dresden to chronicle the way party leaders, government ministers, and grass-roots agitators helped determine the outcome of Landtag and Reichstag elections. In some special cases, these reports permit Retallack to focus on individual constituency races. Here he discovers a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of antisocialist unity that merits examination at the national level as well. Retallack also discusses anti-Semitism and the challenge it posed to the *Honoratiorenpolitik* of Saxony's traditional elites. Lastly, he documents the gradual emergence of a consensus among the nonsocialist parties that the Saxon Landtag franchise should be revised in order to prevent a socialist takeover of the legislature. Although that revision was apparently improvised and passed into law with unseemly haste in 1896, Retallack argues that it can be properly understood only in the context of a long-term mobilization of the Saxon electorate.

Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann shifts the focus to what he calls the "third tier" of German government: the cities. Here he demonstrates that German liberalism's alleged subordination to entrenched elites in the mid-nineteenth century stands in sharp contrast to the formidable power base that liberals were able to establish in thousands of town halls across the country. Bolstered by discriminatory voting regulations favoring the propertied and educated *Bürgertum*, the liberals were able to compensate for their loss of influence in the Reichstag, Prussian Landtag, and other state parliaments by retaining firm control of municipal and local politics. Yet liberal influence in municipal councils was already being challenged before 1900, not only by the Social Democrats but also by conservatives in Protestant Germany and the Catholic Center Party elsewhere. By 1914 the liberals had become so committed to preserving entrenched privilege and influence locally that they no longer recognized the extent to which this contradicted the ideals they had traditionally espoused.



Peter Steinbach's contribution offers a *tour d'horizon* of recent research in the field of electoral history and raises provocative new questions for future work. Steinbach notes that the integration of different methodologies and historical perspectives promises the greatest opportunity to fuse a quantitative analysis of election returns with a broader understanding of the role of electoral politics in German history. Such an understanding, he argues, in part requires an appreciation of the calculations that motivated Bismarck to risk a "revolution from above" through the introduction of the universal Reichstag franchise. It is also necessary to consider the larger social and economic developments in late-nineteenth-century Germany that conspired to frustrate Bismarck's political plans, particularly at the local and regional levels. For when one looks to the actual effects of the democratic franchise, argues Steinbach, the question arises: "Did it remain accessible to political manipulation, or did it instead develop an independence and momentum of its own as a consequence of autonomous political developments and aspirations?" To address this issue and to explore the evolution of Germany's electoral system under Bismarck's successors, Steinbach concludes that the historian must continue to search for the best mix of methodologies and interpretative models in order to avoid the limitations in any "purism" of methods.

The four papers in Part Two represent both a broad chronological sweep and a diversity of themes. Taken together they expand the repertoire of approaches available for studying how gender determined opportunities for political participation. They also remind us that class as a category is enormously complex, that women's participation in mass politics has reflected contradictory perceptions, and that the relationship of women to the political culture and the community demands much more historical investigation. The first and last essays in particular, by Eve Rosenhaft and Jill Stephenson, present fundamentally different approaches to an understanding of gender and its role in the political process.

Eve Rosenhaft begins provocatively by suggesting a new perspective on German women as "living, breathing" historical agents who are also part of a system of organizing social perception. These two roles are, of course, closely related; empirical bodies cannot be considered as entities that exist independently of, or outside, the body politic. Yet this is what much of German historical writing has tried to do, especially when it is concerned with electoral politics and

party systems. The alternative, Rosenhaft suggests, is to expand our definition of how politics works and where it takes place, so that it includes familial, sexual, and other social relations that have heretofore been dismissed as nonpolitical. The traditional definitions of politics and political history have, as Rosenhaft argues, given privileged status to men and their forms of political interaction at the expense of women. To correct this limitation, Rosenhaft argues that one should not think of politics as something that is confined to male political parties or even to the exclusively male *Stammtisch* in the local pub. Instead, politics can be found on boarding house staircases and other “social places” populated principally by women. It was here, after all, that female consciousness in the broadest sense was generated – or not generated – and here that the networks of everyday life intersected with a larger political world.

Kathleen Canning considers the social history of the German working class, with special reference to the question of class formation in the textile industry. She argues that class consciousness in the *Kaiserreich* arose in ways that from the very outset were undercut and rendered problematic by gender. Solidarities were established at the same time that institutions and practices of exclusion became solidified. Appeals for unity stood in sharp contrast to the way in which political exclusivity was ordered along lines of gender. And collective identities were elaborated while contemporaries refused to acknowledge persisting dualisms. Moreover, just as Jill Stephenson and Eve Rosenhaft show for the later period, Canning demonstrates that in the nineteenth century those dualisms coded mass politics in gender-specific terms: They associated men with skilled work, with rationality, and with political control, and women with the home, with emotion, and with subordination. Because all this was inscribed in the language of class, Canning concludes that the culture of work – not to mention the larger processes of political mobilization – cannot properly be understood until historians have embraced the contradictory meanings of production, skill, politics, and class.

Elizabeth Harvey examines the development of political consciousness on the part of middle-class women as a result of their involvement in the *bündisch* movement. In exploring how women were politicized by their experiences in this movement, Harvey introduces the question of generational conflict and shows how it reinforced the sense of alienation that many young women felt toward the Weimar Republic. Because this attitude obliged these women to

rethink their roles in the public sphere, Harvey seeks to determine the extent to which women in the *bündisch* movement were motivated by considerations of gender or of generation. Harvey's conclusion is that in the final years of the Weimar Republic "generational identity interacted with gender identity to shape the ideas that young women held about their political and public role." Still, Harvey cautions, a generational approach to the study of young women in the Weimar Republic is valid "only if it focuses on the way the depression polarized and fragmented any solidarity that might have existed among young women and produced responses that were diverse and not necessarily expressed in terms of generational consciousness."

Jill Stephenson examines the extent to which the history of German women can be placed within the context of a general theory of social, economic, and political mobilization. Modernization, she argues, has had a Janus face for German women. Going beyond the mere assertion that modernization has affected men and women differently, Stephenson illustrates how the "primacy of economics" and the "primacy of biology" have interacted with each other to determine women's status and their "freedom to act as responsible individuals in modern industrial society." By examining the way in which the Nazi regime sought to define women's economic and biological roles, she addresses herself to the long-standing debate about the extent to which the Nazis are to be regarded as modernizers or the opponents of modernization. Stephenson's conclusion is that although the Nazis made pragmatic use of economic modernization to employ women in jobs traditionally reserved for men, they were at best "partial modernizers" committed to an essentially patriarchal view of women's role in society and "determined to prevent the development of individual autonomy and a democratic polity." Thus, if modernization makes emancipation possible, it does not make it inevitable.

The four essays in Part Three underscore the importance of retaining a local perspective in a historical analysis of Germany's political culture. The first essay by Celia Applegate analyzes the political implications of localist ideas in the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. Applegate regards the persistence of such ideas as a symptom of Germany's larger failure to integrate the separate spheres of German public life into a viable national political culture. In this respect, Applegate focuses on the intellectual legitimacy accorded to localist traditions by thinkers of such disparate political pedigrees as W. H.

Riehl, Eduard Bernstein, and Hugo Preuss. She also traces Preuss's efforts, as the architect of the Weimar Constitution, to revitalize the institutions of local and communal self-administration in an attempt to involve the individual more firmly in the fabric of national political life. But these efforts, Applegate concludes, were ultimately "of little moment" and had "neither the time nor the opportunity" in the crisis-ridden years of the Weimar Republic "to integrate themselves into the structure of everyday life."

Whereas Applegate's essay approaches the local dimension of Germany's political culture from a theoretical and essentially national perspective, Richard Bodek's study of Communist music offers a refreshing excursion into politics as a dimension of everyday life in the Berlin working class during the last years of the Weimar Republic. Bodek structures his analysis of the role that music played in the life of the German worker around a single incident: a demonstration in September 1930 against the dismissal of a Communist school teacher. Bodek not only examines the texts of the music the demonstrators sang and analyzes them as expressions of working-class hostility to the existing social and political order, but he also places these texts in the broader context of increased working-class militance in the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Music served the German left as an instrument of political mobilization that activists used to forge a greater degree of working-class solidarity in the face of the "ugly reality" in which the German worker was forced to live. But the net effect of all this, as Bodek shows, was not so much to unite the working class behind the banner of the German Communist Party as to exacerbate the political divisions separating Germany's working and middle classes.

The essays by Applegate and Bodek represent two poles from which the local dimension of Germany's political culture may be considered. In his essay on Weimar populism and National Socialism, Peter Fritzsche tries to bridge the gap between the essentially national perspective Applegate takes in her work on localist ideas and the detailed attention Bodek devotes to the everyday life of the Berlin working class. The focal point of Fritzsche's study is the city of Oldenburg. Through a careful analysis of local newspapers and other primary sources, Fritzsche discovers a remarkable resurgence of political activism on the part of the German burghers that in many ways anticipated the Nazi electoral success in the last years of the Weimar Republic. What happened in Oldenburg, therefore, was not unique

but part of a much broader pattern of political protest and self-mobilization directed not only against the hated Weimar system but against established social and political elites as well. To stress the antielitist and antiestablishment character of this phenomenon, Fritzsche borrows the word “populism” from the vocabulary of American historiography and suggests that the populist insurrections of the German *Bürgertum* throughout the 1920s were not dissimilar to what happened in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century.

Whereas Fritzsche’s essay draws attention to similarities and continuities between the rituals of bourgeois political mobilization in the 1920s and those employed by the Nazis in their bid for electoral support, the fourth essay in this part analyzes the success with which the Nazi Party was able to accommodate itself to the forms of associational life in the Weimar Republic. In a provocative essay on Nazi political mobilization and German associational life, Roger Chickering suggests that the invasive images historians have traditionally used to explain the Nazi Party’s march to power obscure the extent to which this story might be more effectively “framed in metaphors of familiarity and growth from within.” Chickering demonstrates that despite Hitler’s tirades against the *Vereinsmeierei* of the German bourgeoisie, the Nazi Party “grew up within the culture of German club-life.” The NSDAP’s spectacular electoral successes in the early 1930s, therefore, were “conceivable only in the broader context of its gestation within institutions and rituals indigenous to German associational life.” The novelty of Chickering’s argument is that it draws attention to the way in which the Nazi Party was able to occupy – rather than invade – the associational milieu out of which it had originally emerged. Thus, the subtle irony of the essay’s subtitle: “National Socialist German Workers’ Club (e. V.).”

The essays in Part Four shift the focus of the volume from the local back to the national perspective. At the same time, they address themselves either directly or indirectly to the question of continuity in modern German history. In an essay with the tantalizing title “1918 and All That,” Stuart Robson questions the conventional periodization of modern German history and suggests that, to the founders of the Weimar Republic, 1918 appeared much less a caesura than subsequent generations of German historians have been prone to think. As Robson argues, the establishment of the Weimar Republic represented the “culmination of an authentic tradition of reform

reaching back at least as far as 1848.” Moreover, the decisive rupture had occurred with the passage of the peace resolution in the summer of 1917 and the emergence of a parliamentary majority consisting of the Progressives, Center, and Majority Socialists. The majority first tried to reform the old imperial order through the chancellorship of Prince Max von Baden and then, following the collapse of the empire, founded the Weimar Republic. All of this leads Robson to suggest that it might be more fruitful to think of the entire period from 1916 to 1923 as a “German Time of Troubles” that began with the mobilization for total war and ended with the stabilization of the Weimar Republic on terms that were essentially similar to those that existed in other Western European democracies. It would be a mistake, therefore, to dismiss the Weimar Republic either as a historical aberration that was somehow thrust upon the German people in the wake of military defeat or as an improvisation destined to be tossed back on the “trash heap of history” once it became expedient to do so in the early 1930s.

If Robson suggests that one should not overemphasize the role of continuity in explaining the collapse of the Weimar Republic, Larry Jones turns his attention to one area in which there seemed to be a great degree of continuity from the Wilhelmine to the Weimar periods, namely, the political apathy of the younger generation. Proceeding from the premise that generational cleavages were “every bit as important in shaping the general course of political development in the Weimar Republic as those of class, gender, and confession,” Jones examines the efforts and eventual failure of the various nonsocialist parties in the Weimar Republic to mobilize the support of the so-called younger generation. Not only did this help “set the stage for the meteoric rise of National Socialism at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s,” but the political alienation of the younger generation in the Weimar Republic represented the continuation, if not the culmination, of patterns of political behavior that had first manifested themselves in the last years of the Second Empire. The failure of Germany’s republican parties to overcome the generational cleavages that Weimar had inherited from the Second Empire undermined the stability of the Weimar party system and contributed in no small measure to the electoral decline of all of Germany’s more established bourgeois parties.

In his essay on the social bases of political cleavages in the Weimar Republic, Jürgen Falter underscores the extent to which the electoral

behavior of the voting public in the Weimar Republic was shaped by socially and confessionally determined cleavages whose origins clearly antedated the political collapse of 1918. Falter proceeds from the premise that Weimar's political culture was characterized by cleavages between three political subcultures, or *Teilkulturen*, which he identifies as socialist, Catholic, and bourgeois-Protestant. Through the use of multivariate ecological regression analysis, Falter demonstrates that whereas the first two of these were relatively stable, the bourgeois-Protestant subculture was characterized by frequent and pronounced shifts in affiliation from one party to another within the subculture itself. Moreover, the bourgeois-Protestant subculture was also affected by greater net losses to the other subcultures than either the socialist or Catholic subcultures. If one includes the NSDAP – as Falter does for the purposes of analysis – within the bourgeois-Protestant subculture, then changes within the subculture were much more frequent than moves from it to either the socialist or Catholic subcultures. If, on the other hand, one excludes the NSDAP from the bourgeois-Protestant subculture, then it becomes clear that the two liberal parties – the German Democratic Party and the German People's Party – were almost totally decimated and the right-wing German National People's Party somewhat less so by defections to the NSDAP. Although the NSDAP also benefited from less significant defections from the other two subcultures, it was the instability of the bourgeois-Protestant subculture that accounted for the party's meteoric rise in the last years of the Weimar Republic.

Richard Bessel's essay on the formation and dissolution of a German national electorate takes a closer look at the reasons for the instability of Weimar voter allegiances. What Bessel has in mind when he uses the term "German national electorate," however, is by no means synonymous with Falter's concept of the bourgeois-Protestant subculture. Nor does it refer to the right-wing German National People's Party. By national electorate, Bessel means "an electorate which . . . was prepared to accept the value and legitimacy of voting and, on the whole, to vote in a manner constructive to the existing political system." One of the great paradoxes of modern German history is that "although the German electorate took shape within a political system that lent it very little power, it dissolved once it could vote for a real parliament." In the Weimar Republic, the tacit affirmation of the existing political system that had characterized voting in the Wilhelmine Empire gave way to a situation where

“electioneering was largely decoupled from the politics of government, priorities, and policymaking.” Bessel examines four areas in which the explanation for the collapse of a national electorate may be found: the general course of German economic development during the Weimar Republic, the changed relationship between parties and government after 1918, the broadening of the franchise in 1919, and the introduction of proportional representation to replace the system of single-member constituencies that had existed in Germany until 1918. The net effect of these developments was to increase the voter’s sense of alienation from the existing political system, to fracture Germany’s national electorate along lines of “sectional interest-group politics,” and to encourage a politics of irresponsibility and demagoguery on the part of those who sought the favor of the masses.

In sum, these essays offer a broad array of conjectural hypotheses, innovative methodologies, provocative theories, and, in some cases, firm conclusions. Collectively, the contributors explore and explode historical paradigms with language that is intentionally familiar, inventive, and allusive all at once. They define and redefine class and periodization. They rethink genres, they juxtapose social upheaval and gender discrimination, and they explore the political manifestations of generational conflict. Some contributors speak of mass politics in almost seismic terms: They use words like “irruption,” “intrusion,” “fissures,” “fracturing,” “spectacle,” and “frustrated expectations.” Others remind us of the more familiar world of everyday life. Some point to the interdependence of local, regional, and national identities, whereas others study Germans who sought to celebrate both diversity and unity, both authority and authenticity. Some describe the processes of political mobilization and the increasing importance of national issues in elections; others concentrate on the splintering and dissolution of the electorate. Some emphasize the familiar turning points in German history and the discontinuities of social and political change associated with them; others argue for a fundamentally new periodization and emphasize the many continuities stretching through the entire period under debate. Some explore the complex ways in which one can aggregate and disaggregate voters statistically. Others pose the simple question: What were “elections” really all about?

Taken together, these essays reveal that historically Germans have searched for political consensus and social stability in many different