

# Shifting Norms and Political Demand

## Denazification in postwar Germany

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### Abstract

Can states and societies shift social norms? In a major denazification program, millions of Germans were questioned about their political past by courts. This paper documents how denazification shaped the emerging political landscape in postwar Germany. I leverage sharp variation in denazification across Allied occupation zones, across districts, and within districts. I find that broader denazification reduced the demand for nationalist policies and changed social norms. Differences are driven by mass rather than elite cases and political consequences are observed absent major punishment. The results indicate that the breadth of transitional justice can be more important than its severity in coordinating norms on a new political equilibrium.

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# 1 Introduction

Coordination is central to institutional change. A major coordination problem arises during transitions to democracy, where societies coordinate on a new political equilibrium. This is consequential for development: successful transitions are associated with increases in economic growth, reductions in political violence, and improved representation ([Acemoglu et al. 2019](#); [Hegre et al. 2001](#)). Yet transitions are moments of fundamental political uncertainty. In the absence of common knowledge about mutual commitment to democracy, the persistence of authoritarian norms may shape democratic consolidation. A key challenge, therefore, is to delimit the range of legitimate political strategies. This raises the question whether states and societies can shift social norms in democratic transitions.

States and societies in transition require mechanisms to signal commitment to democratic norms and delegitimize past authoritarian norms. Here, a key instrument is to address supporters of the former regime. Should new democracies “forgive and forget, or prosecute and punish?” ([Huntington 1993](#)) Punishment might provoke backlash ([Linz and Stepan 1978](#); [O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 2013](#); [Vinjamuri and Snyder 2004](#); [Elster 2004](#)). Yet ‘doing nothing’ risks that the regime’s influence and ideology may persist ([Nalepa 2022](#); [Teitel 2000](#); [Sikkink 2011](#)). Indeed, growing evidence suggests that citizens’ socialization and role during authoritarianism often continue to shape political demand ([Neundorff and Pop-Eleches 2020](#); [Simpser, Slater, and Wittenberg 2018](#)). Thus, beyond a regime’s leadership, the wider public is not only a key audience but also target of transitional justice. Despite this critical tension, studies about the effectiveness of mass transitional justice remain limited.

This paper presents new evidence on the political consequences of denazification, the largest transitional justice program in history and a major policy designed to shift social norms. I document how broader denazification lowered the demand for nationalist policies and was a leading factor in shaping the political landscape in postwar Germany. Denazification involved the systematic examination of the political past of broad sections of the population. I measure the extent of denazification using the number of denazification court cases per voting-age population. Using three identification strategies and comparing neighboring municipalities across Allied occupation zones, across court districts, and within districts, I consistently find that denazification reduced voters’ demand for nationalist policies

and norms of collective memory. Suggestive evidence indicates that these effects are unlikely to be driven by variation in elite denazification or internment.

To study denazification, I gathered evidence on over 850,000 denazification cases in the state of Baden-Württemberg, where archival data and history offer a unique setting for causal identification. Baden-Württemberg is particularly suited to estimate the effect of transitional justice as one can use three sources of exogenous variation in the extent of denazification.

First, the state was bisected by an Allied occupation zone border which was drawn for purely logistical reasons and gave rise to discontinuous variation in denazification. The extent of denazification was higher in the US occupation zone compared to neighboring municipalities occupied by France. Second, denazification varied within the US occupation zone, where district-level courts implemented the policy decentrally. I leverage idiosyncratic differences in court personnel that gave rise to sharp differences in denazification across neighboring municipalities along court district boundaries. Third, I use within-district variation induced by the distance of a municipality to the district court, which increased courts' cost of collecting and verifying information. In all three cases, I document sharp differences in the extent of denazification.

To study the response to denazification, I focus on federal elections at the municipality level. Following the war, fringe groups were largely excluded from participating in the first federal election in the US and French occupation zones ([Rogers 1995](#)); yet, demand for popular forms of nationalism persisted. Among the major parties in early postwar politics, the Free Democratic Party [FDP] provided the strongest nationalist wing and platform against denazification. Surveys over the 1950s and 1960s consistently found that out of all major parties “anti-Semitic and pro-National Socialist positions were most widespread among FDP voters” ([Buchna 2020](#)).<sup>1</sup>

All three empirical strategies yield results with statistically indistinguishable magnitudes that exhibit the same dynamics over time. I consistently find that denazification strongly reduced the demand for the FDP in the first election after the war. First, I find that voting patterns were similar on either side of the subsequent occupation zone border before the

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<sup>1</sup>Yet by the 1970s, the party underwent remarkable change, entered a social-liberal coalition and this eroded its nationalist wing. For a discussion on policies, politicians, and voters of the early postwar FDP, see section [2.3](#).

end of WWII and differed afterward, using regression discontinuity analyses.<sup>2</sup> Second, the results hold when I compare neighboring municipalities along court district borders, which had similar voting patterns before the war and did not differ economically after the war, using regression discontinuity analyses. Third, I observe similar dynamics when comparing neighboring municipalities within court districts, using the distance to district courts as an instrumental variable for denazification. The effect is substantial. A one percent increase in denazification corresponds to a 0.7-1 percent decrease in the vote share for the FDP. This holds in all three specifications, which explore different and plausibly exogenous variation.

Tracking the effect over time, I show that support for nationalist policies moves as parties evolve. I find that in every election until the 1970s, the vote share of the FDP was significantly reduced. Yet by the 1970s, the party underwent tremendous change, entered a social-liberal coalition and this eroded its nationalist wing. Coinciding with the FDP's change away from a nationalist platform, differences across borders and within districts become muted. The timing of the shift is suggestive. Any confounder would need to induce a change that varies over time and coincides with the change in the FDP's political platform. Suggestive evidence indicates that the latent residual demand can be reactivated by new parties. Higher denazification predicts a lower vote share for the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Concurrently, I observe a positive shift in turnout for supranational elections.

Where the demand for nationalist policies was attenuated, social norms changed in ways consistent with denazification establishing a taboo. Across comparisons, I find evidence that the variation in denazification is associated with norms of collective remembering. Using information on the first and last names of over 20,000 victims of Nazi persecution in Baden-Württemberg, I find that municipalities with more denazification are more likely to have street names associated with Holocaust victims but less likely to have street names commemorating militarists and former supporters of National Socialism. I find corroborating evidence when analyzing the presence of Holocaust memorials.

To clarify the mechanism, I test whether the results are mass- or elite-driven. To do so, I

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<sup>2</sup>Yet occupation zone policies differed along multiple dimensions, which potentially could have influenced politics through other channels. For example, the French did not take in any refugees and dismantled German firms at higher rates. This had important consequences for population and wage growth in the following postwar years and support for immigration in the long-run (Schumann 2014; Ciccone and Nimczik 2022; Lang and Schneider 2023). Thus, it is important to use variation within occupation zones and hold other potential differences across Allied occupation zones constant.

use evidence on the professions and ranks of individuals in over 370,000 denazification cases in the US occupation zone. I find no difference in the extent of denazification of former elites in top administrative, police, (para-) military, and party positions across court districts or as the distance to the court increases within a district. All variation in the extent of denazification is driven by non-elites and in particular teachers – a group previously indoctrinated and central to the dissemination of local norms. Using novel micro-level evidence on internment in the US occupation zone, I also find no differences in a prior purge and internment.

These findings highlight implications of the design of transitional justice following autocratic rule. While most remained unpunished ([Frei 2002](#); [Niethammer 1982](#)) and many careers continued ([Frei 2014](#); [Creuzberger and Geppert 2018](#)), denazification may have served as a costly signal underscoring the credibility of the transition away from authoritarianism. Newspapers reported on ongoing cases and name lists were published on municipal bulletin boards, allowing communities to observe the extent and distribution of former Nazis. This led to the isolation of active supporters and provided an incentive for millions of people under denazification to distance themselves from National Socialism ([Herbert 2019](#); [Leßau 2020](#)). At the same time, the (ex-post) absence of punishment might have lowered the cost of adapting personal narratives in ways consistent with the new social norm ([Leßau 2020](#); [Frei 2002](#)). Denazification, thus, did not root out the bad apples. But denazification was indicative of an equilibrium in which nationalist policies increasingly became taboo.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it builds on extensive research on democratization that focuses on structural explanations including economic development, culture, strategic bargaining over the distribution of economic and political resources, and resulting commitment problems ([Lipset 1959](#); [Moore 1966](#); [Almond and Verba 1963](#); [Dahl 1971](#); [Rustow 1970](#); [O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986](#); [Przeworski 1991](#); [Linz and Stepan 1996](#); [Therborn 1977](#); [Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992](#); [Acemoglu and Robinson 2006](#); [Aidt and Franck 2015](#); [Acemoglu et al. 2025](#)). A more recent strand considers whether the formal architecture of rules – constitutions and electoral systems – can be designed to shape democratization ([Lijphart 1999](#); [Persson and Tabellini 2003](#); [Weingast 1997](#); [North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009](#)). I add to this literature by analyzing the design of policies that shape transitions through social norms.

As such, a second contribution is to study whether policies can persistently shift social

norms. Social norms are central to political behavior (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Dellavigna et al. 2016; Perez-Truglia and Cruces 2017), and a large literature documents their remarkable persistence, including the survival of authoritarian norms in democracies (Voigtländer and Voth 2012; Simpser, Slater, and Wittenberg 2018; Neundorff and Pop-Eleches 2020). While recent work shows that norms can respond to aggregate signals such as elections and symbolic policies (Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2020a; Dewan and Wolton 2022), we know less about whether deliberate policy interventions can shift norms at scale. I study a canonical case in which past political norms do not persistently shape politics but move upon intervention.

Third, the paper provides new evidence on the effects of mass transitional justice. A key result is that transitional justice aimed at the public may serve as an investment in changing long-standing norms after authoritarianism. This finding contrasts with prior research concentrated on the consequences of elite-centered transitional justice (Linz and Stepan 1978; Huntington 1993; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 2013; Vinjamuri and Snyder 2004). More generally, while positive accounts emphasize the discrediting of former regimes through transitional justice (Nalepa 2010; Teitel 2000; Sikkink 2011; Dancy et al. 2019; Horne 2017), it is unclear whether the policy itself or the feasibility thereof, that causes differences. If transitional justice is possible, it is likely implemented alongside a set of related policies consequential for democratic outcomes (Dancy et al. 2019). Or, perhaps more important, underlying differences shape both policies and democracy. Thus, to estimate the impact of transitional justice on democracy, we need a source of exogenous variation and be able to observe specific transitional justice mechanisms. I address these issues by leveraging three quasi-natural experiments and individual-level data on court cases and purges in the context of the largest transitional justice programs in history.

Finally, these results frame debates surrounding denazification. Prior work has considered denazification a failure. The vast majority of cases remained unpunished (Frei 2002; Niethammer 1982) and careers of 'functional elites' persisted into the Federal Republic (Frei 2014; Görtemaker and Safferling 2016; Creuzberger and Geppert 2018). In consequence, historians turned to the question of how Germany turned into a mature democracy despite the failure of denazification (Wolfrum 2006). Notwithstanding denazification's failure to address historical injustices, more recent work suggests that denazification established a

taboo (Herbert 2019; Leßau 2020). My analysis is consistent with a view that denazification’s long-term significance lay less in the number of convictions and more in the experiences millions were forced to go through. This notion aligns with quantitative studies that examine state-level variation and show that more cases without punishment led to lower support for one-party systems and anti-Semitism (Capoccia and Pop-Eleches 2020; Mohr, Voigtländer, and Voth 2019). I add to these studies and develop quantitative evidence across different types of transitional justice; isolate variation in the extent of denazification; leverage three natural experiments; and observe political demand and norms across time and space.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Denazification

Denazification was one of the largest transitional justice program in history (Pendas 2020). From 1945 to 1949, courts processed around 14 million questionnaires and 4 million cases, examining the political past of broad sections of the population. While the Allied Control Council set forth a common denazification directive, which aimed to govern procedures throughout Germany, the implementation across Allied occupation zones and local courts diverged in practice.<sup>3</sup>

Denazification varied across Allied occupation zones. Despite having “enacted similar denazification laws”<sup>4</sup> in their occupation zones, the starkest quantitative difference emerged between the US and French occupation zones (Vollnhals 1991). While the US initiated a broad-based examination of the population, the French targeted a narrower subset (Fürstenau 1969; Vollnhals 1991; Henke 2010). In the US occupation zone, the entire adult population (13.5 million) was subjected to a questionnaire about their Nazi past (*Frage- und Meldebogen*).<sup>5</sup> In the French occupation zone, the questionnaire was distributed

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<sup>3</sup>See Allied Control Authority, Control Council Directive No. 38. *The Arrest and Punishment of War Criminals, Nazis, and Militarists and the Internment, Control, and Surveillance of Potentially Dangerous Germans*, 12 October 1946.

<sup>4</sup>See Office of Military Government. Civil Administration Division. *Denazification, cumulative review*. Report, April 1948.

<sup>5</sup>Completion rates were high as the questionnaire served as a basis for decisions about prosecution, employment restrictions, and access to food rations (Olick 2005, p. 125). While it is natural to question the veracity of the responses, the information provided in the questionnaires was at times subject to verification, e.g. through the Berlin Document Center which held the Nazi party registry. Misinformation was sanctioned.

more narrowly targeting individuals who held positions of power; only around 669,000 questionnaires were completed. A second difference was “much closer supervision and control of the German tribunals by the French Military Government.”<sup>6</sup> While each decision was subject to the centralized approval of French authorities, the procedure in the US occupation zone was entirely decentralized.<sup>7</sup>

Denazification also varied within the US occupation zone. In the US occupation zone, each local district court [*Spruchkammer*] was staffed with a public prosecutor who commanded a team of “evaluators” and “investigators.” Evaluators examined individuals’ responses to a questionnaire about their political past and initially sorted individuals into two coarse categories: those who were likely incriminated, and those who were not. While the law establishing the legal basis for denazification specified instructions for evaluators,<sup>8</sup> incomplete provisions and vague formulations left room for subjective judgment.

Idiosyncratic differences across evaluators mattered in the US occupation zone. For example, evaluators received a list of over a thousand broad ranks, offices, and suspect positions.<sup>9</sup> Yet the law specified that “the ranking and organization list is only an explanatory aid” and a “schematic representation.” Indeed, the fragmented organizational structure of the late Nazi regime left evaluators confronted with a plethora of agencies and positions (Mommensen 1976; Broszat 1969). Thus, the law specified that “external criteria, such as membership of the NSDAP, any of its formations or other organizations, shall not be decisive by themselves alone for the degree of responsibility under this Law. They may be taken as important evidence as to a person’s conduct as a whole, but may be overcome, wholly or partly, by evidence to the contrary. Conversely, non-membership by itself is not decisive to absolve one of responsibility.” Further, evaluators were tasked with

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Thus, the falsification of questionnaires was rare. In North Baden, for example, out of more than one million questionnaires which had been checked by 1947, the public prosecutor charged 3581 and sentenced 335 cases for falsifying evidence (Borgstedt 2001, pp. 56, 61; Ettle (1985, p. 101) finds a similar figure in Bavaria).

<sup>6</sup>See Office of Military Government. Civil Administration Division. *Denazification, cumulative review*. Report, April 1948.

<sup>7</sup>Appendix E provides further detail on differences in denazification across occupation zones.

<sup>8</sup>Law on the Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism of March 5, 1946: with implementing regulations, forms, the instruction for the evaluators of the registration sheets and the ranking list in multicolor reproduction.

<sup>9</sup>The Law of Liberation further categorized these positions according to their presumed level of incrimination into categories: I, II, or b; where category I represented the highest incrimination category. In section 5, I use this information in combination with data on the professions of individuals under denazification, to understand which parts of the population drove the underlying differences.



detecting patterns that required context-specific industry and geographic knowledge: such as “exceptionally fast promotions,” “unjustified increases in income,” or whether places of residence lay “outside the borders drawn by the Treaty of Versailles.” Lastly, denazification courts were understaffed and operated under binding time constraints (Niethammer 1982). In the face of the complexity of the task, idiosyncratic effort and subjective judgment of evaluators became salient. Note, that evaluators had to substantiate incriminating claims. Thus, idiosyncratic variation in effort across courts is likely to have mostly affected the probability of false negatives, i.e. not investigating incriminated individuals.

If the examination revealed suspicious facts or a formal charge, investigations were initiated and information was cross-validated across offices (Leßau 2020, pp. 273f). Investigators collected additional incriminating information about individuals. Finally, judges categorized chargeable cases into one out of five categories, which then decided whether there was a sanction. Punitive measures included fines, employment restrictions, retraction of voting rights, and asset seizures.

Prior work has centered around the failures of denazification. The policy failed to remove Nazis but disproportionately focused on ‘lesser’ perpetrators (Frei 2002), most of whom received only minor punishment or were exonerated in a series of amnesties. Thus, denazification turned into a far-reaching rehabilitation practice that produced millions of ‘passive’ unsanctioned followers (Niethammer 1982). Incriminated persons were thus integrated into the postwar society. A large literature has documented the remarkable persistence of careers from the Third Reich into the postwar period (Frei 2014; Conze et al. 2010; Görtemaker and Safferling 2016; Creuzberger and Geppert 2018).

At the same time, no other measure to confront the past has affected as many Germans as denazification.<sup>10</sup> Recent historical contributions suggest that by forcing millions to engage with their past it established a taboo of identifying with the NS-regime (Herbert 2019; Leßau 2020). Similarly, Dack (2016) argues that this process amounted to a massive denunciation of the Nazi regime that contributed to its discrediting after the war. The trials took place in a public “space that reflected the new order of power in postwar Germany” (Leßau 2020). The outcome was published on a bulletin board in the municipality of residence and newspapers

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<sup>10</sup>In contrast, other measures such as the legal prosecution of war criminals and reeducation efforts only addressed small parts of the population and often only indirectly (Leßau 2020).

reported on ongoing cases. While some initially feared that the trials were “more likely to provoke a nationalist backlash than induce contrition” (Konrad Adenauer in 1946, cited in [Judit 2005](#), p. 55), the shift in norms proved so effective that high-ranking Nazis soon came to fear social ostracism, even by their own families.

## 2.2 Borders and Occupation Zones

A key driver of the variation in denazification across Germany were differences across Allied occupation zones. In general, the borders of occupation zones reflected pre-existing historical divisions. However, in contrast to other zones, the demarcation line between the French and US zones in the South was neither planned nor followed existing administrative borders.<sup>11</sup>

The occupation zone border in Baden-Württemberg was not planned before the end of the war. When the Allies started negotiations on how to split up Germany in the Spring of 1943, France, still subject to German occupation, was absent from these plans. By the end of 1944, however, the situation had changed. France was liberated; run by a provisional government; and determined to resume its place among the Allies ([Ziemke 1975](#), p. 129). At the conference of Jalta in 1945, the three Allies conceded to de Gaulle’s demands of granting France a seat in the Allied Control Council and agreed to establish a fourth, French occupation zone.

The border bisected two former states and did not correspond to historical borders; it was simply drawn along the highway *A8* between Karlsruhe and Ulm ([Willis 1962](#), p. 96). All districts that contained the highway were kept by the US, while those districts south of the highway were given to the French.<sup>12</sup> The partition of South-West Germany was a result of logistical considerations by the US military government that outweighed a proclaimed aim to preserve historical borders: “The boundary between the French and American zones was to be drawn to leave in the American zone the main highway, or Autobahn, through Ulm-Stuttgart-Karlsruhe, as well as the trunk railroad. Administrative and traditional divisions were disregarded completely. The sole concern was to assure access under American control

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<sup>11</sup>For more details on the deliberations and historical context of the border-drawing, see Appendix [D.2](#).

<sup>12</sup>The French insisted on consolidated control for the entire state of Baden. It was not until July 1945 “before the French accepted the zone as offered, with a provision for a review of the boundaries later” ([Ziemke 1975](#), p. 307). This review never took place.

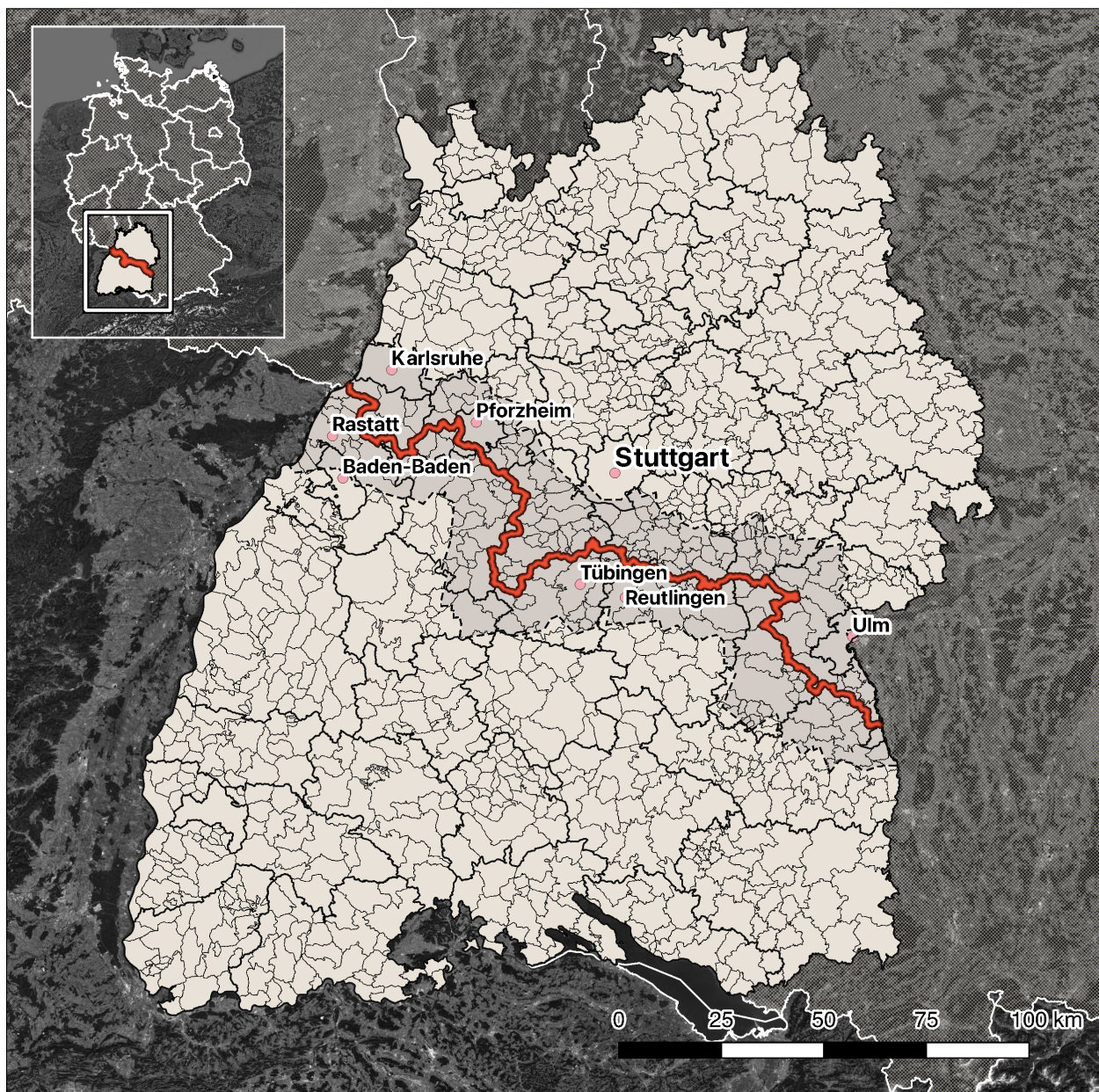


Figure 1: Map of Occupation Zone Border

This figure maps the study area and indicates the occupation zone border (in red), contemporary municipality boundaries (in grey), bold black lines indicate district boundaries, and the outer contours reflect the state boundary of Baden-Württemberg.

to the Middle Rhine region and the seaports” (Mosely 1950, p. 600).<sup>13</sup> Importantly, after the occupation ended in 1952, the border ceased to exist. Municipalities, formerly separated by the border, now were part of the same state.

<sup>13</sup>It is natural to wonder how the construction of the highway might have altered politics prior to WWII. In 4.1, I discuss potential issues and provide evidence that voting patterns and economic characteristics were similar on either side of the occupation zone border.



## 2.3 Nationalism in Postwar Politics

While nationalism was to play a rapidly diminishing part in the politics of postwar Germany, it did not disappear directly after the war. Instead, there were still “millions of resentful and nationalist Germans” (Hobsbawm 1992, p. 144). But who was to represent them?<sup>14</sup>

Among the major parties of the early postwar political landscape, the Free Democratic Party [FDP] had the strongest nationalist wing and platform. Over the first twenty years after the war, “the FDP stood up for the interests of Nazi potentates” (Frei 2002, p. 38), “attracted returning soldiers, expellees, and members of the Hitler Youth generation” (Lösche and Walter 1996, pp. 27), and some FDP party branches even “developed into catchment organisations for former National Socialists” (Herbert 2019, p. 213).

The FDP was critical of denazification and styled itself as “the voice of those robbed of their ‘honor’” (Frei 2002, p. 304). In 1949, the FDP campaigned on the promise to end the political “incapacitation” and legal “deprivation” of those under denazification and demanded a general amnesty (Kiani 2013, pp. 227ff). In 1951, the FDP threatened to veto the ratification of the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community if internees, including war criminals, were not released (Leuschner 2005, p. 11). The treaty was consequential because it would initiate the integration process which eventually led to the creation of the European Union. In 1965, 90% of FDP MPs voted against the extension of the statute of limitations for murders perpetrated during the Third Reich, which would have made the persecution of Nazi killings impossible. In contrast, no Social Democratic parliamentarian and only 10% of CDU MPs voted against the extension (see Table 1). Voting against extending the statute of limitations for murder was strongly and positively predicted by former NSDAP membership (Charnysh and Riaz 2022).

One group among the FDP’s nationalist wing even “aimed to go beyond simply attempting to rehabilitate the participants in Nazi crimes [...]. Its objective was to develop

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<sup>14</sup>During the first years after the war, Western military governments excluded radically right-wing parties and parties with National Socialist affiliations through a system of licensing political parties. Thus, a basic political structure of four major parties emerged across Western Germany: a communist party, a social-democratic party, a conservative Christian party, and the liberals (Rogers 1995, p. 18, p. 132). Communist and social democratic opposition to the Nazi regime rendered them unlikely candidates for support. Similarly and despite being nominally non-denominational, the political Catholicism of the conservative Christian Democrats made them somewhat less attractive for former National Socialist voters. Religious confession was the single largest determinant of electoral support for the Nazi party and Catholics were far less likely to vote for the NSDAP than their Protestant counterpart (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018).

Table 1: Roll-Call Votes on Denazification by Party

|                                                                 | (1)   | (2)   | (3)   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| <i>Vote on Extension of Statutory Limitation on Murder 1965</i> | FDP   | SPD   | CDU   |
| For Extension                                                   | 0.045 | 0.873 | 0.765 |
| Against Extension                                               | 0.894 | 0.000 | 0.105 |
| Abstained                                                       | 0.045 | 0.093 | 0.070 |
| Observations                                                    | 66    | 204   | 200   |

This table presents information on roll-call votes on the extension of the statutory limitation on murder in 1965 by party and vote. The first row displays the share of federal MPs per party who voted for the extension. The second and third rows show the share of MPs per party who voted against and abstained from the vote, respectively. The roll call vote data is taken from [Sieberer et al. \(2020\)](#).

a collective movement of right-wing nationalists at the heart of the FDP, so as to change the balance of political power in the Republic” ([Herbert 2019](#)). The attempt culminated in the high-profile arrest of key members of the conspiring group in 1953 ([Buchna 2010](#)).

From attempts to recreate a far-right movement in the 1950s to the formalization of a “National-Liberal Action” in 1970, links between the FDP and the old guard were pervasive. The party became an important refuge for the political rehabilitation of former Nazis and over 50% of its federal MPs had been Nazi party members ([Buchna 2010; 2020](#)).<sup>15</sup>

These patterns were mirrored in the party’s voter base.<sup>16</sup> Surveys from the 1950s and 1960s consistently found that “anti-Semitic and pro-National Socialist positions were most widespread among FDP voters” ([Buchna 2020](#)). A survey conducted by the US military government [OMGUS] in December 1952, found that the FDP was “the party of Nazi-sympathizers” ([Leuschner 2005](#), p. 12). While only 4 percent of survey respondents would have welcomed a resurgence of the Third Reich, a quarter of FDP voters supported the idea of a second Nazi regime. The question of whether ex-Nazis should be given the same opportunities in politics and business was answered positively by 36 percent of the total sample population, but 80 percent agreed among FDP supporters ([Leuschner 2005](#), p. 12).

<sup>15</sup>For accounts on the Nazi past of FDP deputies in state assemblies see: [Klausch \(2008\)](#) for Lower Saxony, [Klepsch \(2009\)](#) for North-Rhine Westphalia, [Klausch \(2011\)](#) for Hesse, [Klausch \(2013\)](#) and [Tändler \(2016\)](#) for Saarland, [Tändler \(2014\)](#) for Bremen, and [Danker and Lehman-Himmel \(2014\)](#) for Schleswig-Holstein.

<sup>16</sup>Appendix Table D2 shows that across all major postwar parties before 1970, the correlation between the Nazi party vote share in 1933 was highest among the FDP in my sample. This correlation is even substantially higher than the coefficients of far-right fringe parties including the German Party (DP) and the German Reich Party (DRP); only the vote share for the neo-nazi party National Democratic Party (NPD) exhibits a similar correlation.

In a 1956 survey, 56 percent of FDP voters shared the opinion that “Hitler would have been one of the greatest German statesmen without the war” (Bergmann and Erb 1991).<sup>17</sup>

Over the 1970s the FDP moved from a national-conservative toward a liberal platform. In 1969, the FDP entered into a coalition with the Social Democrats, and this eroded its nationalist wing and outlook. With the party’s right-wing substantially weakened and the liberal current of the FDP in command, the party repositioned itself to the center. What once “had been the program core of much of the FDP in the early Federal Republic, clearly had fallen outside the liberal spectrum by the early 1970s.”<sup>18</sup> (Buchna 2010)

### 3 Data

I gather evidence on denazification, elections, and social norms at the municipal level.

**Denazification.** I collect data on over 850,000 denazification cases from the State Archives of Baden-Württemberg. The data covers North-Baden, Württemberg-Baden, and Württemberg-Hohenzollern.<sup>19</sup> Observations correspond to cases that have been processed by German denazification courts and record the municipality of residence, the birthplace, and, for a subset of cases, the profession and rank during the Third Reich.<sup>20</sup> First, I measure the extent of denazification by the number of denazification cases per voting-age population at the municipal level. Second, to study differences in denazification by profession and identify elites, I collect information on the professions of 370,000 individuals located in the US occupation zone and classify cases based on their predicted level of incrimination by sector and rank. Using Boberach (2012), I link over 1500 official titles and ranks in the state administration, judiciary, military, Nazi party, and its branches. Further, I code individual professions by sector using the “Classification of Occupations” [*Klassifikation der*

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<sup>17</sup>In comparison, support for the statement reached 36 percent among CDU voters.

<sup>18</sup>Note other instances where postwar liberal parties shaped political landscapes with nationalist agendas including the FPÖ in Austria and the LDP in Japan. Both Austria and Japan lost the war. Yet, in contrast to Germany, transitional justice remained limited and liberal parties continue to influence politics along nationalist lines.

<sup>19</sup>The data corresponds to the following archival inventories. Württemberg-Hohenzollern: *Landesarchiv BW, StAS Wü 13 T 2*; Württemberg-Baden: *Landesarchiv BW, StAL EL 902*; North-Baden: *Landesarchiv BW, GLAK 465*. Note that this individual-level data on denazification is still subject to an archival restriction period.

<sup>20</sup>Note, that I only observe whether the court processed a case, not their outcome. Further, cases could, but did not necessarily, lead to an oral hearing in court.

*Berufe*] issued by the Federal Agency for Work in 1970. Lastly, I use the classification system described in the 1946 “Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism” to indicate the predicted level of incrimination. The law served as a legal basis and provided guidance for local denazification courts.

***Elections.*** To study the demand for nationalist policies, I obtained data on all federal elections from 1949 to 2021 at the municipal level through the Statistical Office of Baden-Württemberg. As administrative district and municipality borders underwent territorial reorganization in the 1970s, the data were harmonized by the statistical office and follows contemporary municipality borders.

***Internees.*** I use evidence on all internees (over 20000) in the parts of Baden-Württemberg under US occupation to study a prior purge of former political, (para-)military, and administrative elites across municipalities.<sup>21</sup> The purge was conducted by the Allied forces and based on the “Arrest Categories Handbook” issued by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force [SHAEF]. I measure the extent of the purge by the number of internees per voting-age population at the municipal level based on the internees’ place of residence.

***Collective Memory.*** I gather corroborating evidence on local-level indicators of collective memory: including Holocaust memorials, and street names associated with militarists and victims of Nazi persecution. I construct a municipal-level indicator of “Memorials for the Victims of Nazi Persecution” as documented in [Puvogel, Stankowski, and Endlich \(1995\)](#). Further, I use information on the names of over 20,000 victims of Nazi persecution in Baden-Württemberg from the minority census in 1939 and document the renaming of street names in their memory. Lastly, I document the survival of militaristic street names associated with the Nazi regime from two sources: (i) data of all known street names associated with the Nazi regime that have been renamed from 1945 to 2010 in Westfalia ([Weidner 2013](#)), and (ii) data on contemporary controversial street names associated with National Socialism in Northrhine-Westfalia ([West Deutscher Rundfunk 2021](#)).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The data corresponds to the archival inventory *Landesarchiv BW, StAL EL 904/2*.

<sup>22</sup>I exclude all street names that served as toponyms or functional descriptors, focus on persons that occur more than once, and drop all names commemorating individuals who passed away before 1914. This date was the cut-off criterium specified by the Allied Control Council Directive No. 30 in May 1946, which instructed

**Controls.** I collect economic and political data before and after the war. Pre-war, I use municipal-level data on economic and electoral outcomes in the Weimar Republic from 1920 to 1933 and Nazi party membership rate estimates for municipalities above 5000 inhabitants. Historical election data from the Weimar Republic comes from [Falter and Hänisch \(1990\)](#). Results are available for the elections in 1928, 1930, and 1933; yet not available for the elections in 1932, during which the Reich Statistical Office (*Statistisches Reichsamt*) reported election results only for the districts (*Kreise*). Further, I use locality-weighted information on NSDAP membership rates. The data is based on samples drawn from the two original NSDAP member files archived at the Berlin Document Center by teams of researchers in Berlin, Mainz ([Falter and Kater 1993](#)), and Minneapolis ([Brustein 1998](#)).<sup>23</sup> Postwar, I digitized the 1950 census published by the Statistical Office of Baden-Württemberg and obtained data on population, religion, refugees, and employment. I assembled archival data on firms that were subject to industrial dismantlement.<sup>24</sup> Finally, I obtained data on contemporary population, the share of unemployment, foreigners, and religion from the Statistical Office of Baden Württemberg.

## 4 Research Design and Results

Transitional justice is subject to strategic considerations and political economy constraints ([Elster 2004](#); [Nalepa 2010](#); [Vinjamuri and Snyder 2015](#)). For example, transitional justice can be a function of the local supply of former regime supporters. Yet the strength of former supporters may constrain transitional justice efforts. Or, transitional justice may be implemented where it is feasible and often alongside a set of related policies consequential for

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local administrators and elected councils with the removal of militaristic street names. This resulted in a compilation of 101 notable persons. Of which present in my street name sample are: Paul von Hindenburg (president), Manfred von Richthofen (fighter pilot), Max Immelmann (fighter pilot), Oswald Boelcke (fighter pilot), Erwin Rommel (military general), Otto Weddigen (military commander), August von Mackensen (military general), Werner Mölders (fighter pilot), Maximilian von Spee (military commander), Carl Peters (colonial administrator), Hermann Löns (author), Agnes Miegel (author), Walter Flex (author), Ferdinand Sauerbruch (surgeon), Wernher von Braun (aerospace engineer), and Carl Diem (sports functionary).

<sup>23</sup>It is important to note, however, that the sample size and sampling strategy were designed to achieve representativity for individuals and not municipalities.

<sup>24</sup>The data corresponds to the following archival inventories. The official dismantling list for the US occupation zone: *Landesarchiv BW, StAL EA 1-016 195*; the French occupation zone: *Landesarchiv BW, StAL EA 6-006 130*; and dismantled firms that were not on the official list according to German Ministry of Finances in 1959: *Landesarchiv BW, StAL EA 6-006 220*



democratic outcomes. These issues pose challenges for causal inference. To isolate the causal effect of denazification on political behavior, I employ three empirical strategies leveraging different sources of plausibly exogenous variation in the extent of denazification.

First, I focus on neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border which was drawn for purely logistical reasons and gave rise to discontinuous variation in the extent of denazification. Using a spatial regression discontinuity design, I analyze differences between neighboring municipalities across the US-French occupation zone border. Second, I study variation in denazification within the US occupation zone that arose from the decentralized administration of district courts. Here I study the implications of idiosyncratic administrative differences that led to sharp variation in denazification across neighboring municipalities along court district borders. Following [Rozenas, Schutte, and Zhukov \(2017\)](#), I use a regression discontinuity design and compare neighboring municipalities across high and low-denazification court districts and focus on the variation in denazification that is driven by district-level differences, controlling for district times district comparison fixed-effects. Third, I use the fact that the physical distance to district courts increased the cost of collecting information and thus generated variation in denazification within court districts. Using an instrumental variable strategy, I examine variation in denazification induced by the distance to the district court and control for a set of potential confounders including court district fixed effects. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the approach for the regression discontinuity designs and instrumental variable strategy. The next subsections provide greater detail on the identification strategies and present the results of the main analyses, which yield similar estimates that exhibit the same dynamics over time across the three empirical approaches.

## 4.1 Discontinuity across Occupation Zones

This study begins by exploiting the discontinuous exposure to denazification, comparing neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. This boundary forms a spatial discontinuity and regressions take the general form of:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta \text{High}_i + f(X_i) + \sum_{i=1}^n \text{seg}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $y_i$  is the outcome in municipality  $i$ , e.g. the vote share of the respective parties in

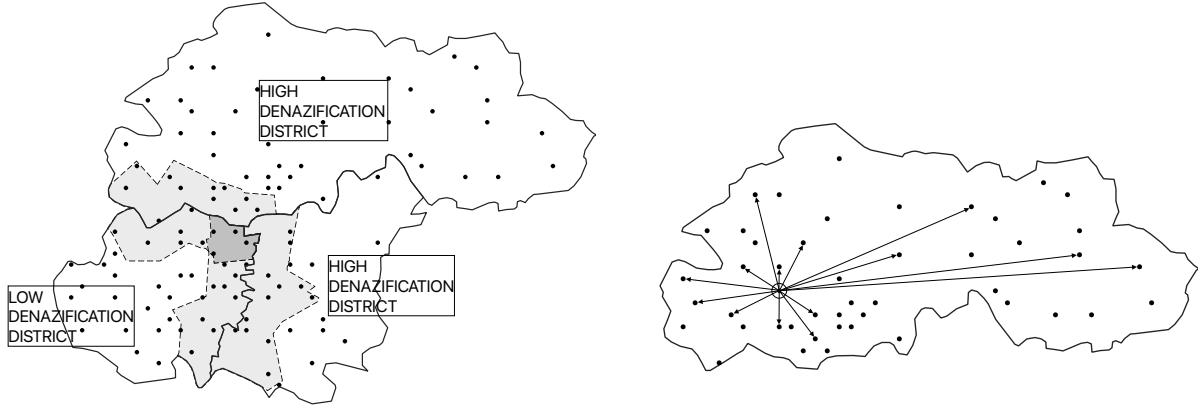


Figure 2: Comparisons across District Borders (left) and within Districts (right)

This figure illustrates the local variation that enters the comparisons across and within court districts. Municipalities are indicated by dots, district boundaries by solid black lines, and the bandwidth by a dashed gray line. In the left panel, I compare neighboring municipalities across court districts with contrasting denazification shares and include district $\times$ district comparison fixed-effects (symmetric segments across borders shaded in light gray). Note that some districts will have municipalities used in multiple comparisons (shaded in dark gray). In the right panel, arrows indicate the distance of the district court to a given municipality which serves as the instrumental variable.

the federal elections. The function  $f(X_i)$  is a local linear approximation using distance to the border as the forcing variable. The variable  $High_i$  is an indicator for whether municipality  $i$  is located within a high denazification municipality. In this first comparison, all border-adjacent municipalities in the US occupation zone serve as treatment units. The coefficient  $\beta$  captures the effect of having been subject to higher denazification on political behavior. In addition, the segment fixed effects,  $seg_i$ , ensure that the specification compares municipalities across the same segment of the boundary. Finally,  $\epsilon_i$  is an error term.

Figure 3 plots the number of denazification cases as a share of the voting-age population and documents a sharp difference across occupation zones. Denazification was 8 pp. higher in the US occupation zone compared to neighboring municipalities occupied by France.

Coinciding with this sharp variation across the border, I observe large and persistent electoral differences. Figure 3 shows that neighboring municipalities located in the US occupation zone were on average 5-6 percentage points less likely to vote for the FDP until the 1970s, after which the effect attenuates. As documented in section 2.3, the postwar FDP had a strong nationalist outlook and this was reflected in party platform, politicians, and voter base. Yet over the 1970s, the FDP underwent tremendous change, entered into a coalition with the social democrats and this eroded their nationalist wing and outlook. I do

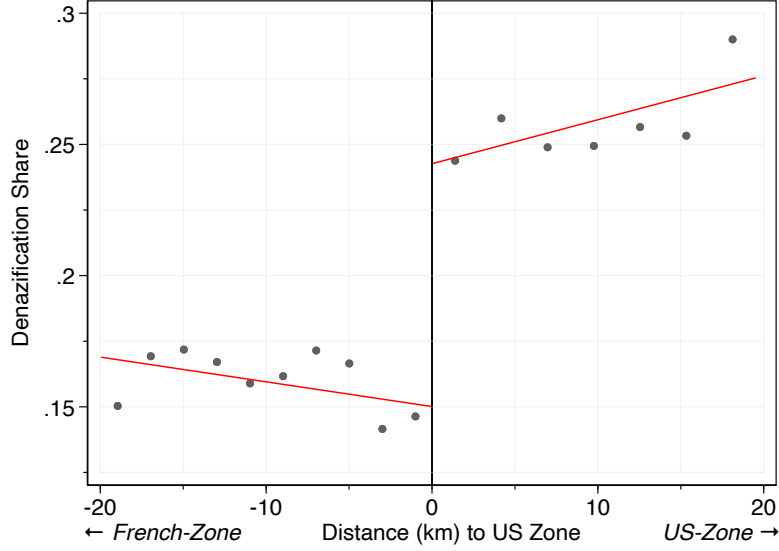


Figure 3: Discontinuity across Occupation Zones

This graph plots the number of denazification court cases as a share of the voting-age population between neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border.

not observe significant differences for any other major party across the border.

Results are calculated using a bandwidth fixed at the MSE-optimal bandwidth in 1949 to ensure comparability over time. In Appendix C, I document robustness to a range of bandwidth, polynomial, and variance estimator choices, including MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates following Calonico et al. (2017).

The identifying assumption is that all relevant factors besides treatment are continuous around the cutoff. If other relevant factors vary sharply at the border, a discontinuity in voting behavior cannot be interpreted causally. Formally, this requirement can be captured as the expected outcome  $E[y_i(High)|X_i = x]$  being continuous around the border. Otherwise, the estimate runs the risk of producing false positives as municipalities with higher denazification might have had a lower propensity to vote for nationalistic parties anyway. This assumption cannot be validated yet is defensible.

To assess the plausibility of this assumption, I examine differences across the border estimating regression discontinuities. Panel A. of Table 2 summarizes the economic and political differences of neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border before and after the Second World War.

The first section of Table 2 provides evidence that economic and political outcomes prior to the occupation were largely continuous across the boundary. The statistical analysis

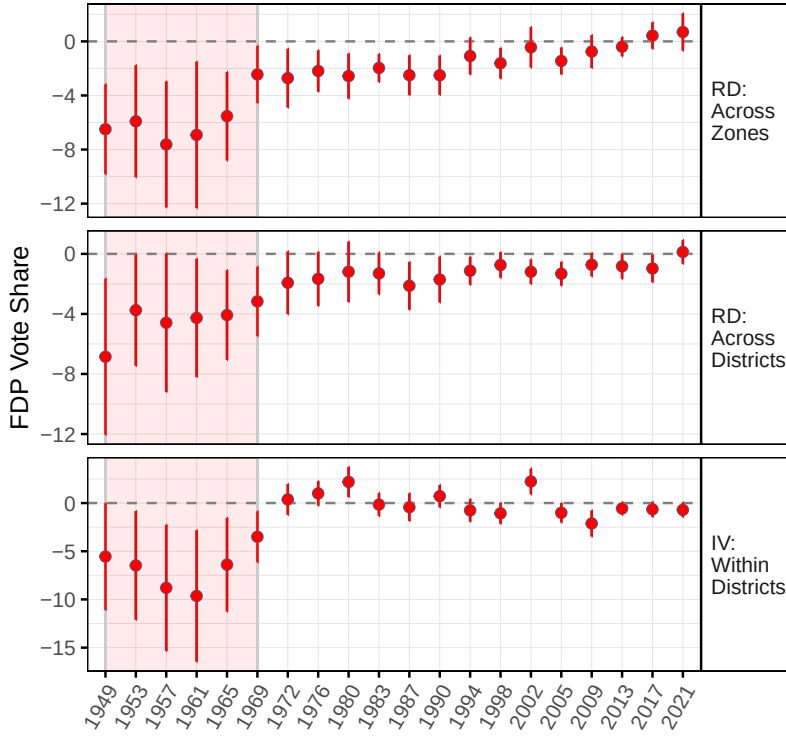


Figure 4: Main results across Occupation Zones

This graph plots the main results. The first row examines the FDP’s vote share between neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. The second row examines differences between neighboring municipalities across district borders within the US occupation zone. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following [Calonico et al. \(2017\)](#). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level. The third row plots instrumental variable estimates over time, controlling for geographic controls. Robust standard errors are clustered at the municipal level.

does not reveal obvious discontinuities at the cutoff on key pre-war economic observables including population, and the share of the Protestant and Jewish populations. Similarly, I find no significant political differences in the historic vote patterns using the average vote shares of parties during the Weimar Republic (1920-1933), which points to the political similarity of municipalities across borders before the war.<sup>25</sup>

The second section of Table 2 examines differences after the war. While there were no

<sup>25</sup>Continuity on pre-war observables notwithstanding, the motorway might have been planned strategically by the Nazi-regime. The Nazis may have rewarded high-support districts or targeted districts that were susceptible to the allure of Nazi propaganda. [Voigtlaender and Voth \(2014, p. 28\)](#), however, find that districts with future Autobahn construction were statistically indistinguishable from the rest in terms of votes for the Nazis in March 1933, the last quasi-free election. This evidence is corroborated by the fact that the Nazis largely followed pre-existing plans set out by the *Studiengesellschaft für Automobilstraßenbau* (STUFA), a think tank developing least-cost plans for a highway network in the 1920s ([Vahrenkamp 2010, pp. 21f](#)). Yet [Voigtlaender and Voth \(2014\)](#) also provide evidence that in districts experiencing highway construction, opposition to the regime, measured as the change of vote shares for non-Nazi parties, was reduced by about one percentage point. This finding likely works against my finding as the US-occupied districts in my sample were disproportionately exposed to Nazi propaganda.

Table 2: Differences across Occupation Zone and District Borders Before and After the War

|                                | (1)                       | (2)     | (3) | (4)   | (5)   | (6)                      | (7)    | (8) | (9)   | (10)  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|-----|-------|-------|--------------------------|--------|-----|-------|-------|
|                                | A. Occupation Zone Border |         |     |       |       | B. Court District Border |        |     |       |       |
|                                | $\beta_H$                 | SE      | BW  | $N_L$ | $N_H$ | $\beta_H$                | SE     | BW  | $N_L$ | $N_H$ |
| <i>Pre-War</i>                 |                           |         |     |       |       |                          |        |     |       |       |
| Population 1933 (ln)           | -.355                     | (.291)  | 24  | 65    | 94    | -.105                    | (.119) | 28  | 446   | 257   |
| Protestant 1925 (%)            | -.059                     | (.272)  | 25  | 68    | 101   | .074                     | (.055) | 26  | 456   | 237   |
| Jewish 1925 (%)                | .001                      | (.003)  | 24  | 66    | 99    | .001                     | (.002) | 24  | 414   | 216   |
| NSDAP Members (ln)             | .33                       | (1.184) | 30  | 74    | 131   | .14                      | (.417) | 21  | 350   | 176   |
| NSDAP Mean Vote Share          | -.028                     | (.042)  | 23  | 64    | 97    | .007                     | (.016) | 19  | 290   | 157   |
| DVP Mean Vote Share            | -.011                     | (.013)  | 23  | 66    | 107   | .004                     | (.004) | 23  | 432   | 209   |
| DDP Mean Vote Share            | -.021                     | (.031)  | 25  | 66    | 110   | .004                     | (.018) | 46  | 963   | 423   |
| Zentrum Mean Vote Share        | .085                      | (.139)  | 22  | 63    | 104   | -.014                    | (.036) | 24  | 442   | 210   |
| <i>Post-War</i>                |                           |         |     |       |       |                          |        |     |       |       |
| Population 1950 (ln)           | -.2                       | (.228)  | 30  | 188   | 214   | -.153                    | (.147) | 24  | 493   | 540   |
| Male Population (%)            | .003                      | (.004)  | 38  | 228   | 265   | .000                     | (.001) | 28  | 588   | 639   |
| Protestant 1950 (%)            | -.06                      | (.149)  | 33  | 202   | 231   | -.024                    | (.049) | 19  | 379   | 407   |
| Industrial Employment 1950 (%) | .025                      | (.035)  | 27  | 176   | 192   | -.003                    | (.01)  | 18  | 366   | 398   |
| Worker Share 1950 (%)          | .032                      | (.019)  | 31  | 193   | 222   | .003                     | (.006) | 20  | 399   | 434   |
| Refugees 1950 (%)              | .124***                   | (.013)  | 33  | 199   | 229   | .003                     | (.007) | 20  | 390   | 424   |
| Firms Dismantled               | -.162**                   | (.077)  | 20  | 135   | 151   | -.105                    | (.103) | 28  | 590   | 640   |

This table presents regression discontinuity estimates examining political and economic differences between municipalities before and after WWII. Columns 1-5 examine neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. Columns 6-10 examine neighboring municipalities across high and low denazification court district borders in the US occupation zone controlling for district  $\times$  district fixed effects; observations are sampled with replacement. Columns 1 and 6 show the estimates on an indicator for “High Denazification” municipalities. Columns 2 and 7 display standard errors. Columns 3 and 8 show the optimal bandwidth in kilometers. Columns 4-5 and 9-10 provide the number of observations around the cutoff. Rows are organized by outcomes. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following [Calonico et al. \(2017\)](#). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

differences in key economic dimensions, I do find important differences in other policies that differed between neighboring municipalities across occupation zones. Notably, the French did not accept any refugees, and extraction, as measured by the number of industrial firms that were dismantled, was higher.<sup>26</sup> These processes had important implications for the pattern of population and income growth after the occupation ended ([Schumann 2014](#); [Ciccone and Nimczik 2022](#)).<sup>27</sup> Yet it was only over the 1960s that a difference in GDP per capita growth emerged. Importantly, “there was no significant growth differential during the 1935-1950 period. Also, in 1950, there was no significant difference in GDP per capita across the

<sup>26</sup>In Appendix E, I explore in further detail whether other differences across Allied occupation zones including refugees, industrial dismantling, and education were likely drivers of the observed differences and provide suggestive quantitative and historical evidence that they were unlikely leading causal factors.

<sup>27</sup>Note that such concerns are attenuated when comparing municipalities within occupation zones. Both the difference in refugees and industrial dismantling become smaller and statistically insignificant across court district borders (see section 4.2).

former occupation-zone border in South-West Germany.” (Ciccone and Nimczik 2022, p. 4)

Another important concern for the process that I study, is sorting across borders and municipalities in response to denazification. As questionnaires were distributed more narrowly in the French occupation zone, the probability of an incriminated person being registered and denazified was lower than in the US occupation zone. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals who were banned from exercising their profession in the American or Russian zones escaped to the British and French occupation zones (Niethammer 1982, pp. 570ff; Vollnhals 1991, p. 28). Yet differential sorting across the French-American border in Baden-Württemberg was unlikely during the initial phase after the war. From April to July 1945 the French occupied all municipalities in the border sample, up to Stuttgart and Karlsruhe. Only once the Americans threatened to cut off their supply lines, the French troops withdrew. Further, migration during the occupation was unlikely to have taken place systematically. France expelled all persons who moved to the French-occupied territories after 1939 and did not accept expellees (Brommer 1985, p. 129).<sup>28</sup>

As the French-US occupation zone border in Baden-Württemberg has no natural nor historic relevance other than being close to a motorway, many concerns of other pre-war discontinuities that are important across administrative borders can be ruled out. Yet while the two occupation zones were merged into a single state after the Allies withdrew, occupation zone policies differed on multiple dimensions. It is thus important to restrict the analysis to variation within occupation zones, where no such differences existed.

## 4.2 Discontinuity across District Borders

The second comparison explores sharp variation in denazification across district borders due to idiosyncratic administrative differences within the US occupation zone.<sup>29</sup> Using a regression discontinuity design, I compare neighboring municipalities across high and low-

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<sup>28</sup>To manage the living space situation and to avoid fiscal costs for France, all persons who moved to territories later occupied by the French after 1939 were prompted to leave. In November 1945, the French repatriated 71,719 persons at the border in the district of Koblenz. Lastly, the French did not take in any refugees in the aftermath of the war. The only significant population inflow into the Southern French occupation zone were 35,000 refugees from Denmark (Borawski 1982). In return for accepting the expellees, the Danish provided food aid over three years. Only after 1950, refugees were relocated to the French occupation zone.

<sup>29</sup>See section 2.1, for a discussion of the factors that led to idiosyncratic differences across district court personnel.



denazification court districts and focus on the variation in denazification that is driven by idiosyncratic district-level differences, controlling for district  $\times$  district comparison fixed-effects. In this comparison, all municipalities in high denazification court districts adjacent to low denazification court districts are considered treated. I define high and low denazification court districts as being 1/2 SD above and below the mean.<sup>30</sup> The left-hand panel of Figure 2 illustrates this empirical strategy graphically.

Empirically, I run regression discontinuities of the following form:

$$y_{ijd} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathbf{1}\{X_{ijd} > 0\} + g(X_{ijd}) + \kappa C_{jd} + e_{ijd} \quad (2)$$

where  $y_{ijd}$  represents the outcome for municipality  $i$  in court district  $j$  paired with its neighboring district  $d$ . Each municipality  $i$  can appear multiple times in the dataset for each neighboring district  $d$  it borders when these districts have differing levels of denazification.  $X_{ijd}$  indicates the level of denazification. The term  $\mathbf{1}\{X_{ijd} > 0\}$  is an indicator function that equals 1 if municipality  $i$  in court district  $j$  borders a district  $d$  with a high level of denazification, and 0 otherwise.  $g(X_{ijd})$  is a local linear function modeling the relationship of the outcome with the distance to the nearest border between district  $j$  and its neighboring district  $d$ .  $\beta_1$  is the coefficient of interest, representing the impact of denazification on the outcomes. The term  $C_{jd}$  is a vector of district  $\times$  district comparison fixed-effects.  $\nu_{ijd}$  is an error term.

The results across occupation zones are mirrored when analyzing discontinuities across districts within the US occupation zone. Figure 5 shows that municipalities located along court districts borders of high and low denazification districts differed sharply in their denazification share.

Panel 3 in Figure 4 reports estimates from a regression discontinuity design using the variation in denazification of municipalities induced by being in a high or low denazification district. Comparing neighboring municipalities across contingent districts, I find dynamics echoing patterns across zones. Higher denazification negatively predicts the vote share for the FDP but this difference is attenuated once the FDP's nationalist wing loses influence.

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<sup>30</sup>Note that some districts will have municipalities used in multiple comparisons. If, for example, a municipality in a high-denazification district is sufficiently close to two distinct low-denazification districts, it will be sampled twice.

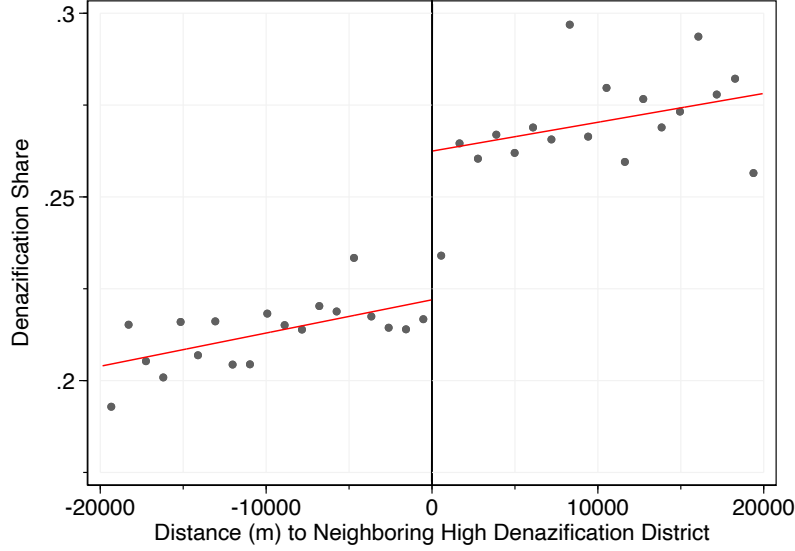


Figure 5: Discontinuity across Districts

This graph plots the number of denazification court cases as a share of the voting-age population between neighboring municipalities across the court districts within the US occupation zone.

The main identifying assumption is that no other factors besides treatment are continuous around the cutoff. To assess potential violations of this assumption, Panel B in Table 2 examines the economic and political differences of neighboring municipalities across court district borders before and after the Second World War.

Table 2 provides evidence that, when restricting the analysis to neighboring municipalities within the US occupation zone, most economic and political outcomes before and after the war were largely continuous across districts. Importantly, I find no differences in postwar policies that differed across the occupation zone border including the share of refugees and the number of dismantled industrial firms. The presence of significant differences in denazification across neighboring and otherwise similar municipalities suggests that idiosyncratic factors, beyond municipalities' structural characteristics, played a role.

Analogous to the first empirical strategy, an important concern is selective migration across district borders. While there were limits to the extent of migration across the French-American occupation zone border, no such restrictions existed on intra-zonal migration. Yet in contrast to differences in denazification across occupation zones, which were common knowledge, differences across court districts were hard to predict. Ex-ante, it was not obvious which district courts would denazify more or less at the margin and the majority of

questionnaires were collected before courts started operating.<sup>31</sup> Further, in individual-level denazification data within the US occupation zone, I find migration from individuals born in high denazification court districts but residing in low denazification court districts to play only a minor role quantitatively (approx. 1% of all cases). Lastly, my results are unchanged when measuring denazification by restricting the sample to non-migrants who resided in their district of birth. Taken together, this suggests a limited role of selective migration in my comparisons.<sup>32</sup> Still, in the next comparison, I restrict the analysis to variation to municipalities that are subject to the same district court.

### 4.3 Differences within Districts

The third comparison uses variation in denazification within court districts in the US occupation zone. I consider the possibility that the geographic distance of a municipality to a district court imposed a cost to gathering information about the incrimination of individuals. I use the within-district distance to a court as an instrumental variable for denazification.

My instrumental variable (IV) analysis builds on the following first-stage equation:

$$x_{ij} = \alpha + \beta Z_{ij} + \phi \mathbf{M}_i + \gamma L_j + \nu_{ij} \quad (3)$$

where  $Z_{ij}$  is the instrumental variable measuring the distance to the district court of district  $j$ . The explanatory variable of interest is the extent of denazification  $x_{ij}$ , as measured by the standardized denazification share. The term  $\mathbf{M}_i$  is a matrix of control variables. The term  $L_j$  is a vector of district-level fixed effects, and  $\nu_{ij}$  are independent and identically distributed errors.

The second-stage equation estimates:

$$y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta^{(IV)} \hat{x}_{ij} + \theta \mathbf{M}_i + \kappa L_j + \epsilon_{ij}, \quad (4)$$

where  $y_{ij}$  is the outcome in municipality  $i$ , district.  $\hat{x}_i$  are the fitted values of  $x_i$  from equation (4), and the  $\beta^{IV}$  estimate is a local average treatment effect, representing the effect

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<sup>31</sup>Also note that for all persons who were dead or missing, absent, fugitive, or in custody and whose suspected level of incrimination was class I or II, municipal mayors had to submit a questionnaire.

<sup>32</sup>Yet after the occupation ended, all restrictions on the freedom of movement ceased to exist, and sorting became likely.

of denazification on various outcomes in districts where denazification was higher because of the proximity to a district court.

Table 3 reports the results examining neighboring municipalities within court districts, using the distance to district courts as an instrumental variable for denazification. The instrumental variable estimates reveal that differences in denazification induced by geography negatively predict electoral differences until the 1970s. Being 10 kilometers away from the court is associated with a 0.3 SD (1.8 pp.) lower denazification share. The estimate suggests that a one standard deviation change in denazification is associated with an approximately 5-6 pp. lower FDP vote share until the 1970s. Tracking the effect over time in Figure Panel 3 4, I observe the same dynamics as observed across Allied occupation zones and court district boundaries. There is a strong negative effect of denazification on the FDP's vote share until the 1970s and coinciding with the change away from nationalist policies these differences vanish.

Table 3: Instrumental Variables – Differences within Districts

| <i>A. IV Estimates</i>                     | (1)                | (2)                | (3)                |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Outcome: FDP Vote Share Before 1970</i> |                    |                    |                    |
| Denazification per Voting Population (SD)  | -5.53**<br>(2.58)  | -6.73**<br>(2.62)  | -5.04**<br>(2.19)  |
| <i>B. IV First Stage</i>                   |                    |                    |                    |
| Distance to District Court (km)            | -0.03***<br>(0.01) | -0.04***<br>(0.01) | -0.03***<br>(0.01) |
| F-Statistic                                | 16.04              | 16.11              | 10.38              |
| Observations                               | 3096               | 3096               | 3096               |
| District FE                                | Yes                | Yes                | Yes                |
| Geographic Controls                        | No                 | Yes                | Yes                |
| Controls 1950                              | No                 | No                 | Yes                |

Table 3 presents IV estimates examining differences in the FDP vote share between neighboring municipalities within districts within the US occupation zone before 1970. Panel A of the table presents the IV estimates where the outcome is the FDP vote share in 1949. The IV is the distance to a district court in kilometers. Panel B displays first-stage estimates. Geographic controls include: latitude, longitude, distance to the district border, and distance to the three largest cities. Controls in 1950 are: the logarithm of the population, the share of protestants, males, workers, industrial employment, refugees, internees, the count of dismantled firms, and a dummy indicating city status.

To interpret these results it is important to note that unconditionally, the exclusion restriction might be violated. The distance to a court also proxies for the centrality of a municipality in a given district and thus might shape politics through other channels. Thus,

in Table 3 column 2, I condition on time-invariant geographic controls including latitude, longitude, the distance to the district border, and the distance to the three largest cities including Stuttgart, the state capital. In column 3, I introduce a set of economic and political controls observed in 1950 including the logarithm of the population, the share of males, protestants, industrial employment, workers, refugees, internees, the number of dismantled firms, and a dummy indicating city status. Coefficients on all covariates included the IV analyses are reported in Appendix Section C.6. An important caveat of this strategy is that these control variables are only available post-treatment.

#### 4.4 Denazification and Collective Memory

Table 4: Differences in Collective Memory

|                         | (1)              | (2)    | (3)                  | (4)    | (5)                  | (6)    |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|
|                         | RD: Across Zones |        | RD: Across Districts |        | IV: Within Districts |        |
|                         | $\beta_H$        | SE     | $\beta_H$            | SE     | $\beta_H$            | SE     |
| Militarist Street Names | -.379**          | (.154) | -.305**              | (.131) | .276                 | (.254) |
| Victim Street Names     | .1               | (.089) | .358**               | (.163) | .608**               | (.28)  |
| Holocaust Memorial      | .049             | (.035) | .31***               | (.103) | .291**               | (.137) |

This table presents estimates examining differences in collective memory. Columns 1-2 examine neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. Columns 3-4 examine neighboring municipalities across high and low denazification court district borders in the US occupation zone controlling for district $\times$ district fixed effects; observations are sampled with replacement. Columns 5-6 examine neighboring municipalities within court districts. Columns 1, 3, and 5 display the estimates. Columns 2, 4, and 6 display standard errors. Rows are organized by outcomes. “Militarist Street Names” is the number of street names commemorating militarists and supporters of National Socialism. “Victim Street Names” is the number of victim named streets. “Holocaust Memorial” is an indicator of the presence of a Holocaust memorial. All regressions control for the total number of streets in a given municipality. The IV-specification controls for contemporary population (ln), the share of protestants, foreigners, unemployed, and the population growth rate 1950-2017. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following Calonico et al. (2017). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district and municipal level, respectively

Where the demand for nationalist policies is attenuated, other behavioral changes followed. Table 4 reports differences in collective memory including the number of street names commemorating militarists and supporters of National Socialism, and Holocaust memorials. I observe that the number of streets whose names were associated with the Nazi regime is 0.3 (1/2 SD) lower in high denazification municipalities across the occupation zone

and district borders. At the same time, the number of streets whose names were associated with the victims of Nazi persecution is 0.4 streets (or 1/2 SD) higher in high denazification municipalities, both in the comparison across and within districts. I find corroborating evidence that these municipalities are also around 30 percent more likely to have Holocaust memorials. I find no difference in the likelihood of observing a holocaust memorial across the occupation zone border, using the MSE-optimal bandwidth.<sup>33</sup> All regression analyses control for the total number of streets per municipality.

## 4.5 Persistence

This subsection examines the impact of denazification on contemporary voting outcomes. Table 5 shows that historical variation in denazification predicts contemporary vote for the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In two out of three identification strategies, I find that a one standard deviation change in denazification is associated with a one percentage point lower vote share for the AfD on average. This finding provides suggestive evidence that the residual latent demand for nationalist policies can be reactivated by new political entrants. Note that the result across occupation zones is not robust to clustering standard errors at the district-level using plug-in residual variance estimation.

Furthermore, using turnout data in all European elections since 1979, I observe that municipalities with a higher level of denazification exhibit a two percentage point increase in turnout for European elections. This result suggests that the effect of denazification extended beyond national elections and had implications for supranational elections.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Note that any fixed bandwidth below MSE-optimal yields a statistically significant difference in the likelihood of observing memorials across the occupation zone border of around 15 percent.

<sup>34</sup>For future research, this raises the question of whether the shift away from nationalist policies favored post-nationalist forms of political identification.



Table 5: Persistent Differences in Voting Behavior

|                               | (1)              | (2)    | (3)                  | (4)    | (5)                  | (6)     |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|----------------------|---------|
|                               | RD: Across Zones |        | RD: Across Districts |        | IV: Within Districts |         |
|                               | $\beta_H$        | SE     | $\beta_H$            | SE     | $\beta_H$            | SE      |
| AfD Vote Share                | -.829*           | (.498) | .363                 | (.422) | -1.492**             | (.61)   |
| Turnout in European Elections | 2.469***         | (.652) | -.331                | (.536) | 2.288*               | (1.199) |

This table presents estimates examining long-term differences in voting behavior. Columns 1-2 examine neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. Columns 3-4 examine neighboring municipalities across high and low denazification court district borders in the US occupation zone controlling for district $\times$ district fixed effects; observations are sampled with replacement. Columns 5-6 examine neighboring municipalities within court districts, controlling for contemporary population (ln), the share of protestants, foreigners, unemployed, the population growth rate 1950-2017, and controls as listed in Table 3. Columns 1, 3, and 5 display the estimates. Columns 2, 4, and 6 display standard errors. Rows are organized by outcomes. “AfD Vote Share” is the vote share for the Alternative for Germany in federal elections from 2013 to 2021. “Turnout European Elections” is the turnout in European Parliament elections from 1979 to 2019. All specifications include election-year fixed effects. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following [Calonico et al. \(2017\)](#). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district and municipality level using the ten nearest neighbors.

## 5 Mechanism

### Mass vs. Elite Denazification

The results raise the question of how denazification shaped political behavior and norms. One possibility is that denazification changed the demand for nationalist politics in the population at large. Yet another explanation is that the political supply changed across my comparisons. First, it is important to note that my analysis focuses on the party list vote in federal elections. Voters, thus, face the same candidates and results hold even within electoral districts. Still, it is conceivable that denazification affected the supply of former elites through other channels. Indeed, prominent accounts of transitional justice suggest that purges of elites can be a key factor shaping trajectories after authoritarianism ([Huntington 1993](#)). Purges prior to and elite lustrations coinciding with denazification might have limited their subsequent organizational capacity. Or, by contrast, they could have fueled a backlash in places where many were purged.

Guided by these observations, I explore evidence on the former positions and ranks of over 370,000 individuals under denazification and use data on all internees in the US occupation zone. The fact that I do neither find differences in former elites under denazification nor in

the share of internees, suggests that elites do not drive the observed differences. In contrast, I document variation across non-elites central to the dissemination of local norms.

Table 6 presents estimates examining differences in denazification by profession and rank in the US-occupation zone using a regression discontinuity across court district boundaries (columns 1-3) and an instrumental variable analysis within districts (columns 4-6). Panel A. in Table 6 indicates that there was no difference in the likelihood of denazification of former elites in top administrative, police, (para-)military, and party positions (columns 1, 3). Rather, a statistically significant difference is observable with respect to the denazification share of those who do not fall into one of the presumed incrimination categories under the Law of Liberation. These are cases where the level of incrimination is not readily inferred by occupation alone, underlining the role of evaluators' idiosyncratic effort in driving variation in denazification across districts. This finding aligns with studies that highlight the importance of transparency mechanisms in uncovering less overt forms of collaboration after authoritarianism (Nalepa 2022).

## Diffusion of Social Norms

Further, theory suggests social norms depend on groups of highly central actors, who may provide cues for or shape individuals' perception of collective norms (Paluck and Shepherd 2012). To test this possibility, Panel B examines differences in denazification by sectors. I find strong differences in the denazification share in the manufacturing and the education sectors, both across and within court districts. While manufacturing constituted the single largest category (around 1/3 of all denazification cases), teachers were "disproportionately targeted" by Nazi propaganda, "strongly represented" in the Nazi party base (Kater 1985; Falter 2020; Voigtländer and Voth 2015), and central to the dissemination of local norms. By 1937, over 95% of all teachers had joined the National Socialist Teachers' League (Feiten 1981; Welch 1993). Historically, education played an important in fostering compliance (Paglayan 2022) and shaping ideological preferences (Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich 2021; Cantoni et al. 2017). My findings are consistent with research emphasizing the norm-setting role of denazification. Higher denazification among indoctrinated peers sent a stronger signal that expressing nationalist beliefs became taboo (relatedly see Bénabou and Tirole 2011).

Table 6: Differences across Professions and Ranks

|                                               | (1)                  | (2)    | (3) | (4)                  | (5)    | (6)  |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------|-----|----------------------|--------|------|
|                                               | RD: Across Districts |        |     | IV: Within Districts |        |      |
|                                               | $\beta$              | SE     | BW  | $\beta$              | SE     | Mean |
| <i>Panel A. Denazification of Elites</i>      |                      |        |     |                      |        |      |
| Share Elite (std.)                            | .06                  | (.155) | 18  | .41                  | (.417) | .012 |
| Share No Elite (std.)                         | .988***              | (.016) | 15  | .955***              | (.033) | .235 |
| <i>Panel B. Denazification across Sectors</i> |                      |        |     |                      |        |      |
| Share in Agriculture (std.)                   | .608***              | (.218) | 19  | -.816                | (.6)   | .04  |
| Share in Industry and Manufacturing(std.)     | .354                 | (.246) | 21  | 1.362***             | (.512) | .075 |
| Share in Trade and Services (std.)            | -.091                | (.267) | 12  | 1.147***             | (.414) | .02  |
| Share in State (std.)                         | .152                 | (.158) | 20  | .546                 | (.368) | .028 |
| Share in Education (std.)                     | .649***              | (.14)  | 18  | .749**               | (.374) | .013 |
| <i>Panel C. Internment</i>                    |                      |        |     |                      |        |      |
| Share Internees                               | -.086                | (.054) | 22  | -.004                | (.157) | .307 |

This table presents regression discontinuity and instrumental variable estimates examining differences in denazification by profession and rank. Columns 1-3 examine neighboring municipalities across high and low denazification court district borders in the US occupation zone controlling for district  $\times$  district fixed effects. Columns 4-5 examine neighboring municipalities within districts. The specifications are the same as in Figure 2 but use standardized denazification shares by ranks and professions as independent variables. Recall, that Table 2 showed no differences in the share of internees across districts, suggesting that prior purges of former elites do not drive the observed differences. Similarly, Panel A examines differences for cases that fall into suspected incrimination categories I, II, and b under the Law of Liberation and those that do not. Panel B estimates differences in denazification across sectors. Panel C analyzes differences in the share of internees. Column 6 displays the mean share of the respective groups in the sample. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following [Calonico et al. \(2017\)](#). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district and municipal level, respectively.

Yet past norms persist where groups previously exposed to authoritarian norms are left out.

## Punishment

If denazification changed the demand for nationalist politics at large, a natural question is which features drove the wider population to adopt new norms. A central debate in the literature on the institutional design of transitional justice pertains to punishment ([Dancy et al. 2019](#)). How harsh, if at all, should former supporters be punished? Punishment might deter future behavior by signaling its cost. Yet a fear is that sanctions might trigger counter-reactions, especially in a subset of formerly strong supporters ([Huntington 1993](#)).

The evidence on internment in the US occupation zone in Panel C suggests limited differences in an elite purge and particularly severe form of punishment.<sup>35</sup> More generally,

<sup>35</sup>Internment was interpreted as a form of advance punishment by denazification courts. As a result, the

while denazification courts could impose sanctions, the vast majority remained unpunished.<sup>36</sup> Of those who were sentenced, most received very minor sentences, were exonerated by subsequent amnesties, or had their sentence revoked by a court of appeal (Niethammer 1982; Frei 2002). The facts that most people under denazification were not punished and that my findings hold comparing municipalities subject to the same denazification courts suggest that strong punishment was unlikely to be a leading causal factor in my comparisons.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, the absence of punishment might have allowed people to adapt personal narratives in ways consistent with the new social norm (Leßau 2020; Herbert 2019; Frei 2002). Denazification, thus, did not root out the bad apples. But denazification was indicative of an equilibrium in which nationalist policies increasingly became taboo.

This view and finding is consistent with prior work which has shown that German states with more denazification cases without punishment are associated with higher democratic support and lower anti-semitism (Capoccia and Pop-Eleches 2020; Mohr, Voigtländer, and Voth 2019). More generally, the results support recent research emphasizing that amnesties and prosecutions both can work (Dancy et al. 2019); and qualify a dichotomous understanding of transitional justice as a choice to “forgive and forget, *or* prosecute and punish” (Huntington 1993).

## Scope Conditions

It is important to note that the findings originate from a specific intervention in a specific context. Several observations are relevant. First, Germany transitioned into fascism democratically. Voters and mass movements enabled the creation of the political machinery. Second, Germany lost the war. The total defeat loosened domestic political economy constraints on transitional justice. Third, the transition to democracy happened against the backdrop of sustained economic growth, aligning incentives across past political affiliations.

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few denazification cases that resulted in prison sentences were considered served (Niethammer 2016, p. 107).

<sup>36</sup>Only 0.01 percent of the population in the US and French occupation zone were initially put in the top two offender categories Fürstenau (1969, p. 228).

<sup>37</sup>At the same time, the ex-ante possibility of punishment could have been an important feature of the process. In Appendix B, I find that the main effect is concentrated in places closer to internment camps. Further, it is instructive to note that mere reflection in the form of filing a denazification questionnaire was unlikely to have caused the observed electoral differences, at least not within the US occupation zone. While the entire adult population of the US occupation zone had to file a questionnaire, it was only when a case was initiated that punishment became possible and differences in voting materialized.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Germany’s political development is remarkable upon comparison. Consider Austria and Japan. Both countries lost the war and experienced strong economic growth afterward. Yet, in contrast to Germany, mass transitional justice remained limited, and ‘liberal’ parties continue to influence politics and collective memory along nationalist platforms.

## 6 Conclusion

In his ‘*Guidelines for Democratizers*’, [Huntington \(1993\)](#) issued a clear warning to new democracies: “Do not attempt to prosecute authoritarian officials for human rights violations” and that “if replacement occurred and you feel it is morally and politically desirable, prosecute the leaders of the authoritarian regime [...] while making clear that you will not prosecute middle- and lower-ranking officials.” My paper reconsiders the role of mass transitional justice by analyzing one of its most canonical cases.

Denazification was one of the largest transitional justice programs in history and shaped the emerging political landscape in postwar Germany. Variation in the extent of denazification across occupation zones, across districts, and within districts predict voting patterns for nationalist policies. Where the demand for nationalist policies was attenuated, norms changed. Places with higher denazification saw more Holocaust memorials and more victim street names. Differences were not driven by the denazification of former elites but by wider groups previously indoctrinated and central to the dissemination of local norms. The results suggest that the wider public, not just elites, can be a target of transitional justice and respond in ways that shape political demand and the evolution of social norms.

New democracies confront not only powerful prior elites but also face difficult choices about how to deal with supporters and followers. While the decision to do nothing need not have direct consequences for the functioning of democracy, it can continue to shape politics as prior norms of political identification may endure. Political entrepreneurs may try to mobilize these prior norms in the future. In this sense, mass transitional justice can be understood as part of a broader effort to confront and delimit authoritarian legacies. Further analyses of the effects of other interventions on breaking the persistence of authoritarian legacies are an important area for future study. A key question for this research will be: if a prior

political identity becomes taboo, by what is it replaced? Or, perhaps more important, what conditions facilitate the adoption of norms? In Germany, the absence of punishment possibly allowed people to adopt personal narratives consistent with a post-nationalist identity. A better understanding of the individual-level mechanisms through which policies enforce new norms will not only help to inform their design but might also shed light on the dynamic construction of political norms and identities.

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# Appendices

## A Data

Table A1: Summary Statistics

|                                   | (1)   | (2)     | (3)   | (4)    | (5)  |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|-------|--------|------|
|                                   | Mean  | SD      | Min   | Max    | N    |
| FDP Vote Share 1949               | 16.19 | (12.84) | 0.00  | 66.01  | 1101 |
| CDU Vote Share 1949               | 50.64 | (23.88) | 5.41  | 100.00 | 1101 |
| SPD Vote Share 1949               | 18.31 | (10.87) | 0.00  | 58.68  | 1101 |
| AFD Mean Vote Share               | 9.47  | (2.09)  | 4.01  | 17.36  | 1101 |
| Turnout European Elections (Mean) | 56.11 | (4.56)  | 44.46 | 82.68  | 1101 |
| Militarist Street Names           | 0.34  | (0.76)  | 0.00  | 6.00   | 1101 |
| Victim Street Names               | 0.23  | (0.79)  | 0.00  | 10.00  | 1101 |
| Holocaust Memorial                | 0.13  | (0.34)  | 0.00  | 1.00   | 1101 |
| Share in Denazification           | 0.22  | (0.07)  | 0.06  | 0.46   | 808  |
| Share in Top Categories (std.)    | -0.00 | (1.00)  | -2.35 | 4.79   | 366  |
| Share in No Category (std.)       | 0.00  | (1.00)  | -2.16 | 3.38   | 366  |
| Share in Agriculture (std.)       | -0.00 | (1.00)  | -1.31 | 6.36   | 366  |
| Share in Industry (std.)          | 0.00  | (1.00)  | -2.23 | 4.63   | 366  |
| Share in Trade (std.)             | -0.00 | (1.00)  | -1.88 | 3.63   | 366  |
| Share in Civil Service (std.)     | 0.00  | (1.00)  | -2.03 | 4.15   | 366  |
| Share in Education (std.)         | 0.00  | (1.00)  | -2.27 | 4.77   | 366  |
| Share of Internees                | 0.00  | (0.00)  | 0.00  | 0.03   | 516  |
| Population 1950 (ln)              | 7.93  | (1.05)  | 5.01  | 13.12  | 1101 |
| Male Population (%)               | 0.47  | (0.02)  | 0.26  | 0.60   | 1101 |
| Protestant 1950 (%)               | 0.45  | (0.34)  | 0.01  | 0.99   | 1101 |
| Industrial Employment 1950 (%)    | 0.39  | (0.13)  | 0.06  | 0.72   | 1101 |
| Worker Share 1950 (%)             | 0.23  | (0.06)  | 0.09  | 0.45   | 1101 |
| Refugees 1950 (%)                 | 0.15  | (0.08)  | 0.01  | 0.37   | 1101 |
| Firms Dismantled                  | 0.07  | (0.50)  | 0.00  | 9.00   | 1101 |
| City Indicator                    | 0.28  | (0.45)  | 0.00  | 1.00   | 1101 |
| Population Growth 1950-2017 (%)   | 0.83  | (0.80)  | -0.47 | 11.79  | 1101 |
| Population 2017 (ln)              | 8.46  | (1.09)  | 4.61  | 13.28  | 1101 |
| Protestants 2011 (%)              | 0.33  | (0.17)  | 0.03  | 0.81   | 1101 |
| Foreigners 2011 (%)               | 0.07  | (0.04)  | 0.00  | 0.30   | 1101 |
| Unemployment 2017 (%)             | 0.02  | (0.01)  | 0.00  | 0.04   | 1101 |
| Population 1933 (ln)              | 9.00  | (1.16)  | 7.25  | 12.94  | 571  |
| Protestant 1925 (%)               | 0.52  | (0.37)  | 0.00  | 0.99   | 586  |
| Jewish 1925 (%)                   | 0.00  | (0.01)  | 0.00  | 0.09   | 586  |
| NSDAP Members (ln)                | 1.53  | (1.10)  | 0.05  | 5.40   | 399  |
| NSDAP Mean Vote Share             | 0.20  | (0.08)  | 0.00  | 0.70   | 580  |
| DVP Mean Vote Share               | 0.03  | (0.03)  | 0.00  | 0.25   | 605  |
| DDP Mean Vote Share               | 0.10  | (0.06)  | 0.00  | 0.36   | 603  |
| Zentrum Mean Vote Share           | 0.28  | (0.25)  | 0.00  | 0.86   | 605  |

This table presents summary statistics on municipal-level variables.

## B Heterogeneity

In this section, I use data on the distance to internment camps to investigate one potential channel through which denazification acquired its effect. Although multiple channels may be relevant, I focus on the impact of the geographical proximity to internment camps, which possibly interacted with denazification by elevating the perceived threat of denazification.

Figure B1 presents estimates examining heterogeneity in the response to denazification by the distance to internment camps. I fully interact the three empirical designs linearly with the distance to internment camps and analyze the effect of denazification on the FDP vote share in 1949. Across specifications, I consistently detect that the impact of denazification was stronger in areas situated closer to internment camps. This finding is consistent with a hypothesis that denazification prompted conformity or caution, especially in places where the threat of denazification was more credible initially. In places further away from internment camps, the necessity to adjust political identities may have seemed less immediate.

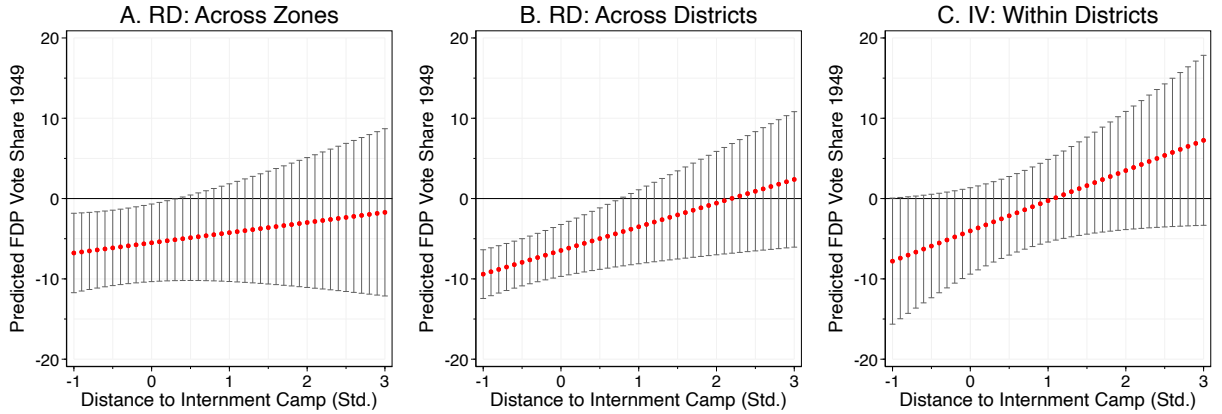


Figure B1: Heterogeneity in Denazification Effect by Distance to Internment Camps

This graph presents estimates examining heterogeneity in the response to denazification distance to internment camps. The results derive from a linearly interacted the designs with distance to internment camps. The outcome is FDP vote share in 1949. Panel A and B display results from the regression discontinuity across occupation zones and districts, respectively. Panel C shows estimates from the instrumental variable analysis within districts.



## C Robustness

### C.1 Bandwidth

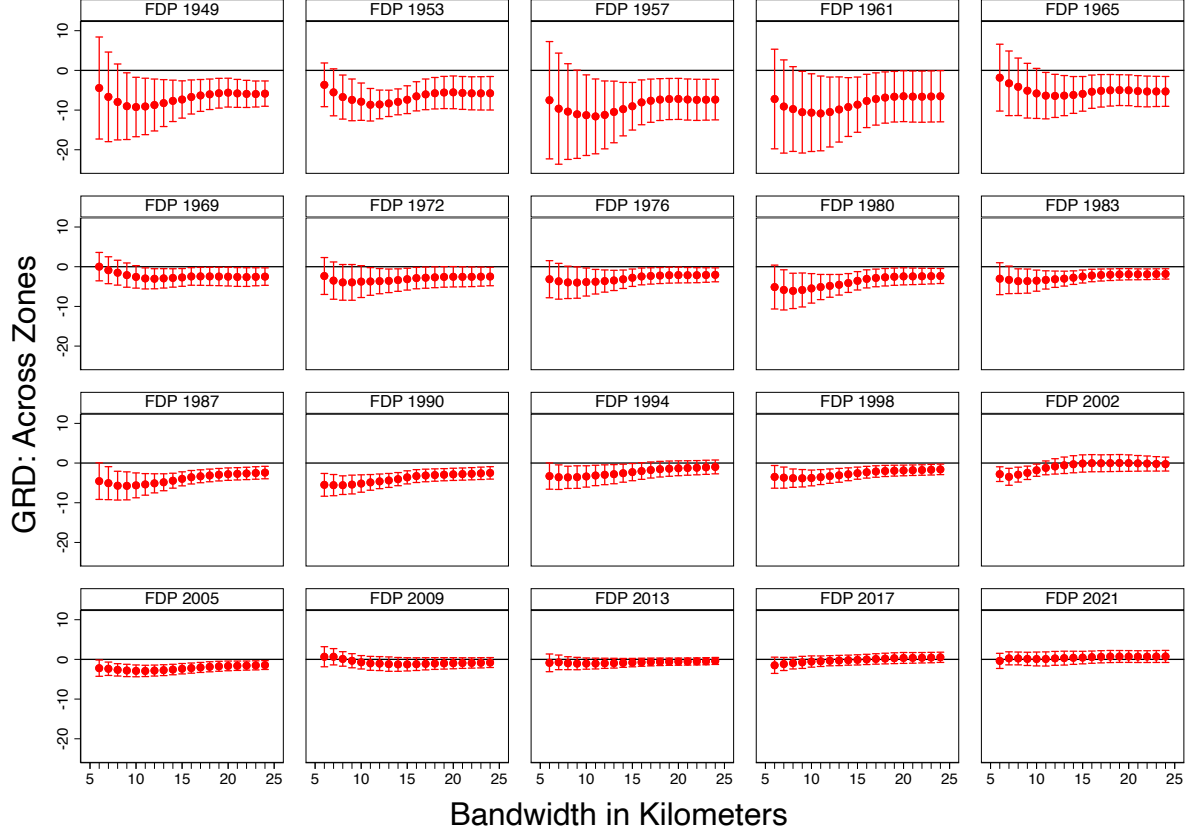


Figure C1: RD across Allied Occupation Zones

This graph plots regression discontinuity estimates examining differences in political behavior between neighboring municipalities across occupation zone borders within the US occupation zone for varying bandwidths. The outcome is the vote share for all major parties from 1949 to 2021. The instrument is whether a municipality is in a high denazification district. Municipal-level denazification is standardized and results display the effect of a one SD (6 pp.) change in denazification. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

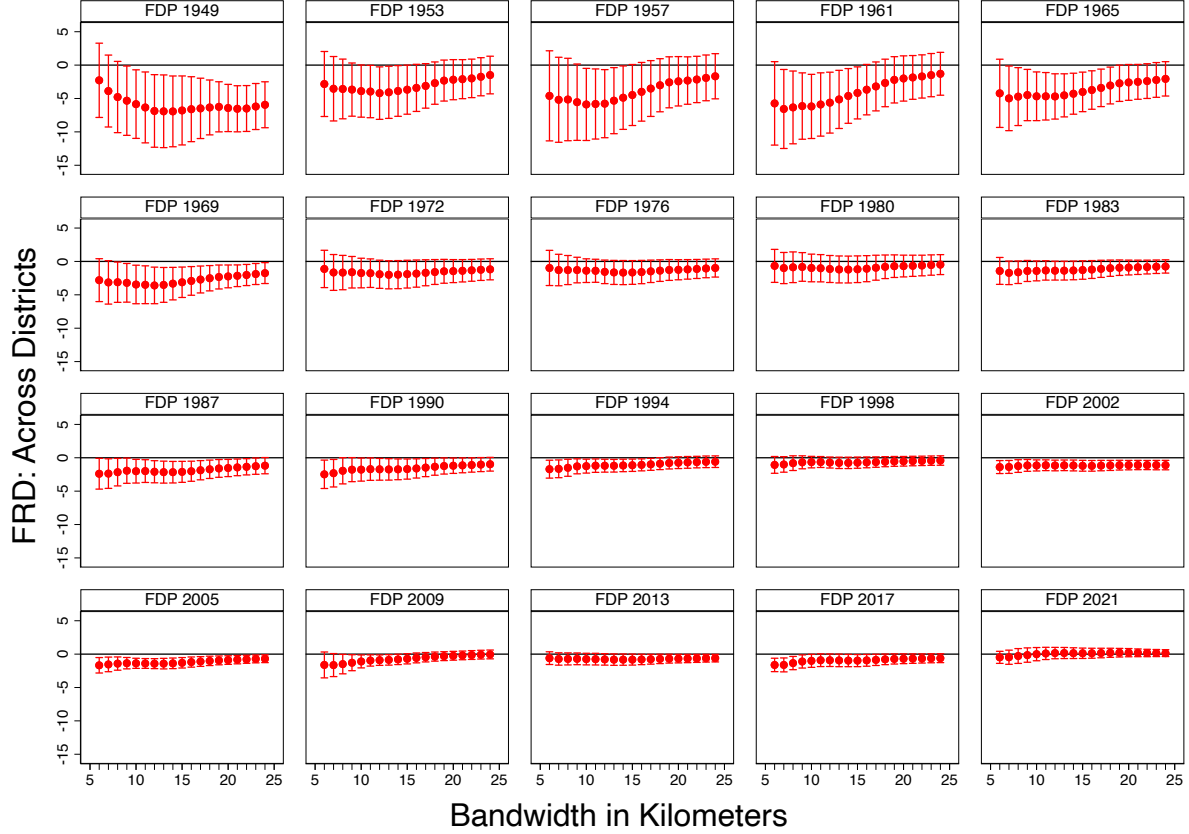


Figure C2: RD across Court Districts

This graph plots regression discontinuity estimates examining differences in political behavior between neighboring municipalities across district borders within the US occupation zone for varying bandwidths. The outcome is the vote share for all major parties from 1949 to 2021. The instrument is whether a municipality is in a high denazification district. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

Table C1: Robustness to Different Bandwidths

|                    | (1)                    | (2)     | (3)                   | (4)     |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
|                    | Occupation Zone Border |         | Court District Border |         |
|                    | $\beta_H$              | SE      | $\beta_H$             | SE      |
| MSE-optimal (13km) | -5.935***              | (2.165) | -5.013***             | (1.739) |
| CER-optimal (10km) | -6.006***              | (1.899) | -5.226***             | (1.691) |
| 5 Kilometers       | -5.923                 | (7.852) | -2.182                | (3.19)  |
| 10 Kilometers      | -9.23**                | (3.82)  | -5.665**              | (2.429) |
| 15 Kilometers      | -7.332***              | (2.397) | -6.213**              | (2.42)  |
| 20 Kilometers      | -5.609***              | (1.852) | -5.932***             | (1.745) |
| 25 Kilometers      | -5.772***              | (1.611) | -5.557***             | (1.765) |
| 30 Kilometers      | -5.24***               | (1.89)  | -5.13***              | (1.601) |

This table presents regression discontinuity estimates examining robustness of the main result using different bandwidths. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

## C.2 Polynomials

Table C2: Robustness to Different Polynomials

|                      | (1)                    | (2)     | (3) | (4)                   | (5)     | (6) |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------|-----|-----------------------|---------|-----|
|                      | Occupation Zone Border |         |     | Court District Border |         |     |
|                      | $\beta_H$              | SE      | BW  | $\beta_H$             | SE      | BW  |
| Linear Polynomial    | -7.187***              | (2.787) | 30  | -5.013***             | (1.739) | 20  |
| Quadratic Polynomial | -6.208***              | (1.851) | 28  | -4.847***             | (1.444) | 37  |
| Cubic Polynomial     | -6.308***              | (1.879) | 36  | -5.518**              | (2.243) | 38  |

This table presents regression discontinuity estimates examining robustness of the main result using different polynomials. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

## C.3 Standard Errors

Table C3: Robustness to Different Variance Estimators

|                                 | (1)                    | (2)     | (3) | (4)                   | (5)     | (6) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------|-----|-----------------------|---------|-----|
|                                 | Occupation Zone Border |         |     | Court District Border |         |     |
|                                 | $\beta_H$              | SE      | BW  | $\beta_H$             | SE      | BW  |
| Clustered SE (Municipal-Level)  | -7.3***                | (1.811) | 33  | -6.156***             | (1.28)  | 25  |
| Clustered SE (District-Level)   | -5.935***              | (2.165) | 25  | -6.353***             | (1.455) | 19  |
| Robust SE                       | -7.286***              | (1.807) | 33  | -5.99***              | (1.304) | 23  |
| Robust SE (5 Nearest-Neighbors) | -7.397***              | (1.803) | 34  | -6.016***             | (1.325) | 24  |

This table presents regression discontinuity estimates examining robustness of the main result using different variance estimators.

## C.4 Outliers

In Figure C3, I assess the robustness of the main findings to the exclusion of outliers in terms of denazification. Specifically, I investigate the consistency of the estimates for the main variable, FDP's vote share in 1949, when excluding the bottom and top ten percentiles of denazification.

Panel A focuses on the regression discontinuity analysis across occupation zones, where I restrict the data to fall within a 30-kilometer distance to the boundary before denazification percentiles are calculated. Panel B examines the regression discontinuity across districts. Panel C presents the results for the instrumental variable (IV) analysis within districts.

The results demonstrate that the estimates remain stable and are largely unaffected by the exclusion of outliers.

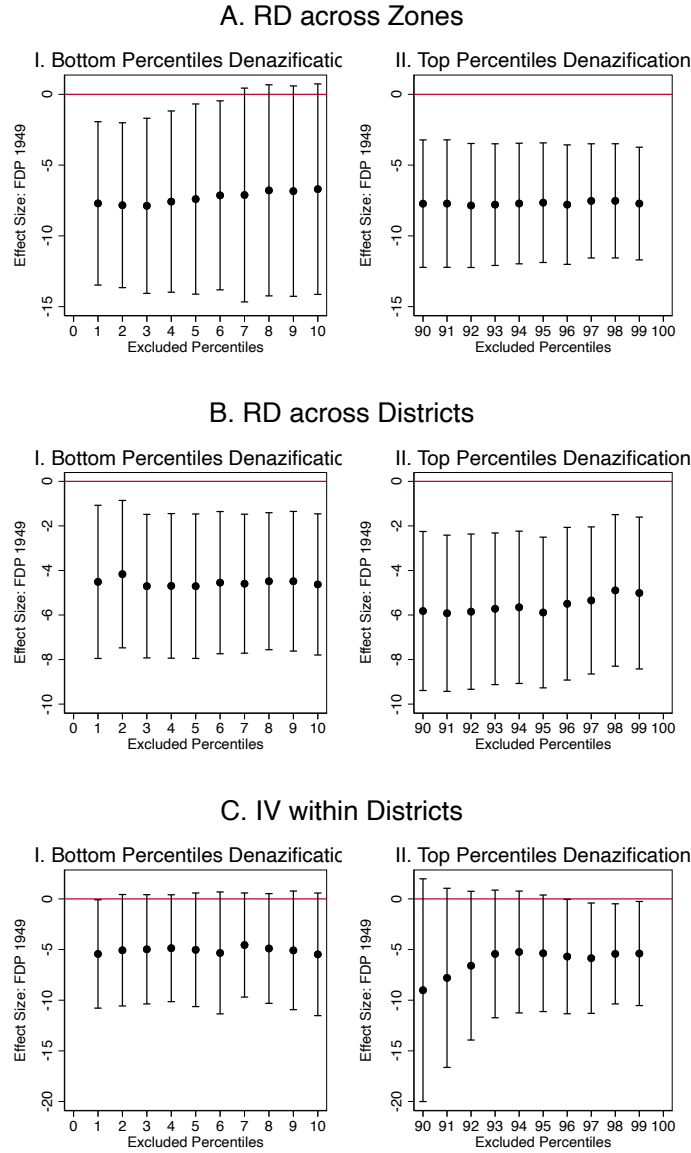


Figure C3: Robustness to Excluding Outliers

This graph plots regression estimates examining the robustness of the main results to the exclusion of outliers in terms of denazification. The outcome is FDP vote share in 1949. Panel A explores the regression discontinuity across occupation zones, which restricts the data to fall within 30 kilometers along the boundary before calculating the denazification percentiles. Panel B investigates the regression discontinuity across districts, and Panel C presents the results for the instrumental variable (IV) within districts. Within each panel, sub-panel I. and II. exclude the bottom and top ten percentiles in denazification, respectively.

## C.5 Specification Check

In Figures C4-C6, I run a specification check reporting the distribution of t-curves and effect size derived from the three specifications using every possible combination of control variables, as specified in Section 4.3. The outcome is the main variable, the FDP's vote share in 1949.

The results indicate that the t-statistics are centered around 2 and the effect size stays with the mass of estimates centered around -6, indicating that results are robust to the order in which the control variables are sequentially included.

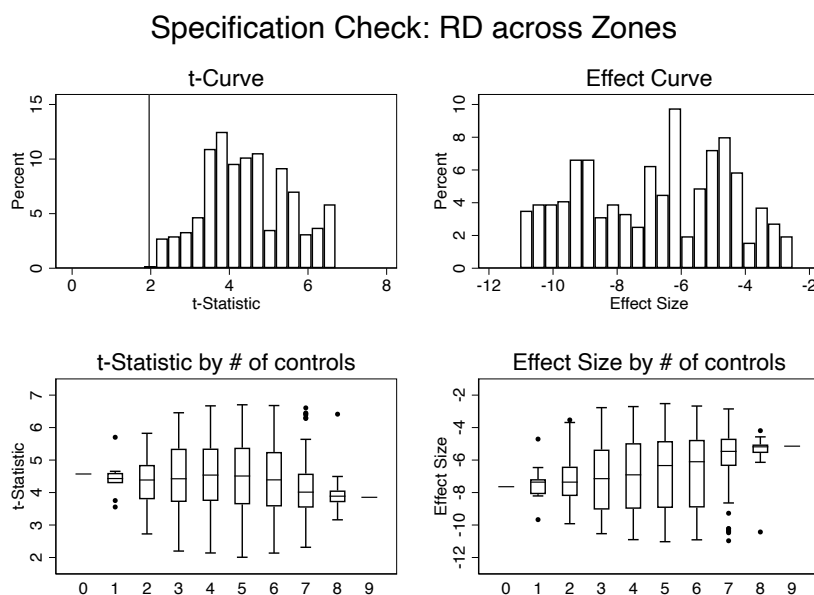


Figure C4: Robustness to Permuting Controls in RD across Zones

This graph plots regression estimates examining the robustness of the main regression discontinuity across districts results to different specifications using all possible combinations of controls. The outcome is FDP vote share in 1949. The upper-left panel plots the distribution of t-statistics. The upper-right panel displays the distribution of effect sizes. The lower panels show t-statistics (left) and effect sizes (right) by the number of controls included.

### Specification Check: RD across Districts

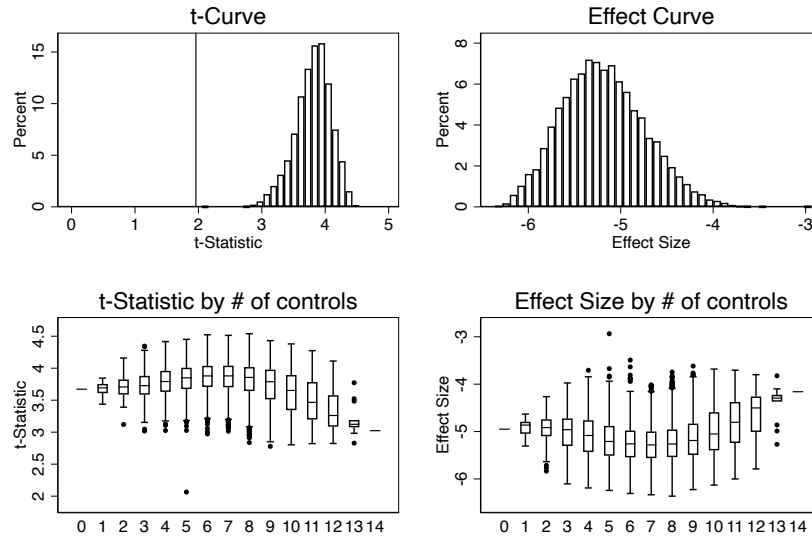


Figure C5: Robustness to Permuting Controls in RD across Districts

This graph plots regression estimates examining the robustness of the main regression discontinuity across districts results to different specifications using all possible combinations of controls. The outcome is FDP vote share in 1949. The upper-left panel plots the distribution of t-statistics. The upper-right panel displays the distribution of effect sizes. The lower panels show t-statistics (left) and effect sizes (right) by the number of controls included.

### Specification Check: IV within Districts

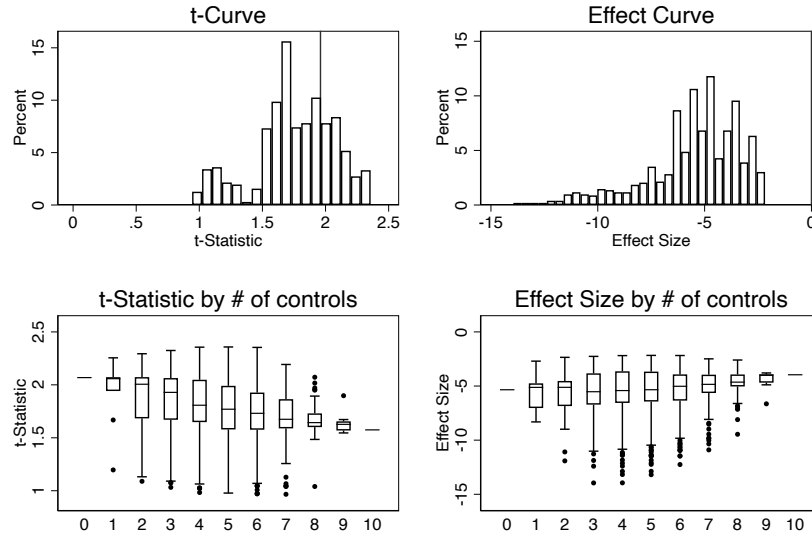


Figure C6: Robustness to Permuting Controls in IV

This graph plots regression estimates examining the robustness of the main IV results to different specifications using all possible combinations of controls. The outcome is FDP vote share in 1949. The upper-left panel plots the distribution of t-statistics. The upper-right panel displays the distribution of effect sizes. The lower panels show t-statistics (left) and effect sizes (right) by the number of controls included.

## C.6 Full Instrumental Variable Tables

In Table C4, I report the coefficients on all covariates in the instrumental variable analysis.

Table C4: Instrumental Variables – Differences within Districts

| <i>A. IV Estimates</i>                     | (1)                | (2)                | (3)                 |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Outcome: FDP Vote Share Before 1970</i> |                    |                    |                     |
| Denazification per Voting Population (SD)  | -5.53**<br>(2.58)  | -6.73**<br>(2.62)  | -5.04**<br>(2.19)   |
| Latitude                                   |                    | 0.44<br>(10.95)    | 1.99<br>(7.63)      |
| Longitude                                  |                    | 12.38<br>(17.69)   | -8.55<br>(10.45)    |
| Distance to District Border (km)           |                    | -0.20**<br>(0.09)  | 0.08<br>(0.06)      |
| Distance to Stuttgart (km)                 |                    | -0.22**<br>(0.09)  | -0.10<br>(0.07)     |
| Distance to Karlsruhe (km)                 |                    | 0.01<br>(0.14)     | 0.17<br>(0.11)      |
| Distance to Mannheim (km)                  |                    | 0.03<br>(0.21)     | -0.13<br>(0.13)     |
| Population 1950 (ln)                       |                    |                    | 0.44<br>(0.44)      |
| Male Population (%)                        |                    |                    | 10.87<br>(28.30)    |
| Protestant 1950 (%)                        |                    |                    | 24.33***<br>(2.72)  |
| Refugees 1950 (%)                          |                    |                    | 9.89<br>(6.32)      |
| Industrial Employment 1950 (%)             |                    |                    | -6.06<br>(5.67)     |
| Worker Share 1950 (%)                      |                    |                    | -26.65**<br>(12.78) |
| Firms Dismantled                           |                    |                    | 0.35<br>(0.36)      |
| Share of Internees                         |                    |                    | 57.76<br>(88.64)    |
| City Indicator                             |                    |                    | 2.18*<br>(1.12)     |
| <i>B. IV First Stage</i>                   |                    |                    |                     |
| Distance to District Court (km)            | -0.03***<br>(0.01) | -0.04***<br>(0.01) | -0.03***<br>(0.01)  |
| F-Statistic                                | 16.04              | 16.11              | 10.38               |
| Observations                               | 516                | 516                | 516                 |
| District FE                                | Yes                | Yes                | Yes                 |
| Election FE                                | Yes                | Yes                | Yes                 |
| Geographic Controls                        | No                 | Yes                | Yes                 |
| Controls 1950                              | No                 | No                 | Yes                 |

This table presents IV estimates examining differences in the FDP vote share in elections before 1970 between neighboring municipalities within districts within the US occupation zone and reports coefficients on all covariates.



Table C5: Instrumental Variables – Differences within Districts

|                                           | Outcomes          |        |          |        |          |             |          |        |          |         |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|----------|--------|----------|-------------|----------|--------|----------|---------|
|                                           | Collective Memory |        |          |        |          | Persistence |          |        |          |         |
|                                           | (1)               | (2)    | (3)      | (4)    | (5)      | (1)         | (2)      | (3)    | (4)      | (5)     |
| <i>A. IV Estimates</i>                    |                   |        |          |        |          |             |          |        |          |         |
| Denazification per Voting Population (SD) | 0.28              | (0.25) | 0.61**   | (0.28) | 0.29**   | (0.14)      | -1.49**  | (0.61) | 2.29*    | (1.20)  |
| Streets                                   | 1.07**            | (0.44) | 4.30***  | (0.65) | 0.60***  | (0.19)      |          |        |          |         |
| Latitude                                  | -0.18             | (0.86) | -0.86    | (0.91) | 0.12     | (0.44)      | 4.46**   | (1.82) | 0.42     | (4.04)  |
| Longitude                                 | 0.40              | (0.98) | 0.64     | (1.28) | 0.77     | (0.66)      | -2.46    | (2.50) | -3.19    | (6.81)  |
| Distance to District Border (10 km)       | -0.01             | (0.07) | -0.06    | (0.07) | 0.06*    | (0.03)      | -0.15    | (0.16) | -0.08    | (0.29)  |
| Distance to Stuttgart (10 km)             | -0.13             | (0.10) | 0.14*    | (0.08) | 0.03     | (0.04)      | 0.37*    | (0.19) | -0.45    | (0.39)  |
| Distance to Karlsruhe (10 km)             | 0.09              | (0.12) | -0.10    | (0.13) | -0.12*   | (0.07)      | -0.42    | (0.31) | 0.28     | (0.66)  |
| Distance to Mannheim (10 km)              | 0.01              | (0.11) | 0.14     | (0.15) | 0.10     | (0.08)      | -0.29    | (0.28) | -0.52    | (0.78)  |
| Population 1950 (ln)                      | 0.27              | (0.30) | 0.25     | (0.27) | 0.32*    | (0.17)      | -1.47**  | (0.74) | 3.16**   | (1.33)  |
| Male Population (%)                       | 1.95              | (2.66) | 1.79     | (3.48) | 1.42     | (1.61)      | 3.02     | (7.40) | -9.74    | (15.44) |
| Protestant 1950 (%)                       | 0.04              | (0.32) | -0.36    | (0.38) | -0.13    | (0.18)      | 0.86     | (1.03) | -1.11    | (1.60)  |
| Refugees 1950 (%)                         | 1.61**            | (0.78) | -1.64**  | (0.75) | 0.09     | (0.44)      | 2.61     | (1.84) | -2.15    | (3.44)  |
| Industrial Employment 1950 (%)            | 0.13              | (0.56) | -1.06    | (1.57) | -0.44    | (0.32)      | -0.50    | (2.01) | -0.37    | (2.83)  |
| Worker Share 1950 (%)                     | -0.75             | (1.29) | 1.23     | (2.75) | -0.69    | (0.74)      | 1.93     | (4.59) | 4.09     | (6.51)  |
| Firms Dismantled                          | -0.10             | (0.10) | 0.01     | (0.11) | -0.13**  | (0.05)      | -0.10    | (0.10) | -0.23    | (0.23)  |
| Share Internees (std.)                    | -0.03             | (0.03) | -0.06*   | (0.04) | -0.02    | (0.02)      | 0.19**   | (0.09) | -0.22    | (0.18)  |
| City Indicator                            | 0.03              | (0.10) | -0.24**  | (0.11) | -0.07    | (0.06)      | 0.27     | (0.23) | -0.36    | (0.47)  |
| Population 2017 (ln)                      | -0.04             | (0.26) | -0.42*   | (0.25) | -0.22    | (0.16)      | 1.10     | (0.74) | -4.68*** | (1.32)  |
| Protestants 2011 (%)                      | -0.78             | (0.58) | -0.67    | (0.79) | -0.53    | (0.42)      | 2.68     | (1.94) | -8.69**  | (3.55)  |
| Foreigners 2011 (%)                       | 0.94              | (1.72) | 0.54     | (2.00) | -0.85    | (1.07)      | 0.07     | (4.39) | -11.13   | (9.34)  |
| Unemployment Share (Std.)                 | -0.03             | (0.07) | -0.14*   | (0.08) | -0.02    | (0.04)      | 1.03***  | (0.19) | -1.42*** | (0.35)  |
| Population Growth 1950-2017 (%)           | 0.08              | (0.11) | 0.15*    | (0.09) | 0.08     | (0.06)      | -0.43*   | (0.25) | 0.93*    | (0.48)  |
| <i>B. IV First Stage</i>                  |                   |        |          |        |          |             |          |        |          |         |
| Distance to District Court (km)           | -0.03***          | (0.01) | -0.03*** | (0.01) | -0.03*** | (0.01)      | -0.03*** | (0.01) | -0.03*** | (0.01)  |
| F-Statistic                               | 10.24             |        | 10.24    |        | 10.24    |             | 11.88    |        | 12.17    |         |
| Observations                              | 516               |        | 516      |        | 516      |             | 4644     |        | 1548     |         |
| District FE                               | Yes               |        | Yes      |        | Yes      |             | Yes      |        | Yes      |         |
| Election FE                               | -                 |        | -        |        | Yes      |             | Yes      |        | Yes      |         |
| Geographic Controls                       | Yes               |        | Yes      |        | Yes      |             | Yes      |        | Yes      |         |
| Controls 1950                             | Yes               |        | Yes      |        | Yes      |             | Yes      |        | Yes      |         |
| Controls 2010                             | Yes               |        | Yes      |        | Yes      |             | Yes      |        | Yes      |         |

This table presents IV estimates examining differences in collective memory and contemporary voting behavior between neighboring municipalities within districts within the US occupation zone and reports coefficients on all covariates. Outcomes are reported by columns: (1) the number of militarist street names, (2) victim street names, (3) Holocaust memorials, (4) AfD Vote Share 2013-2021, (5) Turnout in European Parliament Elections 1979-2019.

## C.7 Contemporary Differences across Borders

Table C6: Contemporary Differences across Occupation Zone and District Borders

|                                 | (1)                       | (2)    | (3) | (4)   | (5)   | (6)                      | (7)    | (8) | (9)   | (10)  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------|-----|-------|-------|--------------------------|--------|-----|-------|-------|
|                                 | A. Occupation Zone Border |        |     |       |       | B. Court District Border |        |     |       |       |
|                                 | $\beta_H$                 | SE     | BW  | $N_L$ | $N_H$ | $\beta_H$                | SE     | BW  | $N_L$ | $N_H$ |
| <i>Contemporary</i>             |                           |        |     |       |       |                          |        |     |       |       |
| Population 2017 (ln)            | -.123                     | (.246) | 30  | 187   | 214   | -.167                    | (.14)  | 21  | 402   | 447   |
| Protestants 2011 (%)            | -.003                     | (.082) | 35  | 213   | 239   | -.022                    | (.026) | 23  | 455   | 502   |
| Foreigners 2011 (%)             | -.001                     | (.009) | 29  | 180   | 206   | -.002                    | (.003) | 20  | 391   | 428   |
| Unemployment 2017 (%)           | .000                      | (.001) | 28  | 178   | 201   | -.001                    | (.001) | 29  | 606   | 657   |
| Population Growth 1950–2017 (%) | .153                      | (.189) | 26  | 166   | 189   | -.03                     | (.117) | 22  | 435   | 478   |

This table presents regression discontinuity estimates examining political and economic differences between municipalities today. Columns 1-5 examine neighboring municipalities across the French-American occupation zone border. Columns 6-10 examine neighboring municipalities across high and low denazification court district borders in the US occupation zone controlling for district  $\times$  district fixed effects; observations are sampled with replacement. Columns 1 and 6 show the estimates on an indicator for “High Denazification” municipalities. Columns 2 and 7 display standard errors. Columns 3 and 8 show the optimal bandwidth in kilometers. Columns 4-5 and 9-10 provide the number of observations around the cutoff. Rows are organized by outcomes. MSE-optimal bandwidths and bias-corrected estimates are implemented following [Calonico et al. \(2017\)](#). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district-level.

## D History

This appendix provides further discussion on: (1) denazification, (2) occupation zone borders, and (3) popular forms of nationalism in early postwar politics, and (4) other differences across occupation zones.

### D.1 Denazification

From 1945 to 1949, German denazification courts processed around 14 million denazification case files ([Leßau 2020](#)). Initially, the Allied Control Council set forth a denazification directive:

“All members of the Nazi Party who have been more than nominal participants in its activities and all other persons hostile to Allied purposes shall be removed from public and semi-public office, and positions of responsibility in important private undertakings. Such persons shall be replaced by persons who, by their political and moral qualities, are deemed capable of assisting in developing genuine democratic institutions in Germany. [...] German

Table D1: Denazification in the Occupation Zones

|                                        | US Zone    | French Zone | British Zone | Soviet Zone |
|----------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Population                             | 16,779,600 | 5,879,000   | 21,886,900   | 17,180,400  |
| Interned                               | 95,250     | 18,963      | 68,500       | 67,197      |
| of which released by 1947              | 44,244     | 8,040       | 34,000       | 7,214       |
| Convicted as part of Nazi Organization | 144,139    | 17,033      | 19,000       | 18,061      |
| Questionnaires completed               | 13,500,000 | 669,068     | 2,144,000    | -           |
| Sentenced by Spruchkammern             | 950,126    | 669,068     | 2,041,454    | -           |
| Category I: Major Offenders            | 1,654      | 13          | -            | -           |
| Category II: Offenders                 | 22,122     | 938         | -            | -           |
| Category III: Lesser Offenders         | 106,422    | 16,826      | 27,177       | -           |
| Category IV: Followers                 | 485,057    | 298,789     | 222,028      | -           |
| Category V: Exonerated                 | 18,454     | 3,489       | 1,191,930    | -           |
| Cases dropped                          | 316,417    | 349,013     | 600,319      | -           |

Table D1 summarizes aggregate statistics on internment and denazification across the Allied occupation zones. The first row reports the population of each respective zone. The following three variables describe the initial arrest phase, while the subsequent set reflects outcomes during the denazification process. Population figures for 1946 are drawn from the *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (1952). Figures on internment are sourced from Vollnhals (1991, p. 164f); the British figure is an estimate by Wember (1992, p. 367). Data on denazification court charges and classifications are from Vollnhals (1991, p. 228), noting that British figures pool the first three categories and cover only cases after February 1947. Figures on questionnaires derive from Judt (2005); there is no corresponding figure for the Soviet zone, although estimates suggest that 850,000 former NSDAP members were registered and examined by Soviet authorities.

education shall be so controlled as to completely eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas.”

The actual implementation of denazification, however, varied across and within Allied occupation zones. In this subsection, I provide more detail on the major differences in denazification and related policies across Allied occupation zones. Table D1 displays aggregate statistics on initial internment and denazification across occupation zones.

### D.1.1 Denazification in the US Occupation Zone

The American denazification program was by far the most comprehensive in scope (Cohen 2006, p. 9). Initially, a highly punitive policy was envisioned (Biddiscombe 2007, p. 30f; Bloxham 2004, p. 27). The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) established automatic arrest categories for high-ranking Nazi cadres, extending from national

to local group leaders and encompassing a wide range of organizational affiliations, including the SA, SS, SD, Gestapo, Hitler Youth, Peasant's League, Labor Front, and Nazi Party members who joined before 1933 ([Ziemke 1975](#), p. 379). By 1947, the US military held 95,250 suspects in internment camps and sentenced 144,139 individuals as members of criminal organizations. [Frei \(2002, p. 207\)](#) observes that internment influenced public support for denazification: “[t]he fewer the number of war criminals sitting in Allied prisons, the more uncompromising the solidarity being expressed for them.”

The entire adult population of the US zone was subjected to a political questionnaire (*Frage- und Meldebogen*). Completion rates were high, as responses determined prosecution, employment restrictions, and access to food rations ([Olick 2005](#), p. 125). While instrumental for screening, the questionnaire also “forced all respondents to reflect on their Nazi past; to reconsider their relationship with the regime and to rewrite their personal history” ([Dack 2016](#), p. 286).

Court trials in the US zone were initially comparatively punitive. Of the 950,126 cases initially sentenced by the denazification courts, 13.7 percent were classified in the three highest offender categories. By contrast, in the French zone, the corresponding share was 2.7 percent. Per 100,000 inhabitants, the US zone classified 45 times as many individuals as major offenders, 8 times as many as offenders, and twice as many as lesser offenders, while categorizing half as many as followers and dismissing cases three times less frequently. This harsher sentencing partly reflected a reversal of the burden of proof, whereby defendants had to demonstrate their innocence ([Vollnhals 1991](#), pp. 40ff). As a result, punishment sometimes proved harsher for rank-and-file members than for major perpetrators ([Herz 1948](#)).

Initial public support for denazification in the US zone soon eroded. In US-occupied territories, support declined from 57 percent in 1946 to 17 percent by 1949 ([Mohr, Voigtländer, and Voth 2019](#)). [Capoccia and Pop-Eleches \(2020\)](#) suggest that perceived unfairness provoked a backlash.<sup>38</sup> In 1946, Konrad Adenauer, later the first Chancellor

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<sup>38</sup>[Leßau \(2020, pp. 436ff\)](#) cautions that survey responses may not accurately reflect the consequences of denazification. Theodor Adorno, for instance, argued that “the indignation about denazification has relatively little to do with the matter at hand, but a lot to do with the political and social ideology, the psychological makeup of the respondents.” According to Adorno, expressions of opposition to denazification may have been exaggerated and driven more by group conformity than genuine conviction. Furthermore, individuals undergoing denazification naturally had an incentive to respond negatively when asked to evaluate the process.

of the Federal Republic, called for those categorized as Nazi followers to be left in peace. Adenauer argued that “confronting Germans with the crimes of the Nazis—whether in trials, tribunals or reeducation projects—was more likely to provoke a nationalist backlash than induce contrition” (Judt 2005, p. 55f).

Despite initial differences in case classifications, most suspects were eventually not punished. By March 1946, large parts of the judicial denazification process had been transferred to German courts, though military supervision continued. During this period, many individuals initially placed in higher offender categories and subjected to employment restrictions were reclassified into lower categories. Moreover, the amnesty laws of 1949 and 1954 cleared charges against a large proportion of those previously sentenced by German courts. These laws resulted in the removal of denazification tribunal rulings from the criminal records of affected individuals (Herbert 2019, p. 535).

### D.1.2 Denazification in the French Occupation Zone

Denazification was less extensive in the French occupation zone (Biddiscombe 2007; Fürstenau 1969). Initially, weak administrative capacity, internal conflicts between the military administration and the provisional government, competing priorities,<sup>39</sup> and a lack of planning<sup>40</sup> rendered initial attempts at denazification uncoordinated and largely ineffective.

Directly after the war, arresting high-ranking Nazis took priority, but the lack of precise instructions to officers on the ground impeded effective enforcement. By 1947, the French had interned 18,963 individuals and sentenced 17,033 for membership in a criminal organization.

Subsequently, local committees were established as self-cleansing initiatives, gathering information about local Nazis. However, France soon adopted the American legal approach to denazification. Unlike the Americans, France did not extend the denazification process to the entire adult population of its zone, in part because NSDAP membership alone was not considered sufficient grounds for further scrutiny (Cohen 2006, p. 77). The denazification

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<sup>39</sup>France’s priorities were fundamentally shaped by its recent war history. A war-ridden century with neighboring Germany led France to advocate for the fragmentation and decentralization of Germany. Furthermore, the economic disruption caused by the German occupation from 1940 to 1944 resulted in France’s strict insistence on reparation payments and the de-industrialization of the German territories under French occupation (Grohnert 1991; Willis 1962).

<sup>40</sup>In contrast to the British and Americans, the French had few formal plans to fall back on. Between the Yalta Conference, where the French were granted their occupation zone, and the beginning of the military occupation lay a mere six weeks (Henke 2010, p. 56).

questionnaire was distributed more narrowly. Approximately 669,000 questionnaires were completed. Of the 669,000 cases processed by the denazification courts, only 13 were classified as major offenders (the highest offender category), and another 938 as offenders (the second-highest category). In contrast to the US zone, individuals awaiting court decisions did not face provisional employment restrictions (Vollnhals 1991, p. 40f). Overall, the courts in the French occupation zone dropped approximately 350,000 cases.

In consequence, the probability of being confronted with denazification, whether directly or indirectly, was substantially lower in the French zone. Moreover, sentences within the same offender category tended to be harsher in the US-occupied territories. Those judged as followers largely escaped punishment. On a per capita basis, eight times as many cases were considered by denazification courts in the US zone compared to the French zone; forty-five times as many cases were classified under the highest offender category; and eight times as many were placed in the second-highest offender category.

When purges and bans from the public and private sectors were enforced, they focused primarily on the public sector. Per capita, dismissals from public office roughly equaled those in the US zone. Much of this initiative was driven by efforts in Württemberg-Hohenzollern, the western part of the French occupation zone (Fürstenau 1969, p. 141). There, the Social Democratic regional government exercised a degree of autonomy from May 1946 to Spring 1947. A distinguishing feature of the process was its political character: there was no judicial proceeding and no right of appeal (Cohen 2006, p. 80). District committees classified cases, but all decisions required approval by the state commissioner for political cleansing, Otto Künzel, and the French military government.<sup>41</sup> Despite the partial autonomy of Württemberg-Hohenzollern, all decisions ultimately passed through the French military authorities. This special status was short-lived; it was revoked in Spring 1947, and thereafter the judicial-based American procedure was strictly applied across the entire French zone (Cohen 2006, p. 80).

Further complications arose from France's own wartime experience. Years of collaboration between the Vichy regime and Nazi Germany left a legacy of personal ties. Some *collaborateurs* had formed relationships with Germans, and personal bribes and gifts

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<sup>41</sup>Decisions made by local cleansing committees were later translated into American classification schemes (Vollnhals 1991, p. 42).

were widespread, often accepted as “personal reparation payments” to avoid sanctions (Fürstenau 1969, p. 137; Friedmann 1947, p. 29; Cohen 2006, p. 79).

Raymond Schmittlein, Director-General for Cultural Affairs and Public Education in the French occupation zone from 1945 to 1951, later commented on the French approach to denazification: “Le tragique dans cette histoire, c’est que la dénazification n’a rien dénazifié” (cited in Henke 2010, p. 7).

## D.2 Occupation Zone Borders

When the Allies started negotiations over the division of Germany in the spring of 1943, the Western Allies had yet to reach the Atlantic coast, cross the Channel, and overcome the Alps. The first formal proposals set out to divide Germany into three parts: a North-Eastern, a North-Western, and a Southern zone. France, still under German occupation, was absent from these early plans. A joint British-Soviet proposal allocating the South to the United States was quickly countered by an American proposal placing the British in charge of the South (see Figure D1). The United States’ reluctance to assume responsibility for the South-West reflected concerns about being burdened with a war-torn France that, as Roosevelt warned Churchill, “will take a lot of nursing to bring it to the point of walking alone” (telegram of 7 February 1944, cited in Ziemke 1975, p. 118). Roosevelt feared that such an arrangement might entangle the United States with France’s recovery. In contrast, occupying the North-Western zone promised a faster withdrawal through the North Sea. With negotiations in deadlock, it took another year and a handful of disheartened exchanges for a resolution to materialize.

While negotiations over zonal divisions stalled, US troops advanced across France. General Eisenhower soon realized that American forces would enter Germany sooner than anticipated. By September 1944, these facts on the ground compelled the United States to accept the occupation of a Southern zone (Ziemke 1975, p. 124).

By the end of 1944, circumstances had shifted. France had been liberated, was governed by a provisional administration, and was determined to reclaim its status among the Allies (Ziemke 1975, p. 129). At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the three major Allies agreed to de Gaulle’s demand to grant France a seat on the Allied Control Council and to



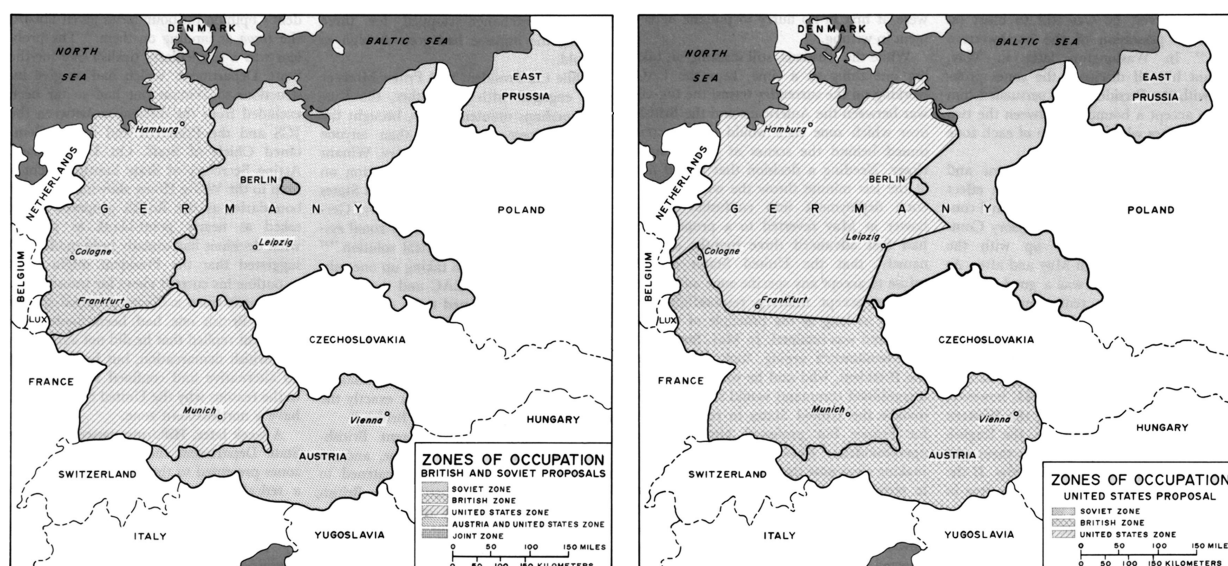


Figure D1: Occupation zones under the joint British-Soviet proposal (left) and the US counter proposal (right) from 1943 (Ziemke 1975, p. 119).

establish a fourth, French occupation zone. Given Stalin's reluctance to cede Soviet territory, the French zone was carved out of British and American allocations. Unlike the demarcations elsewhere, the boundary in the South-West cut directly through the middle of the two states *Baden* and *Württemberg*,<sup>42</sup> as shown in Figure 1.

The border between the French and US zones in Baden and Württemberg was neither preplanned nor aligned with existing or historical boundaries; rather, it was drawn along the A8 highway between Karlsruhe and Ulm (Willis 1962, p. 96). All districts containing the highway were retained by the United States, while districts to the south were assigned to France. The partition of South-West Germany reflected logistical priorities: "The boundary between the French and American zones was to be drawn to leave in the American zone the main highway, or Autobahn, through Ulm-Stuttgart-Karlsruhe, as well as the trunk railroad. Administrative and traditional divisions were disregarded completely. The sole concern was to assure access under American control to the Middle Rhine region and the seaports" (Mosely 1950, p. 600). Despite these arrangements, the French insisted on consolidated control of the entire state of Baden. It was not until July 1945 that France accepted the zone as offered, albeit with a provision for a future review of the boundaries (Ziemke 1975,

<sup>42</sup>British persistence secured a minimal consensus regarding the preservation of the remaining historical state borders. The boundaries between zones were intended to correspond to the existing borders of states and Prussian provinces.



Table D2: Vote Share Correlation between the NSDAP and Postwar Parties

|                       | (1)      | (2)       | (3)    | (4)    | (5)      | (6)      | (7)      |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|----------|
|                       | FPD      | CDU       | SPD    | BHE    | DP       | DRP      | NPD      |
| NSDAP Vote Share 1933 | 0.339*** | -0.285*** | 0.0235 | 0.0109 | 0.214*** | 0.186*** | 0.376*** |
| Observations          | 322      | 322       | 322    | 322    | 322      | 322      | 322      |

This table presents correlation coefficients examining variation between the NSDAP vote share in 1933 and the average vote share of various postwar parties before 1970.

p. 307). No such review ever took place.

### D.3 Nationalism in Early Postwar Politics

Among the major parties, the early postwar Free Democratic Party (FDP) was the most vocal critique of denazification and offered a strong platform for popular forms of nationalistic policies. Alongside the radical right Deutsche Partei (DP) and Deutsche Reichspartei (DRP), the early postwar FDP consistently demanded an end to denazification ([Kiani 2013](#), pp. 227ff). During the 1949 election campaign, FDP posters demanded an end to the “incapacitation” and “deprivation” of rights associated with denazification.<sup>43</sup> In September 1951, the FDP formally called for a general amnesty for “so-called war criminals.” Together with the DP and DRP, FDP members occasionally supported motions aiming to limit denazification or demand general amnesty altogether ([Kiani 2013](#)).

Erich Mende, later leader of the FDP and Vice-Chancellor of Germany, threatened that he and two dozen other parliamentarians would reject the ratification of the EEC and German Treaties unless a large number of war criminals were released ([Leuschner 2005](#), p. 11). On formal occasions, Mende wore the Knight’s Cross, the highest military honor awarded in Nazi Germany. Together with Zoglmann, he later founded the *National-Liberale Aktion*, a nationalist movement aimed at unifying right-wing groups across Germany.

The presence and influence of former Nazis were particularly pronounced within the North Rhine-Westphalian FDP. The faction around Friedrich Middelhauve, deputy party leader from 1952 to 1956, developed a “German Program” intended to transform the FDP into a German-national collective movement ([Leuschner 2005](#), p. 12). Among those involved was

<sup>43</sup>Typography, color scheme, and orthographic choices in the poster suggested an appeal to nationalist voters. The poster employed a black, red, and white color scheme and italicized the “ss” in “Schluss” (end) instead of using the common “ß,” visually evoking the symbolism of the Waffen-SS.

Hans Fritzsche, former chief commentator of Nazi radio and a defendant at the Nuremberg Trials. Shortly thereafter, a network around Werner Naumann, whom Hitler had chosen in his political testament to succeed Goebbels, attempted to capture the FDP in North Rhine-Westphalia. While the core group consisted of approximately 15 individuals, the broader network encompassed over 1,000 supporters (Baldow 2013). In 1953, British authorities intervened and arrested the leading members of the Naumann group (Buchna 2010), although many others associated with the circle remained active within the party (Baldow 2013).

Despite this disruption, the influence of former Nazis within the FDP persisted. Among them was Ernst Achenbach, deputy leader of the FDP's parliamentary group, a former defender of IG Farben at the Nuremberg Trials, and an advocate for a general amnesty for Nazi crimes. His legal assistant was *SS-Obergruppenführer* Werner Best, a senior SS officer and key figure under Reinhard Heydrich. Two central figures in Achenbach's circle within the FDP were Wolfgang Diewerge, personal assistant to Middelhaue, and Heinz Wilke. Wilke had served as a full-time Hitler Youth leader during the Third Reich; Diewerge was a recipient of the "Blood Order," awarded to participants in Hitler's failed coup of 1923 (Görtemaker and Safferling 2016, p. 341). Achenbach remained an FDP member of the Bundestag from 1957 to 1976. Shortly before his death, it emerged that he had participated in the deportation of Jews during his tenure as a German embassy official in Paris (Leuschner 2005, p. 17).

While the FDP/DVP in Baden-Württemberg was considered more liberal in the immediate postwar period, several of its regional chapters in the formerly French-occupied zones exhibited a markedly nationalist orientation. The Southern Württemberg district, led by Eduard Leuze, repeatedly clashed with the more moderate leadership of Northern Württemberg (Adam 1979, p. 230). Leuze, who served as a member of the state parliament until 1972, as Minister of the Economy of Baden-Württemberg (1960–1966), and as a member of the FDP's federal executive committee, rejected the principles of denazification and sought to align the party with the nationalist course advocated by Middelhaue and Euler (Adam 1979, p. 235f). Leuze only stepped down as regional party leader when the FDP's liberal wing gained control in 1969 (Adam 1979, p. 242f).

Among the major parties in the early postwar period, FDP's voters exhibited the strongest demand for nationalist policies. A large survey conducted by American authorities

Table D3: Roll-Call Votes on Denazification across the Border

|                     | All Parties    |                |                   | FDP            |                |                   |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
|                     | (1)<br>FR-Zone | (2)<br>US-Zone | (3)<br>Difference | (4)<br>FR-Zone | (5)<br>US-Zone | (6)<br>Difference |
| Pro-Denazification  | 0.288          | 0.429          | 0.140*            | 0.000          | 0.130          | 0.130*            |
| Anti-Denazification | 0.308          | 0.294          | -0.014            | 0.583          | 0.652          | 0.069             |
| Abstained           | 0.415          | 0.277          | -0.138*           | 0.417          | 0.217          | -0.199            |
| Observations        | 53             | 119            | 172               | 12             | 23             | 35                |

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

in December 1952 found that the FDP attracted a disproportionate share of “Nazi sympathizers.” While only 4 percent of the general population expressed support for a resurgence of National Socialism, approximately 25 percent of FDP voters favored the establishment of a “second Third Reich.” On the question of whether former Nazis should be granted equal opportunities in politics and business, 36 percent of the overall population responded affirmatively, compared to 80 percent among FDP supporters (Leuschner 2005, p. 12).

By the late 1960s, however, the nationalist wing within the party had lost influence. In September 1967, party leader Erich Mende announced that he would step down after the next elections. With the party’s right-wing substantially weakened and the liberal faction gaining control, the FDP repositioned itself to the left and entered into a coalition with the Social Democrats in 1969.<sup>44</sup>

While the party had undergone significant transformation since the 1970s, by the end of the 1980s national-conservative elements regained some influence within the FDP. Among them was Manfred Brunner, former European Commissioner for the Single Market, who maintained contacts with nationalist fraternities, the group around Jörg Haider in the Austrian FPÖ, and right-wing radicals associated with the newspaper “Junge Freiheit.” Brunner later filed a legal challenge at the Federal Constitutional Court, arguing that the Maastricht Treaty undermined German sovereignty (Leuschner 2005, p. 235). Another prominent FDP figure, Alexander von Stahl, defended the right-wing newspaper “Junge

<sup>44</sup>In the 1980s, the “Manifesto of the Market Economy,” authored by Economics Minister Otto Graf Lambsdorff, marked the FDP’s strategic shift toward market-liberal and pro-business policies. The publication deliberately provoked the breakdown of the coalition with the Social Democrats.

Freiheit” before the Constitutional Court.

In 2002, FDP member Jamal Karsli triggered one of the largest debates on anti-Semitism in postwar Germany after condemning the influence of the “Zionistic lobby” in an interview with “Junge Freiheit.” Shortly thereafter, Jürgen Möllemann—Federal Minister for Education (1987–1991), Minister of the Economy (1991–1993), and Vice-Chancellor of Germany in 1992—accused a deputy secretary-general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany of fomenting anti-Semitism through alleged “spitefulness.” Möllemann’s remarks fueled an openly anti-Semitic discourse and coincided with a near threefold increase in anti-Semitic crimes during the final quarter of 2002 compared to the preceding quarter ([Salzborn and Schwietring 2019](#), p. 30).

## E Differences Across Occupation Zones

The first empirical design provides LATE estimates across occupation zones. However, occupation zones differed along multiple policy dimensions. In particular, they varied in their intake of refugees from the East, the extent of industrial dismantling, and education policies. In this section, I discuss the potential influence of these and other occupation zone policies on voting behavior, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

### E.1 Refugees

The military government of the French occupation zone initially did not take in refugees from the East after the war. While the rationale was mainly to minimize a potential fiscal burden, the French also justified their expellee policy on grounds of a potential foreign infiltration of the native population ([Brommer 1985](#), p. 129). In the US zone, in contrast, the average share of refugees in the municipal population was 17.7 percent.

Many refugees voted for the Bloc of Expellees and Deprived of Rights (*Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten*, BHE), a party founded to grant parliamentary representation to expellees. These refugees overwhelmingly originated from the eastern territories of the former German Reich, which had served as electoral strongholds of the Nazi Party before World War II. The BHE provided a political refuge for former Nazi cadres, and its successor party eventually merged into the neo-fascist National Democratic Party (NPD) in 1964. [Menon \(2023\)](#) argues that differences in expellee intake influenced the propensity to vote for the far right: counties that initially received a higher proportion of expellees were more likely to support the radical right in the short, medium, and long term. [Hangartner et al. \(2019\)](#) provide contemporary evidence that refugee arrivals induce a shift to the right. If this result extends to my setting, it would attenuate the finding of a higher nationalist vote in the French occupation zone.

However, it is also conceivable that votes for the FDP and the BHE acted as strategic substitutes for right-leaning voters. In this interpretation, voters across occupation zone borders may have simply chosen different parties within the broader right-leaning spectrum. Accordingly, the observed effect could be partly driven by variation in the share of expellees. While I also detect a positive effect for the BHE in the formerly U.S.-occupied municipalities,

it is important to note the following:

1. The effect for the FDP is already observable in the 1949 federal elections, at a time when the BHE did not yet exist;
2. The magnitude of the effect for the FDP is an order of magnitude larger than that for the BHE;
3. The effect for the BHE vanishes after three election cycles,<sup>45</sup> whereas the effect for the FDP persists;
4. All results presented in the main text are robust to controlling for the share of refugees in 1950. In contrast, conditioning on the share of refugees eliminates the effect for the BHE.<sup>46</sup>

Further, to distribute refugees more equally, the federal government initiated a relocation program (*Umsiedlungsprogramm*). During the early 1950s, over 200,000 refugees were relocated from the former American and British occupation zones to territories formerly occupied by France. By 1961, the difference in the share of refugees across the border had already diminished significantly.

Finally, the remaining two empirical strategies exploit variation within the U.S. zone, holding constant differences in the share of refugees [Schumann \(2014\)](#); [Ciccone and Nimczik \(2022\)](#). Taken together, while refugee arrivals was a social process of major import, the comparisons presented in the main text are unlikely to be solely driven by differences in the number of refugees.

## E.2 Industrial Dismantling

The Allies dismantled industrial firms to extract reparations in kind, demilitarize the German economy, and restitute loot seized during the war. The extent of these reparations, however, differed across occupation zones. Table [E1](#) summarizes differences between the

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<sup>45</sup>This includes the BHE's successor party. In 1961, the BHE merged with the radical right German Party (*Deutsche Partei*) to form the All-German Party (*Gesamtdeutsche Partei*).

<sup>46</sup>I acknowledge that controlling for the refugee share may introduce post-treatment bias. A possible, though equally imperfect, solution is to instrument for the expellee share using the distance to local expellee camps or the availability of usable housing stock immediately after the war.

American and French occupation zones in the state of Baden-Württemberg. In the French-occupied part of Baden-Württemberg, approximately 50 percent more firms were affected by removals compared to the neighboring U.S. zone. The fair value of dismantled machinery in municipalities under French occupation was estimated at 331 million RM (1938 prices), roughly twice the corresponding figure for the U.S.-occupied areas.<sup>47</sup>

|                    | <b>A: Documented</b> |                 | <b>B: Undocumented</b> |                 | <b>C: Demilitarization</b> |                 | <b>D: Restitutions</b> |                 |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
|                    | Firms                | Value RM (mil.) | Firms                  | Value RM (mil.) | Firms                      | Value RM (mil.) | Firms                  | Value RM (mil.) |
| <b>U.S. Zone</b>   | 56                   | 58.953          | 1025                   | 46.696          | 7                          | 7.081           | 872                    | 26.786          |
| <b>French Zone</b> | 1571                 | 209.063         | 966                    | 78.911          | 117                        | 36.553          | 617                    | 6.469           |

Table E1: Industrial Dismantling in Baden-Württemberg

Note: The U.S. Zone includes Württemberg-Baden, while the French Zone Württemberg-Hohenzollern and Südbaden. Values are indicated at their fair value in 1938 RM. Figures are sourced from the official Dismantling Index File [*Reparationskartei*] (HStF F30/2 646). The Dismantling File was created by German authorities after the occupation ended in order to assess and compensate the damage incurred by the removals.

Shortly after the end of the war, the Allies carried out *wild* removals of machinery. These unilateral removals were treated as “war loot” and were not fully counted toward the reparations set by the Allied Control Council. The wild phase ended in June 1946 with the adoption of the “Plan for Reparation,” which initiated a more formal second phase of dismantlement. The first list included about 1,800 firms ([Harmssen 1951](#), p. 28f). To coordinate reparations, the 1945 Potsdam Agreement established the Inter-Allied Reparations Agency (IARA).<sup>48</sup> The second list issued in November 1947 comprised 868 firms: 496 in the British zone, 186 in the U.S. zone, and 236 in the French zone. The dismantling lists provoked widespread unrest, particularly in the Ruhr area (British zone), leading to protests, sabotage, work stoppages, and violent incidents ([Fiereder 1989](#), p. 225). Efforts to limit dismantling culminated in a joint resolution by German state governments, and in August 1948, the government of Württemberg-Hohenzollern resigned in protest under the initiative of the CDU ([Fiereder 1989](#), p. 221). At the federal level, the SPD emerged as the

<sup>47</sup>Firms in the British and Soviet zones experienced even greater losses than those in the French zone, both in per capita and absolute terms. The value of dismantled machinery amounted to 2.6 billion RM in the British zone and approximately 5 billion RM in the Soviet zone.

<sup>48</sup>The IARA’s 1951 balance sheet recorded that Germany had paid USD 502.3 million RM (1938 prices) ([Inter-Allied Reparation Agency 1950](#), p. 539f). However, these figures do not capture the extent of unilateral removals.

principal critic of dismantling among major parties, organizing protests, and campaigning on an anti-dismantling platform during the 1949 federal elections (Tøllefsen 2016, p. 271).

Ciccone and Nimczik (2022) show that there were no significant differences in the number of industrial firms or industrial workers per capita across the French-American occupation zone border in 1950, suggesting that the aggregate economic impact of dismantling on firms and employment was limited.

While industrial dismantling had no detectable effect on aggregate measures of industrial activity by 1950, the direct consequences of the policy may have been psychological. To account for this, I collected information on the official dismantling lists from 1947. The estimates presented in the main text are robust to controlling for the number of dismantled firms.

### E.3 Education

Differences in education policies across the French and U.S. occupation zones may have influenced voting patterns in 1949. Both the United States and France sought to reeducate Germans through educational reform, viewing the Weimar education system as partly responsible for Hitler’s rise.

In all three Western zones, subjects pervaded by Nazi ideology were either banned or suspended early on: biology was stripped of racial theory, history restricted to antiquity, and geography limited to the study of geology (Gehrz 2002, p. 122f). Nazi-era textbooks were banned, leading to shortages: the Americans reprinted Weimar-era textbooks preserved on microfilm, while the French imported and translated textbooks from Switzerland, Luxembourg, and France (Vaillant 1984, p. 207). Nonetheless, all three Western Allies faced severe paper shortages, and “new texts did not appear in any real quantity until 1949” (Gehrz 2002, p. 123f).

Many structural reform plans — such as the introduction of comprehensive schools, extension of primary schooling, abolition of school fees, and elimination of confessional schools —ultimately failed. When responsibility for education was returned to German authorities, no substantial structural changes had been implemented (Braun 2004, p. 176).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>One realized difference was the introduction of French as a foreign language in the French zone, breaking the longstanding primacy of Latin (Benz and Scholz 2009, p. 122). In the U.S. zone, social studies were



In contrast, differences in the denazification of teachers may have had more immediate political effects. At the end of the war, 97 percent of teachers were members of the National Socialist Teachers League, and approximately 23 percent were Nazi Party members ([Jarausch and Arminger 1989](#), p. 199f). Both Americans and French removed teachers associated with the Nazi Party or its auxiliary organizations, pending individual approval for readmission. The U.S. removed two-thirds of all teachers in North-Württemberg ([Vollnhals 1991](#)); by October 1947, of 3,767 dismissed teachers, about one-third remained employed, and 2,500 were still awaiting denazification proceedings ([Braun 2004](#), p. 65). In northern Baden, staffing shortages were even more acute: for 11,000 schools across the U.S. zone, only 42,000 teachers were available. In contrast, in the French zone, only 25 percent of teachers in *Volksschulen* (primary and lower secondary schools) were dismissed ([Ruge-Schatz 1977](#), p. 72f). An analysis of within U.S. zone variation in teacher denazification and its potential effects on political behavior is provided in Section 5.

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introduced to promote democratic thinking, although curricular content was largely left to individual teachers ([Braun 2004](#), p. 176ff). These reforms, implemented relatively late, suggest education policy differences are unlikely to explain voting behavior in 1949.

## F Framework

This section sketches a framework of social-norm dynamics under policy intervention. Society must coordinate on a common norm. A policymaker may incur a cost to render the desired norm focal (*descriptive norm*) and define past actions that conflict with it (*prescriptive norm*). Without this investment, private beliefs remain diffuse and the coordination problem persists. In one possible equilibrium, a broad yet lenient intervention dispels pluralistic ignorance and lowers image concerns, thereby facilitating the transition to the new norm.

### Population, Types, and Actions

A continuum of agents of mass one is indexed by  $i \in [0, 1]$ . Each agent possesses a private scalar of past actions incongruent with the new norm

$$\theta_i \in [0, 1],$$

where higher  $\theta$  denotes greater incongruence.<sup>50</sup>

Agents choose  $a_i \in \{A, B\}$ , where  $A$  denotes adopting the new norm. Let  $p$  denote the share choosing  $A$ .

**Payoffs.** Adopting yields a coordination gain  $\beta > 0$  but incurs a type-dependent dissonance cost  $c(\theta)$ , with  $c : [0, 1] \rightarrow R_+$  strictly increasing. Revealed incongruent agents suffer stigma  $\sigma > 0$ .

Thus:

$$\begin{aligned} U_{\text{unrev.}}(A|\theta) &= \beta p - c(\theta), & U_{\text{unrev.}}(B|\theta) &= \beta(1 - p), \\ U_{\text{rev.}}(A|\theta) &= \beta p - c(\theta) - \sigma, & U_{\text{rev.}}(B|\theta) &= \beta(1 - p) - \sigma. \end{aligned}$$

### Policy

The policymaker receives a signal about  $F_0(\hat{\theta}; \mu_0, \sigma_0^2)$  over the distribution of incongruence in the population, characterized by mean  $\mu_0$  and variance  $\sigma_0^2$ . The policymaker chooses  $(e, \tau) \in [0, 1]^2$ :

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<sup>50</sup>Types are i.i.d. with continuously differentiable c.d.f.  $F$  and density  $f > 0$  on  $[0, 1]$ .

- **Breadth**  $e$ : fraction of population investigated, raising public attention and shifting beliefs about norm prevalence.<sup>51</sup>
- **Threshold**  $\tau$ : Among the investigated population, an agent is publicly labelled *incongruent* iff  $\theta_i \geq \tau$ . Revelation is therefore deterministic given  $(\theta_i, \tau)$ , producing the two binary revealed types congruent ( $\theta < \tau$ ) and incongruent ( $\theta \geq \tau$ ).

The probability of revelation is

$$\Pr[\text{revealed}] = e(1 - F(\tau)).$$

Public investment costs  $K(e, \tau)$ , increasing in  $e$  and decreasing in strictness  $1 - \tau$ . A policy is non-credible if  $\tau > \bar{\tau}(e)$ , where  $\bar{\tau}$  captures maximal credibility for given  $e$ .

## Timing

1. The authority commits to  $(e, \tau)$  and pays  $K(e, \tau)$ .
2. Agents observe  $(e, \tau)$ , learn their revelation status, and choose  $a_i \in \{A, B\}$ .
3. Payoffs are realized.

## Strategies and Beliefs

A pure strategy is a map  $s : [0, 1] \rightarrow \{A, B\}$ . Define the payoff difference

$$\Delta(\theta, p) = U(A|\theta) - U(B|\theta) = \beta(2p - 1) - c(\theta).$$

Given  $c'(\theta) > 0$ , optimal strategies are cutoff rules:

$$s^*(\theta; p) = \begin{cases} A & \text{if } \theta \leq \theta^*(p) := c^{-1}(\beta(2p - 1)), \\ B & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Thus the aggregate adoption rate is  $\Phi(p) = F(\theta^*(p))$ .

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<sup>51</sup>A measure  $e$  of agents is randomly investigated and thereby all agents receives a *positive signal* equal to  $e$  that the authority invested in the new state. Equivalently,  $e$  can be thought of the breadth with which the message is spread.

## Equilibrium without Policy

**Lemma 1 (Fixed Points).** Suppose

$$\beta > c(0) \quad \text{and} \quad c(1) > \beta. \quad (\text{A1})$$

Then  $\Phi$  is continuous, strictly increasing, and admits exactly two fixed points  $0 < p_L < \frac{1}{2} < p_H < 1$ .

Condition (A1) ensures both pessimistic ( $p_L$ ) and optimistic ( $p_H$ ) coordination equilibria, reflecting pluralistic ignorance: absent credible signals, agents underestimate support for the new norm, sustaining low adoption ([Bénabou and Tirole 2024](#)).

## Policy as a Coordination Device

Public investment does not alter  $\Delta(\theta, p)$  but creates common higher-order beliefs.

## Broad–Lenient Equilibrium

Define

$$\theta^\dagger := c^{-1}(\beta), \quad \tau^* := \max\{\theta^\dagger, 0\}.$$

By (A1),  $\tau^* \in (0, 1)$ .

**Proposition 1.** Fix  $e \geq \bar{e}$  satisfying  $K(\bar{e}, \bar{\tau}(\bar{e})) \leq \kappa$  (authority’s budget). Choose

$$\tau = \bar{\tau}(e) - \varepsilon, \quad \varepsilon \in (0, \bar{\tau}(e) - \tau^*).$$

Then:

1.  $(e, \tau)$  is feasible, credible, and minimizes  $K$  among credible policies at  $e$ .
2. Under the risk-dominance refinement, the unique equilibrium adoption rate is  $p_H$ .
3.  $p_H \geq F(\tau) > \frac{1}{2}$ ; a positive measure of previously incongruent agents adopt.

**Proof.** Credibility holds since  $\tau < \bar{\tau}(e)$ .  $K$  is minimized as  $K$  is decreasing in  $1 - \tau$ . Credibility ensures coordination on  $p_H$ . Agents with  $\theta \leq \tau$  strictly prefer  $A$  at  $p_H$ , implying  $p_H \geq F(\tau) > \frac{1}{2}$ .

## Comparative Statics

- **Leniency.** Increasing  $\tau$  (holding  $e$  fixed) weakly reduces  $K$  and expands  $F(\tau)$  until credibility binds.
- **Breadth.** Raising  $e$  enlarges the maximal credible  $\tau$ , permitting greater leniency; the authority optimally chooses the maximal affordable  $e$  and most lenient credible  $\tau$ .

**Interpretation.** Broader disclosure elevates the perceived baseline of norm compliance, while leniency softens stigma and preserves participation, consistent with [Bénabou and Tirole \(2024\)](#) and findings on expressive law interventions ([Bursztyn, González, and Yanagizawa-Drott 2020](#); [Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2020b](#)).

## Testable Implications

The model isolates a simple mechanism: when credibility is preserved, *breadth* generates common knowledge while *leniency* widens the set of compatible pasts. However, to preserve credibility, some punishment must be maintained, implying that affected groups may exhibit backlash, a prediction supported by empirical evidence ([Mohr, Voigtländer, and Voth 2019](#); [Capoccia and Pop-Eleches 2020](#)).

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