

The Behaviour of Political Parties and MPs in the Parliaments of the Weimar Republic

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Abstract

Analysing the roll call votes of the MPs of the Weimar republic we find that 1) party competition in the Weimar parliaments can be structured on two dimensions: a left-right and a pro-/anti-democratic dimension. Remarkably, this is stable throughout the entire lifespan of the Republic and not only in the later years and despite the varying content of the votes across the lifespan of the Republic 2) that the nearly all parties were troubled by intra-party divisions, though especially the national socialists and the communists became homogenous in the last years of the Republic.

Keywords

Parliament – Party positions – Weimar – Dimensionality – Roll Call votes

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Introduction

The interest in the Weimar republic has been large by both scholars in economics (e.g. Myerson 2004; van Riel & Schram 1993), history (e.g. Jones 1972, 2009; Schönhoven 2002) and political science (e.g. Berg-Schlosser 1995; Berman 1997; Lehmann 2009; Lieberman 1998; Loewenberg 1971). The studies have covered a wide range of topics from the elections, the political culture, and the rise of national socialism to the various reasons that lead to the demise of the republic. One part of the Weimar republic is however, less studied: the parliament of the Weimar republic – the Reichstag. Specifically, how the elected representatives voted and how the voting patterns can help identify shifts in policies and intra-party conflict.

In this paper we ask to how the party competition in the parliament was structured and how the main parties of the Weimar republic dealt with this, especially in terms of intra-party politics. In order to answer this question we analyze roll call votes cast during the Weimar parliaments by using ideal point estimation. From this analysis we are not only able to see where the parties were positioned in relation to one another, but also to address the various fluctuations among the parties, to analyze which dimensions were relevant for the party competition during the Weimar years and to discuss the dynamics of intra-party politics among the major parties of the era.

Our results show several interesting factors. First, two dimensions were in play in parliament. This is an ideological left-right dimension and, more importantly, a pro vs. anti-Weimar republic dimension. We argue that this second dimension was salient for too many parties for the republic to be viable in the long run. The fall of the republic was influenced by the anti-republican forces of both left and right, whereas the importance and influence of the pro-republican parties dropped markedly over the few years the republic existed. This is corroborated by Jones (1972) who argues that the bourgeois politics fragmented over the years of the Weimar Republic. Secondly, we find that this was not limited to the later years of the Republic, as argued by Loewenberg (1971), but can be found throughout the entire short lifetime of the Republic. Thirdly, we find that the two-dimensional solution was stable despite large variation in the content of votes, making the Weimar Republic different to other democracies collapsing at the same period. Finally, we argue that intra-party conflict was evident for many parties on both dimensions.

The Weimar republic and its parties

From its creation the Weimar republic was haunted by a large degree of instability which in the end helped its demise. This instability was based on several factors. One of them being the fragmentation of the parliament in several smaller parties which comes natural from a proportional electoral system (Duverger 1954). However, this was not the only reason as a fragmented parliament was also found in other countries in the period between WW1 and WW2, for example the Netherlands (Berg-Schlosser 1995). What was even more important was the fact that the parties on the right, National Conservatives (DNVP) and National Socialists (NSDAP), and on the left, Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and Communists (KPD), belonged to the group of the largest parties between 1920 and 1932. These parties did not accept the 1919 constitution and wanted it replaced with a different system. The remaining parties – Social Democrats (SPD), the Catholic ‘Zentrum’ (Centre Party) and the left-liberal Democratic Party (DDP) – had been the guardians of the parliamentary democracy which was in place from 1919-1933.¹ The vast differences was also seen by the fact the Republic had a vast number of changing governments during its brief existence.

External factors also had a great deal of influence on the instability. From the outset the Republic was dealt a poor hand, as the shifting coalitions had to deal with the problems stemming from the First World War and especially the peace negotiations (Kolb 2002:1-10; Schönhoven 2002). While the Social Democrats, the Centre Party and DDP all favored and supported the negotiated peace, they were faced with the task of implementing the dictates of the Allied victors. In the Versailles treaty Germany was not only asked to pay a substantial financial amount as penalty for the war, but also to reduce its military forces substantially and of course also deal with the loss of parts of what used to be German territory. Also the often occurring coup attempts by right wing forces as well as the inflation and the occupation of the Ruhr-area by French and Belgian troops had a destabilizing influence on the Weimar republic.

The party system of the Weimar Republic

¹ Note that since 1930 the president of the Weimar Republic installed the government by ignoring the preferences of the parliamentary groups in the Reichstag.

In German society there are historically two distinct societal cleavages in play; one between the state and the Catholic Church and one between worker and capital (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). The former came to prominence in the cultural battle of the 1870es and 1880es in the early days of the German State, and it resulted in the formation of the Centre Party to represent the interests of Roman-Catholics in Germany. The latter was the conflict between employer and employee which saw especially the development of the Social Democratic party and later the Communist Party. A general overview of the major parties of the Weimar republic on that we restrict our analysis can be found in table 1.

Following socio-historical approaches on the German society and the party system in the late 19th and the early 20th century, four to five social groups or so-called 'milieus' can be identified that have a special relationship towards the major parties (Peukert 1987: 149-161; Lepsius 1993). These milieus and thus the parties belonging to them can be divided into two categories; the individually oriented milieu and the organizational milieu (Pyta 1997: 208-213). Inside the person-centered milieus, we can differentiate between a bourgeois-urban one and an agrarian-rural one. Two liberal parties represented the bourgeois-urban societal milieu. This is, first, the more right-wing orientated German Peoples Party (DVP) and, secondly, the more left-wing Democratic Party (DDP), which renamed itself into German State Party in 1930 ('Deutsche Staatspartei', DStP). Members of the DVP and DDP in particular were represented in almost every cabinet during the Weimar Republic. As the scores of the Rice index, which measures the cohesion within a parliamentary group and can range between zero (stand-off inside a group) and one (complete internal consensus; see Rice 1925), shows, the scores of both liberal parties are by trend smaller compared to the other main parties represented in parliament. The latter is typical for liberal parties, which are often described as weakly organized (e.g., Katz & Mair 1995).² The agrarian-rural milieu was mostly represented by the national-conservative DNVP, which favored the reintroduction of the monarchy and an autocratic political system. The importance of the liberal parties dropped markedly during the Weimar years, in the first election in 1919 they won 23 percent of the votes, but only 2 percent in the last election in March

² We refer to the data used in this article to calculate the cohesion of parliamentary parties in the Weimar Republic. The data is described in the subsequent sections of this paper in more detail. For a more in-depth analysis of the cohesion of all party groups represented in the Reichstag see Markmann (1955).

1933 (Kolb 2002: 308-309). Also the DNVP had losses from around 20 percent in 1924 to between 6 and 8 percent in the elections from 1930-1933. However, it should be noted that the DNVP made a substantial move in its policy during these years. Between 1925 and 1928 the party moved from being one of the right-wing to a more widely accepted conservative party. Yet, in 1928 the move was reversed with the election of Alfred Hugenberg as party leader and cooperation with the NSDAP began, for instance in the referenda concerning the Young-agreement in 1929 and in general in opposition to the republic (Schulze 1998: 310-312; Kolb 2002: 122; Mergel 2005: 411-412).³ As the scores of the Rice index show, in the legislative period from 1928 until 1930 the cohesion among the DNVP MPs was quite low, which reflects conflicts inside this party during the second half of the 1920s. According to Longerich (1995: 189-190), there is evidence that at the end of the 19th century a right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic and nationalist milieu arose. In accordance with the decline of the agrarian-rural milieu, the right-wing extremist and nationalist one formed the basis for the electoral success of the NSDAP, which is since 1928 one of the most strongly cohesive parties represented in the Reichstag.

The socialist and the Catholic milieus are, by contrast, characterized by a strong organizational background. The infrastructure and network of Labor unions and of the Roman-Catholic church provided the foundation of the success of the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party, respectively. One would therefore expect a high degree of internal cohesion, which, however, is the case for the parliamentary groups of Social Democrats and the Communists only. The SPD, however, split in 1917 into the Social Democrats and the Independent Social Democrats (USPD). The left-wing of the latter joined the newly founded KPD in 1920 and thus, also the left wing had its strong anti-republic party. The remaining part of the USPD returned mostly to the Social Democrats in 1923. Likewise to the situation in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949, the Catholic milieu had its special Bavarian party. In favor of the 'Bavarian Peoples Party' (BVP), the Centre Party did not run for elections in Bavaria. In contrast to the Centre Party, which participated in every coalition government in the era of the Weimar Republic from 1919 until 1932, the BVP was more skeptical towards the Weimar Republic and dissolved the common parliamentary club with the Centre Party

³ The moderate wing, lead by the former party leader, Count Westarp, left the party to form the 'Conservative Peoples Party' (KVP, see also Jones 2009).

already in 1920. In addition, during the 1925 presidential election the BVP did not support the Centre Party candidate Wilhelm Marx, but rather the candidate of the right wing and monarchist Paul von Hindenburg (Schönhoven 1972).

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Analyzing the Dimensionality of Parliaments

The question of the dimensionality of a political system is far from trivial. Unidimensionality is theorized to be stable and multidimensionality to be chaotic (McLean 2006: 153-154). Theoretically, it is possible that a large number of dimensions exist in any political space. Empirically, it is another story. The fact is that unidimensionality is dominant in most of the studies of comparative politics. The concept of left-right has dominated politics since before the French revolution and its importance has become even larger ever since the dominance of spatial analysis in comparative politics starting with Downs (1957). Nagel (2006) presents two theoretical considerations why unidimensionality is so predominant; it is either due to the fact that with the left-right we can explain a large part of the variation and hence, the need for more dimensions does not exist. Or it could be due to a normative wish of achieving majority rule, which unidimensionality helps as the median voter will be the Condorcet winner. Robertson (2006) follows some of the same argumentation and concludes that politics is unidimensional and that the only dimension may well be called left and right.

The last decades have seen a dramatic increase in work determining the dimensionality of political space and estimating the positions of the political actors in such a space using some form of roll call votes as data. While these studies on the one hand show strong first dimensions there are empirical examples from around the world that legislatures can be multidimensional. It was the introduction of the NOMINATE approach (Poole & Rosenthal 1997) which was the influential factor in the vast quantity of studies of the roll call votes of the U.S. Congress. It was followed by works such as Voeten (2000) on the UN, Hix (2001) on the European Parliament, Schonhardt-Bailey (2003) on the UK House of Commons in the mid-19th century, and Morgenstern (2004) on Latin American democracies. Other methods have also appeared, for instance the Optimal Classification procedure (e.g. Rosenthal & Voeten 2004; Hansen 2008). In

recent years, however, studies by Rosenthal & Voeten (2004) on the French fourth republic, Schonhardt-Bailey (2003) on the House of Commons 1841-47, and Spirling & McLean (2006; 2007) on the modern House of Commons have used NOMINATE or Optimal Classification. Studies on the voting behavior of members of the European Parliament are also becoming increasingly common (e.g. Hix 2001; Hix, Noury & Roland 2006).

Comparative research in the dimensionality of parliaments has shown that it is often a government-opposition dimension and not a left-right conflict which is the primary dimension (Hix & Noury 2008). This is due to the specific institutional features of parliamentary systems where it is the norm that the government controls the agenda and the opposition react to the proposal put forward by the government making it a question of whether you are with or against the government that determines how you vote as an MP. The left-right dimension does however, come out as a second dimension in most of the studied parliaments (Hix & Noury 2008). Even in non-parliamentary system like the US two dimensions do occur, albeit infrequently. Poole & Rosenthal (1997) have shown that the US Congress is heavily dominated by one dimension; a liberal-conservative, though in some periods also a second dimension which can be labeled progressive-conservative, which from around 1945-1960 was a question of civil rights. For the European Parliament it has been shown that the primary dimension is left-right but a second dimension on EU-integration can also be found, which given the particularities of the European Parliament perhaps is not surprising (Hix 2002; Hix, Noury & Roland 2006).

As the Weimar republic was a parliamentary system we would expect to find two dimensions; a government-opposition dimension as the first and a left-right dimension as the second. If this is the finding then the Weimar parliaments were "normal" parliaments compared to other across time. However, if this is not the case there is another expectation that we can have; due to the specific features of the parties competing during the Weimar years we know that two distinct groups exist; the pro-republic parties and the anti-republic parties. Hence, in case a government-opposition dimension and a left-right can not be found we might expect that what occurs instead is a pro-/anti-republic dimension.

Operationalisation and data

In the Weimar parliaments a roll call vote could be called following §105 of the Standing Order of the parliament when at least 50 attending members requested this (Markmann 1955: 22). Because the number of MPs increased from 459 in the first legislative period, which lasted from 1920-1924, up to 577 in 1930 and reached a number of 608 in July 1932, it should become easier for MPs to get the required support for calling a recorded vote: while in 1920 almost 11% of the Reichstag members had to ask for a roll-call vote, the share of required MPs decreased significantly over time. In addition, in only a few cases § 106 of the Standing Order of the Reichstag prohibited recorded votes. Roll call votes were not allowed in case of some procedural aspects like questions on the number of members of a committee or the length, agenda and postponement of a session. Thus, the Standing Order of the Reichstag provided rather small obstacles to stop requests for calling a recorded vote.⁴ The problem of selection bias in roll call voting as argued by Carrubba et al. (2006) and Hug (2009) is hence, a minor issue for the analysis of roll call votes in the Weimar Republic. The Rice index also suggests that while

For the analysis we created a dataset of all roll call votes from 1920-1933 on the basis of the Reichstag protocols.⁵ However, due to the frequent elections in the Weimar years we can not include all parliaments in our analysis. For four elections the number of roll call votes cast before the next election is so small that it is not feasible to perform any form of analysis of these. An overview of which data has been included and which has been excluded can be found in table 2 below.

--- TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE ---

For estimating the ideal points of the MPs we rely on the Bayesian item response theory model for ideal point estimation used by Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004). The model is estimated by using the PSCL routine for R authored by Jackman (2006). We do not estimate a pooled model but four separate models; one for each period. With the

⁴ Likewise to other cases, there is no information on the number of all votes – recorded and non-recorded – in the Reichstag (see, e.g., Saalfeld 1995; Sieberer 2006). We are therefore not able to estimate the share of recorded votes on all votes conducted in the parliament of the Weimar Republic.

⁵ The protocols are electronically available from <http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/rtbiiiauf.html>. For replication purposes the dataset can be requested from the authors.

information presented in Table 2 combined with the often changing governments there is an overall problem for estimating the ideal points and hence determining the dimensionality. It would be preferable if the government composition was constant in the period for which the ideal points are estimated. However, this is not feasible as we will then end up with more periods with few votes, instead of as it now stands four periods were it is feasible to estimate the ideal points. We estimate the ideal points for the four periods separately, which in turn means that it is possible to determine and discuss the dimensionality of each period. Another reason for estimating the ideal points separately and not in a pooled version is the variation in the content of the votes. In Table 3 we present the content coded by five a priori selected categories. The most voluminous category in all four period is votes on economic issues. This is what would be expected for the Weimar Republic which was troubled by economic crisis for much of its lifetime. While the content share related to economic matters is stable there is much variation in the other four categories. Interior affairs accounts for over 40 per cent of the votes in the 1920-24 parliament, but only 15 per cent in the following one. Procedural issues and votes of confidence are barely 3 per cent of all votes in the first parliament we analyze, but nearly 20 per cent in the 1930-32 period.

--- TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE ---

The dimensionality and positions of the Weimar parliaments and MPs

The question is whether the voting behavior fits best in one dimension or whether two dimensions are needed to produce the full picture. If we focus solely on one dimension, then the empirical analysis provides the ordering presented in Figure 1 below, where the unidimensional positions of the parties elected for the Weimar parliament from 1920-1924 are shown.

--- FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE ---

In the left end of the dimension can the Social Democrats be found, and at the opposite end the German National Conservative Party (DNVP). However, there are several indications in this picture that one dimension might not be enough to explain voting

behavior in the Weimar parliament. First of all, the DNVP and – for most of the time – the SPD were in opposition in the period pictured above.⁶ This would mean that the dimension on which the parties are located is not a government-opposition dimension, but a left-right dimension.⁷ On the other hand, when we include the other parties in our perspective this is also not right. That the USPD and the KPD should be to the right of the Social Democrats and very close to the Catholic Centre Party as well as the two liberal parties DDP and DVP tells us that a second dimension is in all probability needed to achieve the full picture.

When the two dimensional model is taken into account we do correctly classify 97 per cent of the votes cast, versus 89 per cent for the unidimensional model. In Figure 2 we show the positions of the individual MPs for the 1920-24 parliamentary period. The horizontal axis resembles the unidimensional setup discussed above. The members from SPD, USPD and KPD are positioned to the left, whereas the Catholics, the Bavarian People's Party and the DDP are moderately placed around the center. The national liberal DVP is further to the right and near the DNVP. For the second dimension we should from cleavage theory expect that it is about pro- vs. anti-clerical forces. However, as the vertical axis has the Centre Party at one end followed by the two liberal parties and the Social Democrats as well as the somewhat anti-clerical position of the Catholic Bavarian People's Party the interpretation of this dimension can not be supported empirically. What does provide a possible explanation is the almost identical position on the second dimension by the Communists and the German Nationalists. This resembles what we term the pro-/anti-republic dimension. Both the Communists and the German Nationalists were at best lukewarm in their support of the Weimar republic. On the other side we find the DDP, SPD and a bit surprising the DVP as more positive towards the Republic. The USPD which in this period is at point of breaking up holds a less negative view of the Republic than the Communists. For the Centre Party and the two liberal parties the intra-party variation is much larger than for the other parties. The relationship between the Centre Party and its sister-party should also be noted as the BVP hold a more skeptical view to the Republic than the Centre

⁶ The Social Democrats were a member of the coalition government of chancellor Wirth from October 1921 until November 1922 as well as of the Stresemann cabinet, which lasted from August until November 1923.

⁷ Also for the other periods analysed in this paper does a true government-opposition dimension not occur in the unidimensional model. Neither does a true left-right dimension.

Party. From this it is not surprising that the BVP did not support the Centre Party candidate for President in 1925, but instead put their support behind an anti-republican candidate and clear supporter of a monarchical-authoritarian form of governance, Paul von Hindenburg (Schönhoven 1972). Lieberman (1998) argues that it is the parties which we find to be at the upper end on the vertical axis which during the Weimar Republic consistently advocated anti-system ideologies. Turning to the intra-party differences among the MPs we learn that most parties have outliers on both dimensions. However, the Centre Party is, while more coherent on the socio-economic dimension much less so when it comes to the pro/anti-republic dimension, though the members are still mostly supportive of the republic. On the other hand, the conservative DNVP experience most of the variation on the socio-economic dimension while they are more cohesive when it comes to having a skeptical view towards the republic.

--- FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE ---

The existence of the second dimension of pro-/anti-republic sentiments can also be found in the parliamentary period of 1924-1928 (see figure 3). We correctly classify 98 per cent of the votes cast in this period with two dimensions, and 91 per cent with one dimension, and find that the first, the horizontal dimension, is a left-right dimension. The Communists and Social Democrats can be found at the left with the Social Democrats much more moderate than the Communists. The members of the Centre Party, DDP and DVP have in comparison with the previous legislative period moved to the right of the centre and the German National Conservatives have moved towards the centre. This period was the first where the National Socialists gained representation in the Reichstag. They take a position on the left-right dimension left of the centre near the Social Democrats. The positions on the second dimension are different; here we find that the DNVP and the National Socialists have a strong anti-Weimar position. The members from DDP, SPD, the Centre Party, the BVP and DVP have a positive to neutral position towards the republic and thus the principles of parliamentary democracy. Somewhat surprising is the moderate position for the Communist party in this period on the dimension mentioned last. It would have been expected that this party would have had a position like the German National Conservatives and the National

Socialists. This period also has its share of outliers in relation to intra-party positions. The Centre Party has moved closer together on their position towards the republic than in the previous period. The interesting story here is found among the conservative DNVP where the main part of the party, among them also their leader Count Westarp, are close together, where as the later leader of the party, Alfred Hugenberg, is the most anti-republican of all MPs in the parliament 1924-28.

--- FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE ---

Turning to the parliamentary period of 1928-1930 the two dimensions which together correctly classify 98 per cent of the votes, and 86 per cent for the unidimensional model, we still find the exact same dimensions as in the previous periods (see figure 4). The horizontal dimension is still the left-right dimension and the vertical dimension the pro-/anti-republic dimension. The SPD and KPD are located at the left end of the horizontal dimension with the German Nationalist on the right end of the axis. Moderate positions are held by the Centre Party, DDP, DVP and the National Socialists. On the second dimension the anti-republic position are held by the Communists and the National Socialists, whereas the so-called 'grand coalition' between SPD, Centre Party, DVP, DDP and BVP, which was in office during this time period, has a clear positive view towards the republic.

--- FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE ---

From 1928-30 the Weimar republic was governed by coalition, which decisions had impact on the intra-party differences, notably among the Social Democrats, but to some extent also the conservatives. Among the latter party four distinct groupings can be found. One centered round Alfred Hugenberg, one around Count Westarp and two groupings differing not on socio-economic issues, but one being slightly less skeptical towards the republic than the other. It should be noted that it was in this period that Count Westarp lost the leadership of the party and was replaced by Alfred Hugenberg. Westarp withdrew from the DNVP and formed his own moderate "Conservative Peoples Party". The most fascinating result in this period is that while the Social Democrats are

very cohesive there are a handful of outliers. Usually, such outliers will be of little importance. However, four outliers in this period are very important. The four MPs not following the Social Democratic party discipline is the Chancellor Hermann Müller as well as three other Social Democratic ministers.⁸ This is surprising given the agreement between the Government and the coalition participants that in case of doubt ministers were allowed to vote against the government as happened in the case of the building of battleship for the German Navy. The estimated positions tell us another story. The four ministers in question are all placed closely to their government partners of the Centre Party and the DDP. When taking the standard errors into account, the ministers are significantly different in their positions than their party. This result makes us doubt that the Social Democratic ministers were under party discipline and that instead it was allowed for the ministers to differ from the official party line and that this opportunity was indeed used.

--- FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE ---

The positions of the legislative period from 1930 until summer 1932 are presented in Figure 5 above.⁹ Both the first dimension and the second dimension resemble those we have found in the other periods. The first dimension is left-right and the second dimension is the pro-/anti-republic. The two-dimensional model correctly classifies 99 per cent of the votes in this period, 93 per cent is the percentage of votes correctly classified by the unidimensional model. Both the Social Democrats and the Communists are clearly to the left and both have virtually no outliers. On the other side of the axis the German Nationals hold a similar position. The few liberal MPs of the DVP and the renamed DDP also have coherent positions on both dimensions. On the second dimension it is again the Communists and the National Socialists who are against the republic. However, they are closely followed by the German Nationalists. The KVP is much more positive towards the Republic than the German Nationalists from which

⁸ Carl Severing, Kurt Wissell and Rudolf Hilferding (see also Schröder 2001:6). The fourth Social Democratic minister, Robert Schmidt, is positioned within the other Social Democratic MPs.

⁹ Due to too few votes cast in the parliaments June 1932 – November 1932 and November 1932 – March 1933 we have chosen to regard the period of 1930 – June 1932 as the last period for which it is possible to estimate positions.

they split, and follows the positions of the DVP and the renamed DDP. This informs us that the split which happened in the German Nationalists made it easier for the radical wing of the party to change to a much more skeptical position towards the Weimar republic than was the case before the split (Mergel 2003, 2005). In this period there are still outliers present, though to a lesser degree than previously. The Communists, Social Democrats and National Socialists are all very cohesive in their voting patterns. The conservative DNVP is also extremely cohesive, albeit more clearly on the pro-/anti-republican dimension than on the socio-economic dimension. The Centre Party is now more stretched out on the socio-economic dimension than previously and somewhat more cohesive on the pro-/anti-republican dimension.

The overall patterns in the voting behavior that we have seen in the parliaments of the Weimar republic have two major implications. First of all, for nearly all parties at one point in time there are large discrepancies in how the MPs vote. This in turn means that the voting patterns that we find can be used to interpret and understand the intra-party politics of the parties of the Weimar republic in a quantitative fashion, something hitherto unknown. By presenting the voting patterns, the second part of the story is that we can understand the rise and importance of both right-wing and left-wing parties and the homogenous nature in which they voted at least in the later part of the Weimar republic.

Discussion

The results of the roll call vote analysis of MPs represented in the Weimar Reichstag have shown that in comparison to 'modern' parliamentary democracies the Reichstag of the Weimar republic was not structured by a government-opposition divide, but rather by two conflicts: while the first one reflected ideology and thus the left-right ordering of the parties, the second dimension shows the preferences of MPs with regard to the order of the political system. This is despite the (often used) possibility to vote the Chancellor or any minister out of office without offering a successor on the basis of a vote of confidence, which was provided by § 54 of the constitution of the Weimar Republic. In particular Communists and National Socialists made successfully use of this opportunity provided by the constitution to destabilize the political system even more. Whereas the (economically determined) left-right conflict is observable at least as the

second dimension in a number of parliaments according to Hix and Noury (2008), the conspicuous absence of the government-opposition dimension from the two-dimensional model can be seen as a sign that the parliaments of the Weimar Republic was anything but a normal parliament, especially when we compare with other parliaments of the 20th and 21st century. What is further interesting is the stability of the dimensions. From the outset a left-right dimension can be observed as the first dimension and the pro-/anti-Republic dimension as a second. This is a remarkable finding when taking the distribution of the content of the votes into account (see table 3). The variation in the policy areas the votes belong to could lead to vast differences in the estimated positions, which is far from being the case. The two-dimensional models explain at it least successful instance 97 per cent which informs us that the addition of a third dimension will provide relatively little information. The gain in information comes from moving from a unidimensional model to a two-dimensional model, where the increase in the percentage of correctly classified votes is higher than for instance for the U.S. Congress (see Poole & Rosenthal 1997:28).

The extraction of a dimension that deals with the support and rejection of the current political system shows how disputed and polarized the political order as a whole in Germany was during the 1920s and early 1930s. Not only the representatives' thinking of a divide between government and parliament, which had its roots in the Wilhelminan Empire, prevailed during the Weimar republic, so that parliamentary party groups that belonged to the ruling coalition did not support the government without major reservations, but moreover the voting behavior of MPs was structured by their attitude towards the new parliamentary democracy. Because this characteristic was observable not only in the parliaments elected during times of crisis, that is in 1920, 1930 and 1932, but also the legislative periods from 1924 until 1928 and from 1928 until 1930, in which the economic situation was mostly stable, show the robustness and 'institutionalization' of the skepticism and – partly – the rejection of the republican-parliamentary system regardless of economic constraints and foreign policy conflicts. Further, if the cleavage theory by Lipset & Rokkan (1967) is to be believed the relevant dimensions in the Weimar republic should be workers versus capital as one and state versus church as the other. The analyses presented have shown that these cleavages can not be found in the parliaments of the Weimar Republic.

Thus, there was only a small chance from the very beginning that the Weimar Republic could become a stable political system. If one of the major conflict lines in a parliament represents questions on the order of the political system and strong parties from different party families like the National Conservatives and the Communists rather than smaller, unimportant parties stood against the political system, then forming and maintaining a stable majority between parties that support the basic principles of parliamentary democracies becomes generally problematic. The latter is not only the case because the number of potential coalition parties that together capture a majority of seats in the parliament decreases, but also for the reason that other, ideologically determined conflict lines exist like the economic left-right dimension where the supportive parties of the Weimar Republic – Social Democrats, Catholics and the two liberal parties – clearly adopted different policy positions. When applying common theories of government formation that take office and policy constraints into account (for an overview see Laver and Schofield 1998; Müller 2009), the problems of forming a stable and long-lasting coalition government in the Weimar Republic between SPD, Catholics, left- and right-wing liberals and smaller regional parties becomes obvious because of their very different positions on the economic left-right dimension.

One missed chance that possibly would have stabilized the political system was the partly change of the DNVP towards a modern conservative, ‘Tory’-like party in the mid 1920s (see Mergel 2003). As we saw in figures 3 and 4, there was a large degree of internal heterogeneity between the members of the parliamentary party group of the National Conservatives in particular on the ‘pro vs. contra Weimar Republic’ dimension. If the moderate wing of the party would have been able to enforce its positions against the radical, anti-system wing of the DNVP, stable majority coalitions between the centre and centre-right parties would have been a long-term alternative to an ideological heterogeneous ‘grand coalition’. With respect to the DNVP a question which naturally springs to mind when discussing the impact of intra-party politics on the behavior of MPs in this respect is how feasible it would be for MPs to form new parties, or join other parties, and still be re-elected. In the case of the Weimar republic the proportional element in the electoral system made it very easy for new parties to gain representation as the threshold for representation was set very low. However, it was less the case that MPs joined other parties rather than formed their own. The most

notable example would be that of Count Westarp, although his new party only gained a few seats in the last period under study here.

A sustainable democracy requires compromise when there is no majority party. If compromise is absent breakdown threatens. This is what happened in the case of the Weimar Republic where the presence of the second dimension of pro-/anti-republic sentiment made compromise impossible. However, the Weimar Republic was not unique in this instance. Recently Aleman & Saiegh (2010) have presented an analysis of the rise and fall of democracy in Argentina 1916-1930. They conclude that for the first part of period the legislature was two-dimensional with a government-opposition dimension as the first dimension and a policy dimension, of varying content, as the second dimension. However, in the second part of the period they analyze, Argentinean politics could be reduced to a pro-/anti-system dimension.¹⁰ Contrasting this to the case of the Weimar Republic the interesting part is that the re-alignment, which took place in the Argentinean case, did not happen in Weimar Germany. While democracy seems to have been accepted in Argentina as shown by Aleman & Saiegh (2010), this was not the case for the Weimar Republic. The second dimension was thus present at the birth of the Republic and was alive and strong also at the end of the Republic. Despite the fact that the period of the Weimar Republic lies more than 80 years back there are still lessons to be learned for newly established democracies. If actors are repeatedly present which do not accept democracy and who are unwilling to compromise, then democracy will not be sustainable.

¹⁰ Aleman & Saiegh (2010) conclude that it was primarily the distribution of power which leads to the breakdown of Argentinean democracy in 1930 and not the dimension per se.

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Table 1: Major parties represented in parliament and government during the Weimar republic

Party	Parliamentary representation	Government participation	Milieu	Basic ideological direction	Mean cohesion score (Rice index)			
					1920-1924	Dec 1924-1928	1928-1930	1930-1932
KPD	1920-1933	never	Socialist	communist	1	0.985	0.981	0.98
USPD	1919-1924	Nov 1918-Feb 1919		socialist	0.805			
SPD	1919-1933	Nov 1918-Jun 1920; Oct 1921-Nov 1922; Aug 1923-Nov 1923; Jun 1928-Mar 1930		social democratic	0.997	0.999	0.998	0.995
DDP (since 1930: DStP)	1919-1933	Feb 1919-Jun 1919; Oct 1919-Jan 1927; Jun 1928-May 1932 ¹	bourgeois-urban	social liberal / left-liberal	0.882	0.921	0.98	0.982
Centre Party	1919-1933	Feb 1919-May 1932 ¹	Catholic	Catholic-conservative	0.944	0.955	0.95	0.97
BVP	1920-1933	Nov 1923-Jun 1924 Jan 1927-May 1932 ¹		Catholic-conservative, regionalist	0.914	0.954	0.972	0.985
DVP	1919-1933	Jun 1920-Oct 1921; Nov 1922-Oct 1931 ¹	bourgeois-urban	national-liberal	0.959	0.957	0.953	0.986
DNVP	1919-1933	Jan 1925-Jan 1926; Jan 1927-Jun 1928; Jun 1932-Jun 1933 ¹	Agrarian-rural	national-conservative	0.94	0.978	0.917	0.952
NSDAP	1924 (May)-1933	Jan 1933-May 1945 ²	Nationalistic, anti-Semitic	Right-wing extremist, nationalistic		0.95	1	0.998

¹ Including cabinets that were appointed by President von Hindenburg and not elected by the Reichstag.

² Time period exceeds the period of the Weimar Republic.

Table 2: Data overview

INCLUDED		EXCLUDED	
Election	Votes	Election	Votes
June 1920	70	May 1924	16
December 1924	200	July 1932	1
May 1928	152	November 1932	6
September 1930	104	March 1933	8

Table 3: Content of Roll Call Votes in Percentage

Year/Dimension	Economy	Interior Affairs	Foreign Affairs	Agriculture and Trade	Confidence votes and procedural votes
1920-1924	43.7	42.3	5.6	5.6	2.8
1924-1928	57.6	14.8	7.6	6.2	13.8
1928-1930	46.7	20.4	10.5	14.5	7.9
1930-1932	45.2	26.0	5.8	3.8	19.2

Figure 1: Positions of Parliamentary Parties in the first Weimar Reichstag (1920-1924) on one dimension



Figure 2: Positions of MPs in the Weimar Reichstag, 1920-1924

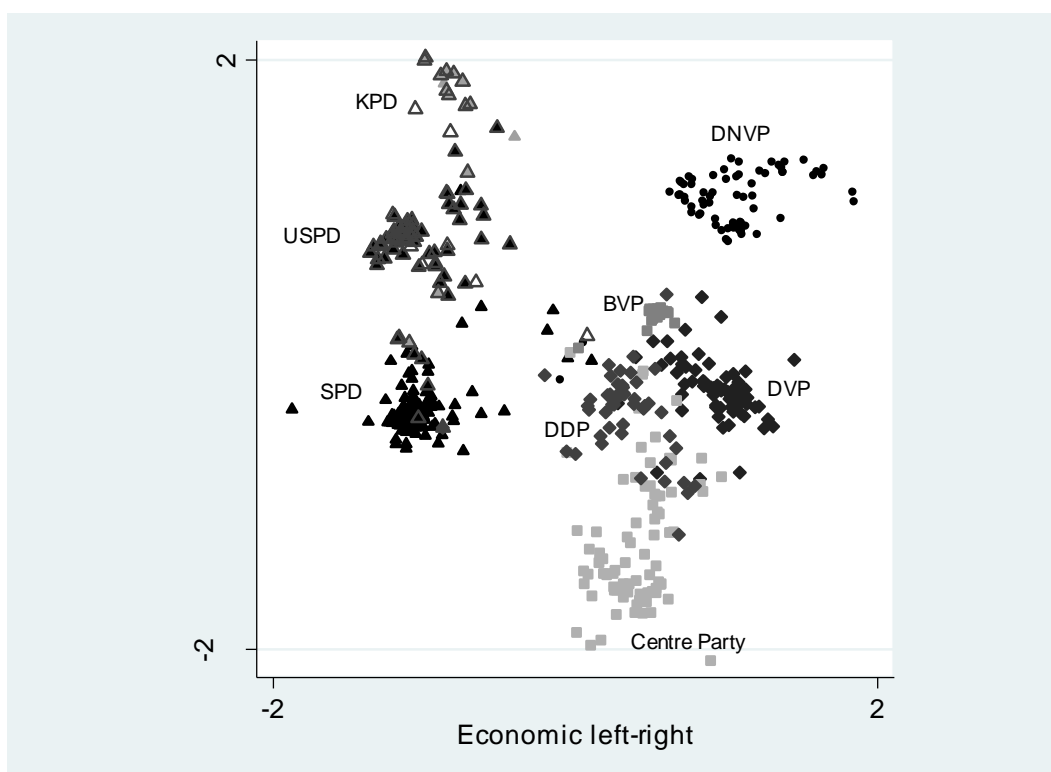


Figure 3: Positions of MPs in the Weimar Reichstag, 1924-1928

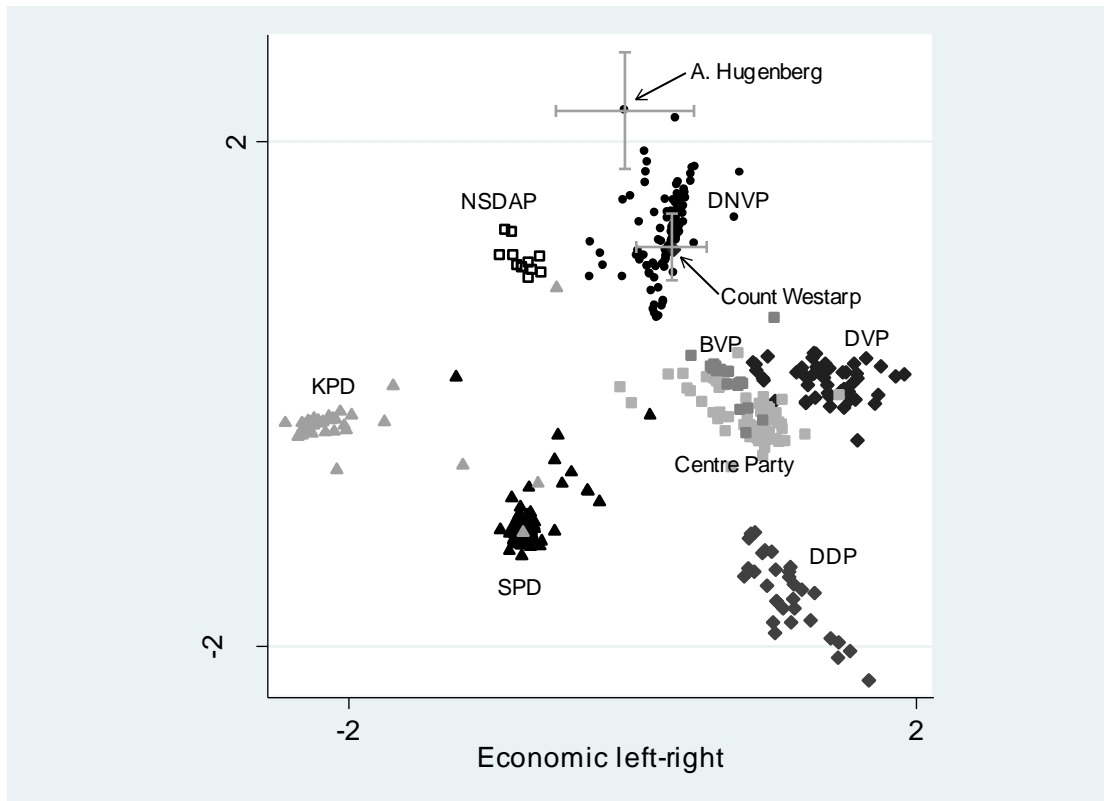


Figure 4: Positions of MPs in the Weimar Reichstag, 1928-1930

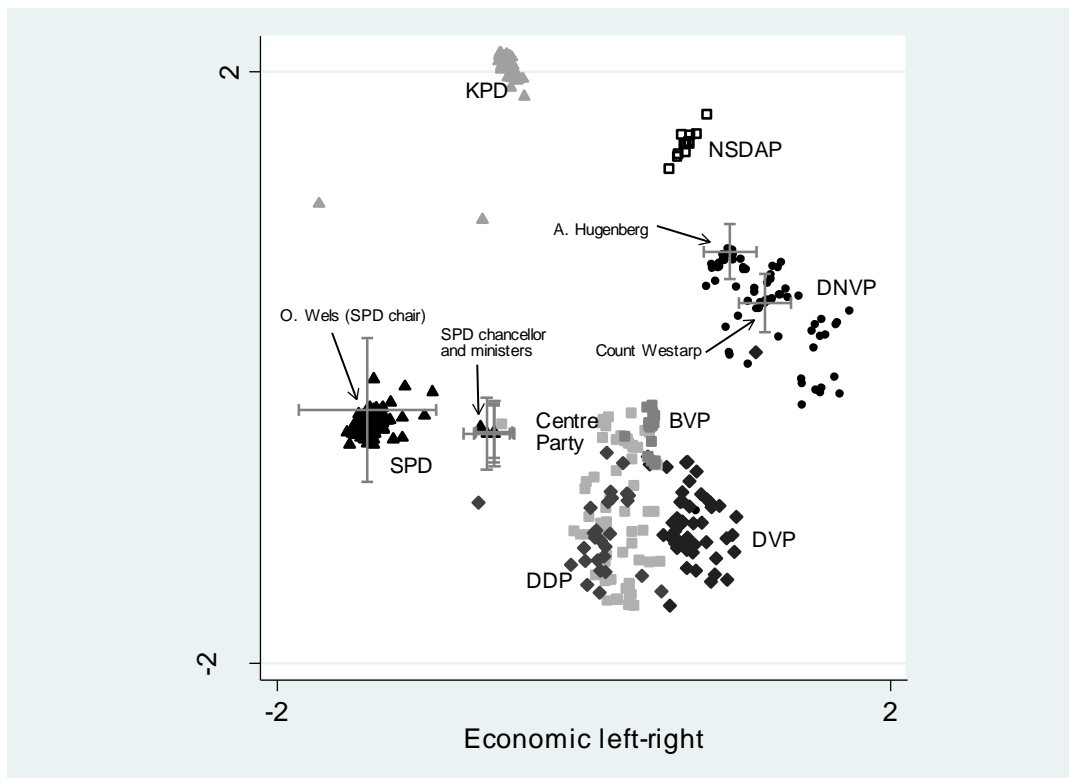


Figure 5: Positions of MPs in the Weimar Reichstag, 1930-1932

