POLITICAL POWER OF THE PRESS IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT. This paper studies the political power of the press in the Weimar Republic (1918–1933). Using the dataset of 135 daily newspapers in Berlin during this period, we examine how changes in the circulation figures of partisan newspapers affected voter turnout, party’s vote shares and mass polarization at three levels: federal, state and city council elections. Our identification strategy exploits the variation in the development of railway system across 20 historical districts of Berlin which influenced the circulation of newspapers in each district. We find that an increase in newspaper circulation significantly increased turnout in 14 outer districts of Berlin. In addition, a one percent increase in newspapers supporting a party led to a 0.04 percent increase in its vote share in federal elections. The effect was weaker for state elections and insignificant for city council elections. Most importantly, the electoral influence of newspapers was driven by tabloids and mass newspapers, and not by elite political newspapers. Moreover, among the anti-Republican press, the right-wing press (DVP, DNVP and NSDAP) exerted a strong influence in federal elections, whereas the power of the communist press was negligible.

Keywords: Press, Newspapers, Politics, Election Outcome, Railways

JEL classification: D72, L82, N44, N74, N84

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Date: October 2, 2019.