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Macrohistorical Models in Historical-Electoral Research: A Fresh Look at the Stein-Rokkan-Tradition

*Stefan Immerfall**

Abstract: The Stein-Rokkan-Tradition furthers a territorial approach by which aggregate data analysis and historical comparisons are combined. Essentially, it points to the historical dimensions of contemporaries opportunity structures. Several pros and cons of this kind of reasoning are discussed and an empirical example concerning the electoral history of Imperial Germany is given. Rokkans' last »geoeconomic-geopolitical model« is shown to be of great value for the explanation of variations within processes of European development.

I. Introduction

In the last couple of years the concern with aggregate data has become respectable again. There are several reasons for this new appreciation (cf. Immerfall 1990: 3-5), the most important of which, probably, is the growing awareness of »space« (and also »time«) being an indispensable concept in the social sciences. In due of this course, methodological and statistical considerations, which for a long time have dominated the treatment of aggregate data, have been supplemented by more theoretical reasoning. As a matter of fact, problems ecological and »individualistic« (Alker 1969) inferences represent a variant of the general problem of social theory, that is the substantial task of relating micro and macro levels of analysis (cf. Wippler/Lindenberg 1987).

In the present paper I will not address methodological or statistical problems of aggregate data analysis. Instead, I will focus on the merit of a historico-territorial approach, of a way of looking at territorial units and

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using aggregate data, which, above all, has been worked out by the late Stein Rokkan. This approach centers, comparatively, on the relationship between past histories and present configurations. It tries to spell out what is general within individual development of different kinds of territorial arrangements.

In the following section I will give an overview about what I call the »Stein-Rokkan-Tradition«. The next section presents an empirical example, while the remaining section will point to some limitations and further possibilities inherent in this kind of reasoning.

II. The Stein-Rokkan-Tradition

As it is well known, Stein Rokkan (1920-1979) was one of the pioneers in international research. Producing, proliferating, and restlessly organizing comparative data, asking questions about sources of variations within and between countries, and confronting hypothesis with the data, he was as well an institution builder as a scholar. His theories have been constantly being revised. Thus, is easy task have a thorough look of the whole argument, all the more, since due to his untimely death there is no summa sociologica one could use as a benchmark.

It is neither possible nor necessary to give hear a full account of Rokkans work (see Immerfall 1991: chpt.3). Suffice it here to say, that my reconstruction of its core elements differs from earlier approaches since it concentrates on Rokkan's last and unifying model. Contrary to scholars like Erik Allardt, Hans Daalder, or Peter Flora, I do not regard, Rokkans conceptual map of Europe (eg. Rokkan 1971) as his most advanced contribution. This map, as you will remember, tries to give a spatially based account of the development of Europe by drawing two axis, one standing for cultural, the other one for economic differentiation. The coincidence of typological and geographical location is quite astonishing, though it does not work for all countries (e.g. Poland). What should be remembered, however, is the fact, that this »map« is only one application of a even more ambitious systematization of European development: the geoeconomic-geopolitical model (see figure 1).

This is also true for earlier themes and accounts in Rokkan's scientific production. Themes like the so called cleavage theory have been singled out, not realizing, that it represents one piece in a jig-saw-puzzle. Elsewhere (Immerfall 1991: 31-44) I have shown, that his earlier work on political modernization and electoral mobilization, on the lasting impact of elite coalitions on subsequent political structures, and on the institutionalization of full-blown mass-politics can parsimoniously be formulated in terms of the latter model. It does not work all the way, I shall admit, but it

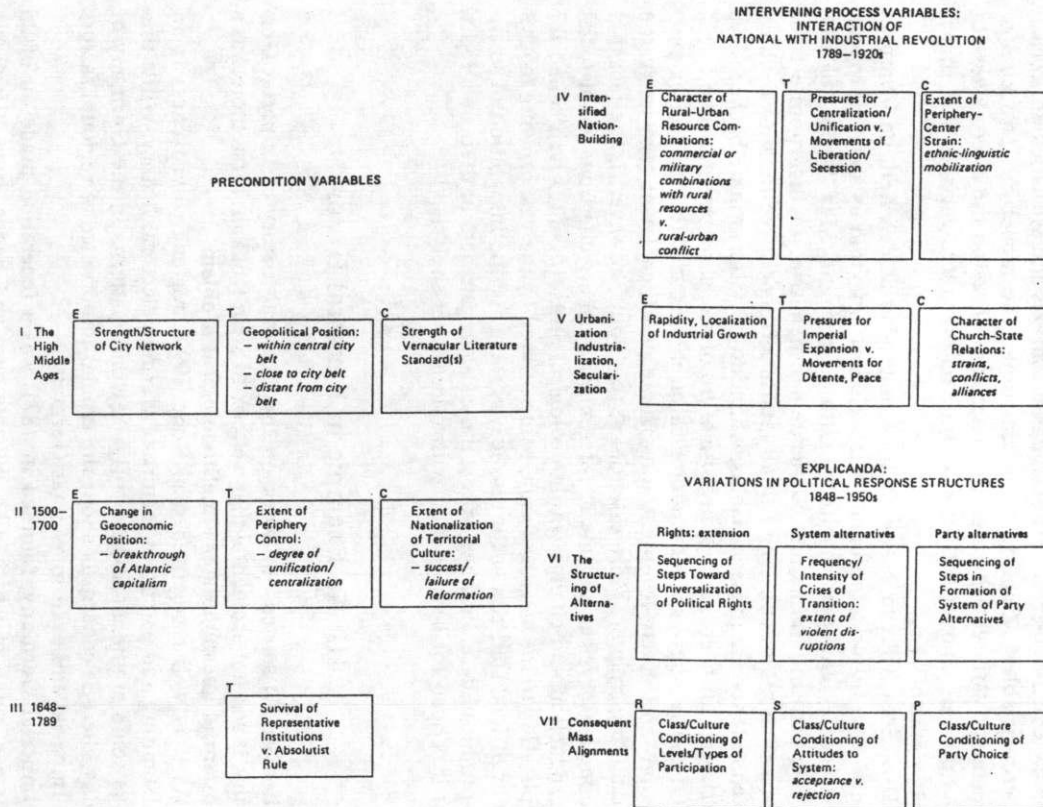


Figure 1: The Geoeconomic-Geopolitical Model (adapted from Rokkan 1981)

goes a long way and it will leave us with a rather well formalized tool in comparative research.

Now, what kind of model is this and how does the explanatory strategy work? Basically, it is a typological-topological model for the explanation of variations in the process of European nation-building. It links conditions, configurations, and decisions of the past with variations in the social fabric of later times, stretching from the the Middle Ages up to the present time. These elements refer to territorial-based contexts and are called »historical macro-variables«. Coming to present times, the model lists two kind of dependent variables, three on the macro and three on the micro-level. (In the following chapter I will concentrate on the macro-variable VIP, that is »party system«.)

How does Rokkan arrive at those macro-variables? Well, he »simply« scans, what historical minded social scientist have told us about European peculiarities and patterns (from Otto Hintze and Max Weber to A.O. Hirschman and Immanuel Wallerstein), then tries to incorporate their schemes in his accounts, and finally starts sorting out redundant variables. »Redundant« are those variables, which do not discriminate between two territorial units at time t_1 in spite of notorious divergence at time t_2 .

Of course, there are methodological problems with this kind of ex-post-festum- and macro-level-reasoning, some of which I will take up in the concluding chapter. More essential at this point, however, is the fact that the model serves as a frame of reference for asking questions about social reproduction and change within ecological units. It is thus well suited for application to the wealth of data, being offered by the vast growing machine of official statistics but it also leaves room for the integration of science-produced data. In other words: it uses aggregate data in their own right, but it is open for combination with micro level analysis.

III. An Example in Electoral History

When we (1) started our work on the electoral history of Imperial Germany, it was not accidental that we took to Stein Rokkan. First, there was a substantial question, later a methodological problem.

As it is well recognized (e.g. Rohe 1990), regional divisiveness is an outstanding and persistent feature of German electoral history. While there is some argument about »truly« regional patterns in the Germany of today, there is consensus about the crucial importance of regional factors in Imperial and even in Weimar Germany.

Imperial Germany, founded in 1871, was a federation made up of 25 »states«, some of which, like Württemberg and Baden, have effectively consolidated not before 1815, while other, like Prussia, have been vastly

heterogeneous in much of their history. Still others, like catholic Bavaria, even did initially not consent to the the form of the unification. Germany at that time, one could say, had a low degree on »nationess« (Nettl) and political particularism hardly comes as a surprise. Contrary to linear modernization and nationalization theory, however, it even seems as if regional differences in electoral outcomes has deepened at least up to the turn of the century (Immerfall 1989).

It is one thing to show political particularism and still another to try to explain it. What factors have to be accounted for? How do they relate to each other? How long do one have to go back for explanation? Rokkan's model obviously seems to provide a practical solution to those questions.

At least it seems so. Looking once again at the model and the the examples and examinations provided by Stein Rokkan and others (for a summary see: Immerfall 19901: 44-60) as well, two difficulties arise in the first place. First, the connection of variables are not quit clear. Some of the historical accounts even look rather arbitrary. Second, there has been some testing, e.g. pertaining to the city-belt hypothesis (Rokkan 1977), but not too much. This is due to lack of data, but there is also the problem of overdetermination. You just cannot do regression-analysis with less than two dozen western-european states and include 13 variables.

This is where the methodological problem comes in. The consideration ran twofold. First, you need more cases. Strict regionalization may provide a solution to this problem. Where, if not in Germany, do you have more heterogeneous regions, territories and histories to test for? Second, you need data going far back in history. For this purpose I checked the records of german »Landesgeschichte«, starting out at the level of constituencies in Imperial German but merging some into larger regions, if that was meaningful. The resulting data covers the 397 constituencies, which served as a carrier of almost all of the macro-variables.

Taking its poor quality into account, the variables were simply dichotomized (2) Figure 2 gives an example for the territorial distribution of one of the independent variable, »Change in Geoeconomic Position* (HE). Figure 3 shows the distribution of the dependent variable VIP (»Party Structures the simplefied version of that variable presented here is called »ZKONFIG«). This variable has been inferred by a matching a series of consecutive cluster analysis on the Reichstags-election (For details, see Immerfall 1991: 203-211 and 140-148).

The questions to be answered, as mentioned above, concern historical determinants of party system formation, wherein »party system« means persisting, regional structures in the Reichstagswahlen from 1871 to 1912. The main results can be summarized in three points.

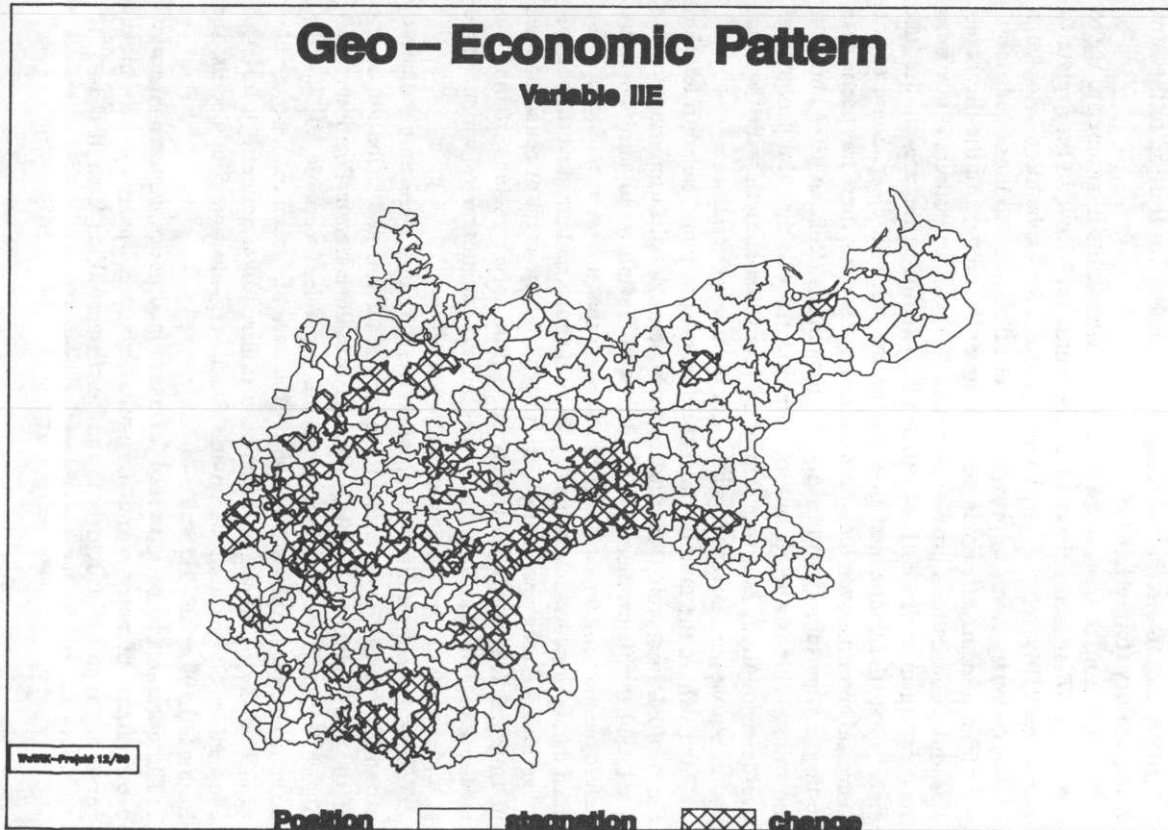
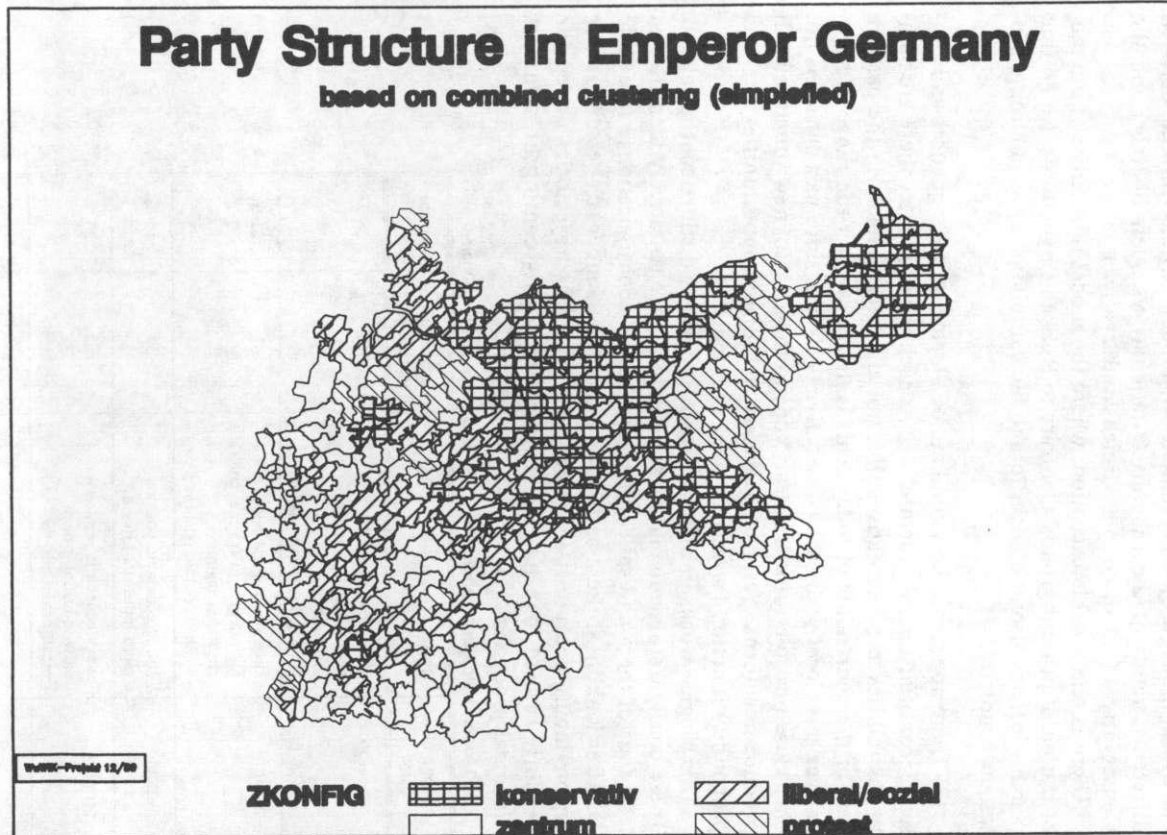


Figure 2:

Figure 3:



(1) Simple analysis of contingency tables and regressions analysis reveals relationships that do seem to confirm some of Rokkan's hypothesis. For example, there is indication that strength of city networks does impede the construction of strong political centers. Also, not spelled out by Rokkan but within the logic of his argument, the model may discriminate between different strands of the Liberals (»national« vs. »left liberal«) and the Conservatives (»Deutsch« vs. »Reichskonservativ«).

There is one notable exception, where the model fails entirely: the mobilization of peasant groups. Contrary to Rokkan *s hypothesis, we do find peasant leagues also as competitors to the catholic party as in strong, protestant countries.

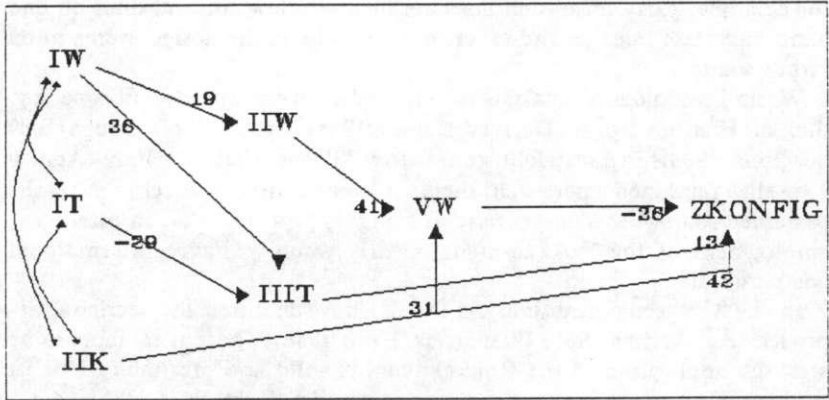
(2) There appears to be some kind of »logic« in the sequences and consequences of historical junctures (3). At each point of entry there are plenty possibilities and alternatives. But not all. Choices taken in the past are part of the constraints of today. This is not to say that the range of alternatives gets closer with each consecutive decisions, since past decisions not only close possible futures but also open others. Also, new junctures will produce new turns. Yet, past decisions and missed opportunities alter the probability function for certain trends to realize.

This »logic« works in different ways, producing distinct configurations. These configurations do cluster regionally. I have tentatively identified at least four of them and called them »paths« or configurations« (see table 1). After looking at these patterns, I found the »Sonderweg-debate« rather unconvincing because it subsumes very divergent trajectories under one heading. Instead, one has to recognize the highly contingent nature of historical processes.

Table 1: Some historical "configurations" in German historical development

Name of "path"	characteristics	number of constituencies	percent
old-european	strong city network, survival of representative institutions weak georapical position	151	38 %
strong	strong georapical position high degree of internal control absolutist regime weak economic position	82	21 %
dynamic	strong economic position rapid industrial growth	59	15 %
peripher	weak economic positon slow industral growth mostly catolic	105	26 %
		397	100 %

Figure 4: Geohistorical Path-Model for Party-Structure (from Immerfall 1991; only significant parameters)



(3) In trying to figure out the interrelationship of these variables, loglinear path analysis was applied. The significant results are presented in figure 4. It is certainly not astonishing to find religion (UK) and industrialization (VW) having the strongest effects on the formation of the German party system. What should be noted however, is the fact, that reduction (starting from the all associations embracing, saturated model and trying to find more parsimonious models) succeeds (that is: it worked in the predicted direction) and that not all variables are needed. This might be considered as a partial confirmation of the Stein-Rokkan-strategy. His variables indeed seem to make sense.

IV. Discussion

Even accepting the link between historical conditions and the emerging party systems: where does this leave us? What do we get out of the geo-economic-geopolitical apparatus for modern ecological analysis? Historical »causality« may have worked in past times, but is it still discernible in our fast changing world? What about the critics who find fault with the post festum-method? And how does one relate macro-historical aggregate analysis to individual behavior? Let me briefly comment on each of these questions.

(1) Looking at the most recent and most advanced compilation of ecological analysis (Berglund/Thorn sen 1990), we find two lines of discussion, ecological inference and macro level analysis. While the Stein-Rokkan-

tradition clearly does not offer anything to first one, it is obviously important for the second one. Certainly, some hypothesis have to be revised as, for example, party formation does not neatly follow cultural lines on one hand and class lines on the other, but, as a whole, the design seems to be rather sound.

While the ecological analysis of within-nation-variation in Europe, e.g. that of France (Dogan/Devivry Daniel 1988), Spain (McDonough/Barnes/Pina 1988), Britain (Johnston/Pattie/Allsopp 1988), or Italy (Agnew 1988) has remained a persistent theme in comparative research, the results remained somewhat ideosyncratic. It is highly probable, that an intelligent employment of the Rokkan-model clearly would enhance international comparability.

In the U.S. ecological analysis usually have featured the sectional approach (e.g. Archer 1988; Fitzpatrick/Hero 1988). There it remains to be seen the application of the Rokkan-model is valid and profitable. This is true for other non-European-contexts as well (cf. Deutsch 1987).

(2) Many social scientist seem to dispute the impact of regional and historical dimensions on contemporary politics and social behavior. It is the the position of ahistorical sociology. This certainly is no new stance and may even be traced back Durkheim.

A lot of evidence speaks in favor of that position, one must admit, the recent elections in former GDR being an outstanding and recent example. Even there, however, the ahistorical argument may be disputed (e.g. Schleth 1991). Another, more subtle argumentation, recently has been put forward by Peter Mair (1990). Due to the diverse national histories we still have heterogeneity among the party systems of Western Europe, Mair argues, but that does not matter much in what parties actually do since usually there is no correspondence between traditional identities and present policy appeals. Then, why go back in history if you can make sense of actual behavior without doing so?

The answer to that question is an empirical one. There are legitimate as well as illegitimate forms of ahistorical sociology (Hamilton/Walton 1988: 189-191). There may be cases for which historical examinations do not help us understand contemporary patterns and practices. In other instances, historical forces do continue to affect today's social arrangement. For those topics, Rokkan not only provides a historical orientation, but gives concrete leads. His model is open enough for extension. We may want to add variables representing contemporaries decisive junctures. I do not want to speculate on that here. But, to return to Mair's argument, the logic of the model does not, of course, assume that there is no change in the identities of political parties, for instance. What it does assume, however, is, that the timing and character of party formation »will leave an indelible mark« (Panebianco 1988: xiii).

(3) Those readers, who are familiar with the dispersed writing of Stein Rokkan, may wonder, why I have not mentioned Rokkan's alleged structural-functionalist bias in most of his earlier work. I also have not commented on his most famous statement on cleavage formation and the freezing of party systems, which has drawn so much applause and dispute, as well. In this context, I like to restrict myself to the most recent, and also very informed criticism, that Einar Berntzen and Per Selle (1990).

According to their thesis, Rokkan's models are closed and they are teleological. This is regarded as a methodological consequence of his premise: to explain any structural variation at a given time point as a kind of end product of earlier development. Rokkan takes history for given and therefore his models bear no explanatory power.

I maintain, that this criticism is only true under certain assumptions. These are intrinsically not connected with what I have called here the »Stein-Rokkan-Tradition«. These assumptions include:

- there as one and only one funnel of causality;
- action is determined by historical outcomes;
- history binds.

Instead, I read the model along the following lines:

- there are varieties of principles of historical change; - former decisions turn into opportunity structures of later times;
- history takes turns.

(4) The greatest problem, then, is not that some variables are treated exogenous. There is no model without assumptions, specifications, and premises. It rather is, that structural uniformities, e.g. the existence of working class parties, are treated as given. This implies the danger, to concentrate oneself on macro-to-macro-transitions. Explanations, that do not cover macro-to-micro and micro-to-macro-transitions, clearly are incomplete (Coleman 1990). Most work in the Stein-Rokkan-tradition, including the one presented here, only supplies evidence for the proposition that certain macro-structures do covariate and that consequences (sometimes) breed consequences - not why, and how. This presents a great deficiency. But it is not impossible to make up leeway.

Rokkan himself certainly was aware of the necessity to relate micro and macro variations. To the exploration of state- and nationbuilding, Rokkan added the study of political mobilization. Indeed, he has come very far in his quest for a testable, unifying, geoeconomic-geopolitical model for the explanation of variations within processes of development. He shows, that extension of political rights, variations in franchise system, and the structuring of party systems can properly be analyzed in a complex framework of political, social, and cultural macro-structures. The balance is in favor of modification and expansion rather than dismissal.

Notes

- 1) Much of the work presented here has grown out of a research project at the University of Passau, which has been financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and led by Peter Steinbach (see Immerfall 1988,1989; on the micro level see now the extensive work of Peter Steinbach 1990 and 1991).
- 2) For closer inspection and reconstruction the data is available from the Cologne Archive of the Center of Historical Research.
- 3) I am rather cautious about this. It demands further inspection with better data and more appropriate statistical procedures. Our standard procedures may not be appropriate for this kind of problem. I think we need a combination of configuration al analysis - such as proposed by Charles Ragin (1989) recently - and discretionary time-series-analysis (e.g. Diekmann/Miner 1984; for a comparison of more conventional procedures, see Stimson 1985). I think the problem of stochastic modelling long-term historical data needs further discussion.

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