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# Immigrant Support for the American Socialist Party, 1912 and 1920

GARY MARKS & MATTHEW BURBANK

THE PERIOD of greatest socialist strength in the United States, the second decade of the twentieth century, coincided with the final decade of a great wave of immigration. This phenomenon has attracted the attention both of scholars seeking to understand the basis of support for the American Socialist party and of those seeking to address the more general question of the sources of immigrant radicalism (Bodnar 1985; Lipset 1977). Both perspectives pose a basic empirical question: What role did ethnicity play in support for the Socialist party, or, more specifically, which immigrant groups supported the party and which groups opposed it?

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The attempt to answer this question has spawned a vast scholarship on the part of historians and social scientists, but a definitive answer remains elusive. Part of the reason for this is that we lack sufficiently detailed and disaggregated data on the political orientations and activities of immigrants themselves. The smallest units of electoral return are at the ward or county level, and information at this aggregate level can never allow us to draw conclusions about individual behavior with any certainty. But it also seems to be the case that the analysis of currently available data has not been taken as far as possible. Previous research has explored the relationship between ethnicity and socialism by examining particular immigrant groups in individual states, cities, or towns (e.g., Critchlow 1986; Gorenstein 1961; Leinenweber 1981; Lorence 1982; Miller 1975; Wolfe and Hodge 1983). Such case studies provide invaluable accounts of the diversity of immigrant politics, but they do not provide a reliable basis for generalization. In this article we take a step back from the wealth of illustrative analysis and try to gain a broader, more systematic, overview of immigrant support for socialism across a wide range of contexts by examining voting among eight immigrant groups—Germans, English, Finns, Irish, Italians, Norwegians, Russians, and Swedes—in the presidential elections of 1912 and 1920, elections in which the American Socialist party received its highest levels of support.<sup>1</sup>

In part, our results confirm generalizations that are already well established in the field. Our expectations of strong positive relationships between concentrations of Russian and Finnish immigrants and socialist voting are unambiguously confirmed, as is our expectation of an equally strong negative relationship for Irish immigrants and socialist voting. But we have also arrived at results that are contrary to widely held notions in the study of American socialism and immigrant political behavior. We find that concentrations of Swedish and Italian immigrants are positively associated with socialist voting. Most notably, we find that concentrations of German immigrants are *negatively* associated with socialist voting in the 1912 presidential election, even when we control for a range of relevant variables. As we discuss below, there are strong grounds for believing that individual Germans were not disproportionately socialist in the decade before the First World War. If we are correct, the mass of evidence for Ger-

man immigrant socialism in cities such as Milwaukee, detailed in numerous case studies, provides an inadequate basis for generalization because it is based on a context-specific relationship.

The thrust of this article is self-consciously inductive. Our aim is to bring a potentially rich, but previously underexploited, source of data to bear on empirical generalizations that have wide currency in American historiography. However, the research presented here is part of a broader, more theoretical attempt to explain the sources and limitations of socialist support, and the results of our analysis bear directly on this project (Lipset and Marks forthcoming).

A number of historians and political sociologists have sought to generalize about immigrant support for socialism. One stream of hypothesizing, the "cultural baggage" approach, focuses on the social and cultural background of immigrants. From this perspective, scholars have argued that immigrants from urbanized/industrialized societies were most likely to support radical or socialist movements in America, because the standards of justice they brought with them were immediately relevant to their new situation (Gedicks 1976; Rosenblum 1973). A second approach has concentrated on the postmigratory social context of immigrant life rather than on cultural predispositions. In this vein, scholars have argued that the experience of immigrating into a rapidly industrializing society instills a sense of uprootedness that can be profoundly radicalizing for those without the skills or experiences to deal effectively with their new environment (Handlin 1973; Leggett 1963; see Marks 1989).

The scholarly debate between proponents of these approaches has been a fruitful one and has generated case studies that have shed much light on the ways in which immigrant politics reflect different patterns of experience and socialization. Both approaches, however, share the assumption that support for socialism is the expression of a general disposition towards radicalism that can be explained in terms of the individual immigrant's cultural background and social context. Neither approach places much weight on the rational sources of radicalism conceived as a choice among alternatives for political expression that are given within a particular political system. In other words, these approaches conceive of radicalism as a social-psychological phenomenon, as an expression of personal experiences or qualities

abstracted from the attraction (or repulsion) exerted by the platforms, policies, and leadership of competing political parties.

The findings of this article suggest that support for the Socialist party cannot be understood as the expression of diffuse radical impulses. While the political orientations of some groups of immigrants remained more or less constant across the elections we consider, the political orientations of many German and English immigrants were transformed in response to the First World War and the Socialist party's determined opposition to American intervention. From this standpoint, the article can be understood as the study of a single case, namely, the change in immigrant voting across two elections. This case was selected because it posed a particularly stark challenge to theories of immigrant radicalism that explain support for socialism in terms of individual propensities. We conclude that it is not possible to generalize about immigrant radicalism without grasping the concrete character of the party-political choices that were available. In other words, it seems to make sense to conceive of radicalism in general, and socialist voting in particular, as a relation between the individual and the party or movement concerned as opposed to a personal propensity that can be understood by looking at individuals in isolation from the political system.

#### ESTABLISHED HYPOTHESES AND EXPECTATIONS

The literature on immigrant political activity has developed coherent sets of expectations about the orientations of various groups of immigrants towards the Socialist party, and it will be useful to elaborate these before setting out the results of our own quantitative analysis. Briefly, German, Russian (Jewish), Finnish, and Norwegian immigrants are generally viewed as strongly prosocialist, while Irish, Italian, and Swedish immigrants are believed to be strongly antisocialist.

No group is regarded as more firmly entrenched in socialism than immigrants from Germany. Germans were the core of the early socialist movement, and their participation in national and municipal Socialist party politics is detailed in several case studies of eastern and midwestern towns and cities where the Socialist party was particularly successful (Ensslen and Ickstadt 1983; Leinenweber 1981). "Artisans and intellectuals from Ger-

many had more influence than any other immigrant group in the establishment and early growth of the American socialist movement” (Laslett 1970: 9; Buhle 1987). In Milwaukee, where the Socialist party sustained a powerful political machine from the beginning of the twentieth century to the Second World War, supporters of the party “tended primarily to be workers and ethnic Germans” (Miller 1986), while in New York, before the rise of Yiddish socialism, “Germans virtually embodied socialism” (Perrier 1983). The prominent role of Germans is supported by a quantitative study of the sources of radical and socialist voting in Illinois that finds a strong positive relationship for every election between 1900 and 1924 between the proportion of white immigrants, of whom Germans were the largest minority, and voting for the Socialist party (Wolfe and Hodge 1983).

The leadership of Germans in the American socialist movement has been linked to the political sources of emigration from Germany, particularly in the wake of the 1848 revolution and state repression of the socialist movement in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The German socialist movement was the largest in the world before the First World War, and many immigrants to America brought their socialist sympathies with them (Bodnar 1985: 86). More generally, German immigrant support for the Socialist party has been linked to the familiarity that many Germans already had with the changes associated with industrialization: “It was primarily those immigrants with industrial backgrounds who added to the radical cohorts in this country. Germans were conspicuous in this regard” (Rosenblum 1973: 152).

While they have not directly challenged this line of analysis, a number of writers have pointed out that the American Socialist party was composed of a far greater proportion of native-born Americans than any previous socialist movement, and that for the first time German immigrants did not dominate the leadership of the socialist movement. Some writers have also noted that the influence of the first wave of German radical immigrants appeared to be on the wane in some cities, such as Chicago, after the turn of the twentieth century (Ensslen and Ickstadt 1983; Keil 1986).

Immigrants from Russia during this period, of whom approximately 52% were Jews, have been regarded, along with the Germans, as the immigrant core of the Socialist party.<sup>2</sup> “In terms of proportion, the Jewish balloting on behalf of socialism was

perhaps exceeded only by that of the German-Americans and the Finnish-Americans" (Liebman 1979: 48). The great successes of the Socialist party in New York City in the 1910s, which included the election of Meyer London to Congress in 1915, 1917, and 1921, were rooted in the first generation of Jewish immigrants on the East Side (Gorenstein 1961; Leinenweber 1981). Like German immigrants, many Jews were "ready made socialists" by the time they came to America (Liebman 1979). Moreover, as Rosenblum (1973: 150) hypothesizes, the propensity of Jewish immigrants for radical politics was increased because they "possessed social characteristics quite in tune with an industrializing America."

Finnish immigration never reached the mass proportions of German or Jewish immigration, with the result that its impact on American society and socialism was smaller. Nevertheless, in proportional terms Finns are regarded as one of the most socialist-leaning immigrant groups (Gedicks 1976; Kivisto 1984; Kostianen 1983). The theme of previous exposure to socialism is frequent in case studies of Finnish Americans. One contemporary Finnish-American socialist attested that "Socialism with us is a kind of immigrant baggage. All the prominent workers in the Socialist vineyard are Old Country Socialists" (quoted in Kolehmainen 1952). However, the hypothesis of prior experience of industrialization and cultural affinity with America does not seem to apply. Case studies of Finnish immigrants have emphasized instead the process of rural proletarianization and traditions of resistance to Russian imperialism (Gedicks 1976; Kivisto 1984).

Norwegian immigrants also had a reputation for radicalism. Like the Finns, "many Norwegian immigrants had leftist sympathies and were socialists when they [arrived]; in Norway, socialism was a rural phenomenon" (quoted in Wefald 1971: 29). Few Norwegians had previously lived in cities, but their rural culture emphasized a communitarian way of life, resistance to central authority, and strong egalitarian values.

Swedes, in contrast, are reputed to have been predominantly conservative, despite having one of the most celebrated martyrs of the Left, Joe Hill (formerly Joel Hägglund), in their ranks (Carlsson 1976). The factors that are hypothesized as influencing Finnish radicalism are adapted to explain Swedish conservatism. Unlike Finnish immigrants, "the majority of Swedish immigrants arrived in America before socialism had obtained a foothold in

Sweden” (Gedicks 1976). And while Finns tended to come from landless labor backgrounds, “the small farmer . . . predominated in the later Swedish emigration stream” (ibid.).

In contrast to the nineteenth century, by the early years of the twentieth century the English made up a relatively small proportion of new immigrants. English immigrants were subject to crosscutting influences in their attitudes toward socialism. They were well acculturated with industrialization and brought with them strong trade union and working-class political traditions (Aronowitz 1973: 144). These traditions were especially strong among workers in skilled occupations such as ironworking and glassblowing, and in coal mining (Green 1975: 27; Laslett 1986; Oestreicher 1988). However, many English immigrants were also likely to be skilled workers in industries that were relatively sheltered from labor-saving innovation, such as maintenance mechanics. They were also found disproportionately in managerial positions ranging from foremen of labor gangs to technicians in the mining industry.

Irish immigrants have generally been viewed as having the weakest socialist propensities of any group from Western Europe. While instances of Irish radicalism documented for the 1870s and 1880s challenge the view that the Irish were always conservative (Brundage 1986; Wilentz 1979), there is little evidence of broad-based Irish support for the American Socialist party. A study of socialism in New York reports that the Irish, “who were well-represented in certain areas of the trade union movement, were entirely absent from the Socialist movement except for episodic appearances” (Leinenweber 1981). A number of writers have explained this in terms of the central role of the Irish in Democratic city machines and the determined opposition of the Catholic church to radical political movements (Dubofsky 1968; Handlin 1973; Karson 1958). In New York, as in Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, the Irish rose in city government and were integrated in police and fire departments, school systems, and clerical trades (Aronowitz 1973: 159–60). The opposition between the Catholic church and the Socialist party was such that “no Catholic worker in early-twentieth-century America could be unaware that his Church was an adversary, not an ally, of socialism” (Karson 1974: 198; Donnelly 1982).

Like the Irish, Italian immigrants are viewed as a group that

provided little support for the Socialist party. In the first place, Italians were overwhelmingly Catholic. Second, a large proportion of them came from rural backgrounds where subordination was a customary aspect of their working lives, with the supposed consequence that once they came to America, "the demands of employers for absolute discipline and hard work were not difficult for them to accept" (Aronowitz 1973: 165). Finally, a large proportion of Italian immigrants were "birds of passage," remaining in the New World only until they built sufficient savings to return with honor to their native country. Hence it is hypothesized that Italians tended to be economic in their orientation to work, rarely developing a commitment to radical political change (Barton 1975).

#### DATA AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

In order to test these basic expectations about the orientation of immigrants to the Socialist party, we have focused our attention on six states: Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (see Appendix A). These states were selected because they have large immigrant populations and exhibit theoretically relevant variation at the state and county level with regard to the proportion of rural/urban population, the presence of industrial manufacturing, and the distribution of native/immigrant population. We have not attempted to select a random sample of states or counties, which in this context would be a dubious undertaking. Our choice of these six states allows us to examine some interesting patterns of variation in a subset that includes a significant proportion of the total number of individuals in the groups with which we are concerned. In 1910 these states encompassed 59% of the foreign-born Germans in the United States, 44% of the English, 39% of the Finns, 51% of the Irish, 60% of the Italians, 55% of the Norwegians, 65% of the Russians, and 52% of the Swedes. In addition, these states are of considerable substantive importance in overall support for the Socialist party: they provided 42% of the total socialist vote in 1912 and 59% of the total socialist vote in 1920.

Using counties in these six states as the units of analysis allows us to match census data for 1910 and 1920 with election returns for the 1912 and 1920 presidential elections.<sup>3</sup> These data, in ratio

form, are then analyzed using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to explore the relationship between concentrations of specific ethnic groups and voting for the Socialist party.<sup>4</sup> The equation includes variables for each of the ethnic groups as well as the percentage of wage earners in manufacturing and the percentage of urban population.

The regression coefficients presented here should be interpreted in terms of the impact of the percentage of a given ethnic group on the percentage of socialist voting across the counties under study, rather than as a measure of how individuals voted. To translate aggregate results such as those presented here into statements about individual behavior requires information about contextual effects that is unavailable from the historical record (Firebaugh 1978; Shively 1969). However, it is possible to control for some important contending influences on socialist voting at the county level, and this article utilizes census data in an attempt to do so systematically.

#### FINDINGS

Our research strategy allows us to explore the effects of varying concentrations of immigrant groups across counties and between elections. Table I reports coefficients for all six states together and for each state individually.<sup>5</sup> The patterns that emerge both confirm and disconfirm entrenched notions concerning immigrant political orientation. We begin by examining those immigrant groups for which prior expectations are confirmed and then turn to the groups for which our findings are likely to be more controversial.

#### *Expectations Confirmed: Socialist and Nonsocialist Immigrants*

The propensities of two groups in particular are strongly confirmed in the regression analysis: those of Russian Jews and the Irish. We find a positive and statistically significant relationship between the proportion of Russian immigrants at the county level and the percentage voting socialist for both the 1912 and 1920 presidential elections. Even though Russians tended to be concentrated in urban and working-class counties, where we would expect socialist voting to be highest, the overall coefficient for

Table 1 OLS regression results, 1912 and 1920

	Wage earners										$R^2$
	Intercept	Urban	German	English	Russian	Nordic	Irish	Italian			
1912											
Overall	0.022 (5.976)	0.050 (4.442)	-0.123 (2.347)	0.643 (1.780)	0.491 (2.868)	0.399 (13.86)	-2.343 (9.375)	0.163 (1.122)			.45
Illinois	0.018 (4.669)	0.044 (2.774)	-0.029 (0.311)	0.998 (2.108)	1.531 (4.622)	-0.036 (0.387)	-1.902 (3.334)	-0.137 (0.908)			.50
Minnesota	0.065 (1.730)	-0.022 (0.048)	-0.563 (1.813)	4.273 (1.351)	-0.108 (0.135)	0.244 (1.890)	-4.215 (2.542)	-0.647 (0.565)			.51
New York	0.006 (0.747)	0.043 (1.887)	-0.009 (0.049)	0.337 (0.753)	0.375 (1.824)	0.145 (0.572)	-0.975 (3.119)	0.065 (0.294)			.48
Ohio	0.022 (3.710)	0.355 (2.734)	-0.195 (1.093)	1.504 (1.881)	0.055 (0.075)	0.397 (0.694)	-3.493 (2.673)	0.500 (0.920)			.63
Pennsylvania	0.012 (1.108)	0.259 (2.587)	0.617 (1.345)	1.006 (0.797)	0.797 (1.939)	0.493 (1.380)	-2.863 (3.985)	0.643 (1.867)			.42
Wisconsin	0.006 (0.286)	0.104 (0.630)	0.130 (0.835)	-0.277 (0.252)	1.015 (1.524)	0.321 (2.960)	-1.648 (1.080)	-0.231 (0.559)			.43

1920

Overall	-0.004 (1.342)	0.163 (4.811)	0.013 (1.533)	0.502 (7.433)	-0.203 (0.564)	1.076 (6.333)	0.494 (17.38)	-1.234 (4.258)	0.272 (2.222)
Illinois	0.005 (2.823)	0.040 (1.060)	0.007 (0.987)	0.148 (2.242)	0.479 (1.871)	1.579 (5.496)	0.075 (1.358)	-1.287 (2.885)	0.219 (3.662)
Minnesota	0.024 (1.021)	0.277 (1.815)	0.036 (1.408)	-0.383 (1.132)	-0.289 (0.085)	0.542 (0.517)	0.477 (4.794)	-2.439 (1.174)	0.256 (0.172)
New York	-0.003 (0.419)	0.127 (1.628)	-0.005 (0.283)	0.287 (1.026)	0.821 (1.803)	0.874 (5.616)	0.259 (0.962)	-0.794 (2.314)	0.498 (1.951)
Ohio	0.003 (1.376)	0.091 (2.319)	0.017 (1.791)	0.014 (1.618)	0.346 (1.026)	0.573 (1.263)	0.113 (0.666)	-1.662 (1.921)	0.312 (1.791)
Pennsylvania	-0.001 (0.172)	0.084 (1.957)	0.022 (1.492)	0.659 (2.012)	0.173 (0.198)	0.589 (1.089)	0.046 (0.187)	-1.497 (2.592)	0.375 (1.928)
Wisconsin	-0.003 (0.123)	0.408 (1.929)	-0.003 (0.079)	0.931 (2.809)	-2.583 (0.973)	0.699 (0.516)	0.354 (1.926)	-3.308 (0.789)	0.178 (0.278)

Note: Entries are multiple regression coefficients (with t ratios in parentheses).

Russians is positive despite control variables tapping these influences. Within individual states, the relationship is strong and positive in New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania (1912), the three states with the greatest concentrations of Russian-born immigrants. This result is particularly impressive because New York, which has been the focus of intensive case study, does not exert undue influence on these results.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond this basic finding, a question arises concerning the absence of a significant positive coefficient for counties in Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Does this indicate that Russian immigrants in these states were unlike those in the other states we analyze? When we attempt to answer this question, we have to be extremely sensitive to the possibilities generated by the ecological character of our data. The proportions of Russian immigrants in the populations of Ohio, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are far lower than in Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania (see Appendix A), and as a result the coefficients for these states are more easily swayed by the introduction of variables that tap related sources of socialist voting. Consistent with the case study evidence that relates support for the Socialist party with Russian Jews, the percentage of Jews among Russian immigrants is markedly higher in New York, Illinois, and Pennsylvania than in the other states.<sup>7</sup>

The results for Irish immigrants strongly confirm the established view that the Socialist party had very little success with this group. The coefficient for the percentage of Irish-born immigrants for 1912 is consistently negative and highly significant overall and for every state except Wisconsin. For 1920 the proportion of Irish is again negative, although no longer significant in the states with the lowest proportion of Irish: Ohio, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Given the disproportionate location of Irish immigrants in urban areas and among large concentrations of workers, that is, in those areas where the Socialist party had the most success in these states, the negative coefficient is clear evidence of the weakness of socialist support among this group.

Although the results for English immigrants are not as unambiguous as for Russian and Irish, they are broadly consistent with the expectation that English immigrants were not particularly strong supporters of the Socialist party. Interpreting the results demonstrates the difficulty of analyzing a small immigrant group (see Appendix A). In 1912 there is an overall positive coefficient,

but only in Illinois is this relationship statistically significant. This finding is probably explained by the concentration of English coal miners with longstanding socialist sympathies in District 12 of the United Mine Workers Union (Laslett 1986).

While it is possible to speak of Irish and Russian-Jewish immigrants in terms of deep-seated individual propensities either for or against radicalism, this approach is less convincing for the English. The Socialist party's opposition to American intervention on the side of the Allies in the First World War alienated many English immigrants who otherwise might have supported the party. While the proportion of English immigrants is still associated with high levels of socialist voting in some states in 1920, the overall association is no longer positive, a result that is congruent with the much-publicized alienation of a number of former English leaders of the Socialist party, including Upton Sinclair and John Spargo.

In analyzing Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish immigrants, we focus on Minnesota, the only state in which each group represents a significant proportion of the population (see Appendix A). Minnesota was characterized by both a high proportion of Nordic immigrants and high levels of socialist voting. Three heavily Nordic counties in Minnesota provided the Socialist party with exceptionally strong support in 1912: Lake, with 36.8% socialist voting; Beltrami, with 28.7%; and Koochiching, with 24.3%. Only Milwaukee, with 26.9% socialist voting, is comparable among the counties we analyze. The coefficients in the fully specified equation for the percentage of Finns at the county level in Minnesota are positive and significant for both 1912 ( $b = 0.802$ ,  $t$  ratio = 2.478) and 1920 ( $b = 0.636$ ,  $t$  ratio = 2.519), matching our theoretical expectations, while those for the Norwegians are positive but not significant. More surprisingly, there are strong positive coefficients for the percentage of Swedes in Minnesota in both 1912 ( $b = 0.220$ ,  $t$  ratio = 1.664) and 1920 ( $b = 0.503$ ,  $t$  ratio = 4.716). It is worth noting that this phenomenon is not confined to Minnesota: when we analyze Swedes separately in Illinois and Wisconsin, states where they are also present in considerable numbers, we find consistently positive coefficients that are statistically significant for Wisconsin in 1912 ( $b = 0.413$ ,  $t$  ratio = 2.493) and Illinois in 1920 ( $b = 0.156$ ,  $t$  ratio = 2.618). These results cannot be explained as an artifact of similar patterns of geographical location on the part of Swedes and more socialist

Finns and Norwegians, because the equations control for the presence of these groups. When we combine the proportions of Finns, Norwegians, and Swedes into one category, we find a very strong and significant positive association with socialist voting across the six states for both 1912 and 1920 (Table 1).

*Expectations Disconfirmed:  
The Italians and the Germans*

Our findings for Italians and Germans at the county level and their support for the Socialist party differ decisively from expectations derived from the case study literature. The findings for Italian immigrants are surprising on two counts. First, the sign of the overall association between concentrations of Italians and socialist voting is positive for both the 1912 and 1920 elections and is highly significant for 1920. Given the strength of Catholicism among Italian immigrants and the fact that a large minority viewed their stay in America as a brief one, these results are counterintuitive. Italians tended to live in cities and counties where the proportion of industrial workers was relatively high, but the positive association is robust even when we control for these variables. Second, the association between the proportion of Italians at the county level and socialist voting becomes stronger after the First World War despite socialist opposition to the Italian war effort. The result for 1920 is most significant in states where Italians made up a sizable proportion of the immigrant population: Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

An important reason for this unexpected finding can be found outside American conditions altogether, in the effects of fierce opposition to the war within a large and influential segment of the Italian Socialist party. When a delegation of prowar Italian labor leaders who had been expelled from their organizations in Italy visited the United States, they were denounced by several groups of Italian immigrants (Montgomery 1986: 337).

It also appears likely that the American Socialist party benefited from the unpopularity of Woodrow Wilson among Italians. For some Italians, the Socialist party may have been less objectionable than the Democratic party, which was associated with a leader who was believed to harbor a deep-seated anti-Italian prejudice. Not only had Wilson expressed thinly disguised anti-Italian sentiments in his *History of the American People*, but he opposed

Italian war claims at the Paris peace conference. Although Wilson was not on the ballot in 1920, this issue dominated the American-Italian press and greatly reduced Italian support for the Democratic presidential nominee, James M. Cox (Nelli 1970: 118–19). A proportion of anti-Republican Italian voters may thus have been induced to vote for Eugene Debs as the lesser of two evils. If so, the association between Italian immigrants and the Socialist party is to be explained not simply in terms of the leanings of Italians towards radicalism or socialism, but as a result of the alternatives open to them in the presidential elections of 1912 and 1920.

Equally surprising are our results for German immigrants. In 1912, the overall relationship between the proportion of Germans and support for the Socialist party is negative even in the presence of controls. This finding runs counter to the expectation of German socialist affinity, as discussed above. How can we account for both this overall negative association and the extensive case study evidence detailing German support for socialism in various cities, such as Milwaukee?<sup>8</sup>

A plausible explanation for this result is that the negative coefficient for 1912 reflects a basic religious cleavage within the German immigrant population between Protestants, who tended to vote socialist, and Catholics, who did not. Given the trenchant opposition of the Catholic church to the Socialist party and the pattern of socialist voting among other groups of immigrants, we attempted to control for the effects of religion by including data on the percentage of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews taken from the 1916 census of religion. However, controlling for the effects of these variables has little influence on the coefficient for Germans.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, a breakdown of counties according to degree of industrialization and urbanization does provide some insight into these apparently contradictory results (Table 2). In urban counties and counties with a significant percentage of wage earners, the coefficient for the proportion of Germans is positive, though not significant for 1912. In the remaining counties there is a clear and statistically significant *negative* relationship between the proportion of German immigrants and socialist voting. Thus the overall negative relationship between the proportion of foreign-born Germans and socialist voting in 1912 is a product of rural and nonindustrial areas rather than the urban or industrialized areas that have been the focus of previous analysis.

The negative association for German immigrants in 1912 is

Table 2 Regression coefficients for German-born immigrants subset by percentage of wage earners and urban population

	High-wage- earner counties ( <i>N</i> = 50)	Low-wage- earner counties ( <i>N</i> = 425)	Urban counties ( <i>N</i> = 87)	Rural counties ( <i>N</i> = 388)
1912	0.466 (1.236)	-0.144 (2.785)	0.034 (0.200)	-0.147 (2.703)
1920	1.776 (3.912)	0.444 (6.585)	0.868 (3.942)	0.451 (6.660)

Note: Entries are multiple regression coefficients (with *t* ratios in parentheses) from an equation which includes control variables for percentage wage earners in manufacturing (in urban/rural analysis), percentage urban (in high/low-wage-earner analysis), percentage of foreign-born English, Russian, Nordic, Irish, and Italian. High-wage-earner counties are defined as counties with 15% or more of wage earners in manufacturing and low-wage-earner counties as less than 15% wage earners in manufacturing. Urban counties are defined as counties with 50% or more of the population in towns of more than 2,500 and rural counties as counties with less than 50% of the population in towns of 2,500.

sharply reversed in 1920. The overall coefficient for 1920 is both positive and statistically significant. Concentrations of Germans in rural and nonindustrial counties (Table 2) become positively and significantly related to socialist voting. This extraordinary shift from 1912 to 1920 testifies to the decisive impact of the First World War on the bases of socialist support and to the role of party-political alternatives in channeling participation. Socialist opposition to American intervention in the war mobilized support in areas of German immigration far more effectively than any previous appeal. While the absence of German-based support for the Socialist party in 1912 is surprising in light of previous case studies, the positive intensity of the connection after the war confirms analyses of rapid socialist growth in Wisconsin and elsewhere (e.g., Lorence 1982). After the First World War and the Bolshevik revolution, the Socialist party shed the bulk of its native support in the West and in the farming states and became a party of immigrants based in a few midwestern and eastern states. A county-by-county comparison of the data between 1912 and 1920 reveals the complementary processes that underlie the shift in sign and magnitude of the German coefficient; not only did the level of socialist voting rise in many predominantly German areas, but the level of socialist voting in non-German counties declined.

While it is clear that our results do not directly contradict case studies that have found strong socialist support among some groups of German immigrants, they do call into question the notion that German immigrants as a whole were disproportionately likely to vote for the Socialist party in 1912. This notion appears to be based on outlying cases and fragmentary information. German immigrants undoubtedly took a leading part in early socialist movements; their influence was such that many socialist meetings were actually conducted in German. Some of the strongest centers of socialism, particularly in Wisconsin, were rooted in German immigrant populations. Nonetheless, in the years immediately prior to the First World War we cannot speak of an affinity between Germans and socialist voting.

Before we leave this question, it is worth examining the possibility that we have merely traced an epiphenomenon, particularly given the ecological character of the data. In the absence of individual-level data, we can never answer this question conclusively, but it is possible to bring additional sources of evidence to bear on our statistical findings.

The changing pattern of immigration from Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century sheds light on our findings. In the first place, the individual motives underlying emigration from Germany to the United States appear to have changed decisively over time. The great wave of emigration during the 1850s consisted of large numbers of liberals and socialists who left Germany in response to the failure of the 1848 revolution and the heavy-handed repression that followed. These emigrants provided the nucleus of the early socialist movement in America. Emigration in the following decades, and particularly during the next great wave of emigration in the 1880s, appears to have been motivated by the search for better economic conditions: in these years the number of emigrants corresponds quite closely to changes in German economic performance (Köllman and Marschalck 1973).

It also seems likely that the potential for radicalism among German Americans declined as the proportion of immigrants from the agrarian regions of East Elbia increased in the second half of the nineteenth century. These farmers and farm laborers left their native Prussia in response to a deepening agricultural crisis that began in the late 1870s and undermined their traditional way of life (Bade 1983). Their goal was to secure agrarian independence in the New World, though few of them did. Given their cultural

roots in a society dominated by Junkers and their traditionalist expectations in coming to the United States, it would be surprising if they were predisposed towards the Socialist party. Only the events of the First World War and the options available in the 1920 presidential election could induce them to support the Socialist party.

An intensive research project on the German working-class community in Chicago suggests that the radical influence of the first wave of German immigrants was in decline by the early 1900s (Keil and Jentz 1983). As German immigrants self-consciously underwent the process of Americanization and the generation of committed socialists aged, the distinct German subculture of newspapers, festivities, theater, picnics, and clubs of all kinds that underpinned socialist organization declined. The old German-language socialist *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, which explicitly rejected American culture and values, was increasingly viewed as old-fashioned and out of touch with American conditions (Ensslen and Ickstadt 1983). By the early 1900s, the most recent wave of immigrants, along with the children of earlier immigrants, were intent on participating within existing American organizations, including AFL unions that were generally suspicious of radical political activity. While the socialist subculture of German immigrants could sustain and regenerate itself in a few cities densely populated with Germans, in most areas it eroded. German support for the Socialist party in 1920 was conditioned above all by the party's refusal to support American intervention against Germany rather than by German commitment to the party's social-economic program.

## CONCLUSION

In our research we have tested commonly held beliefs about the socialist orientations of eight immigrant groups. In several instances our findings confirm prior expectations, providing in the process a quantitative basis for generalizations that previously have been grounded exclusively in case studies. But we have also found evidence that goes against some deep-seated notions concerning immigrant political orientation.

As expected, the percentage of Russian and Finnish immigrants at the county level is positively and significantly associated with

the socialist vote in the presidential elections of 1912 and 1920. Also as expected, the percentage of Irish immigrants is negatively related to the proportion of socialist voting. However, our findings with respect to Swedish and particularly Italian and German immigrant groups conflict with expectations formulated in the literature. For 1912 we find a positive association for concentrations of Swedish and Italian immigrants and support for the American Socialist party, and a negative association for German immigrants. Only for 1920, after the profound experience of the First World War, do we find a positive association between concentrations of German immigrants and support for socialism.

We have pointed to arguments that suggest that these aggregate results hold up for individuals, but it is well to state explicitly that the results of our quantitative analysis do not clinch the argument. We do not rule out the possibility that additional variables not tapped in our analysis are present where these groups are concentrated, and that these might outweigh the statistical effects we measure. We have been able to control for several theoretically relevant variables, but we have not controlled for all possible variables. For example, it could be that in counties where Germans were concentrated, other factors that we do not control for were unpropitious for the Socialist party or vice versa, and that these factors, rather than the presence of Germans, account for the associations we measure.

We stress these limitations of our findings because the kind of quantitative analysis presented here cannot by itself confirm or disconfirm empirical generalizations; it must be refined and extended through case study analysis. Structured, focused case studies may be particularly valuable in evaluating contextual effects where we have few sources of comparative data (George and McKeown 1985). We have argued that the selection of cases for analyzing the relationship between immigrant groups and support for socialism has all too often been determined by the relative success of the Socialist party in a particular city or region, rather than by the criteria of hypothesis testing. For this reason, our vision of immigrant political activity has been skewed.

Finally, this article provides a consistent pattern of evidence supporting the contention that radical political activity is shaped by party context. Between the presidential elections of 1912 and 1920, the American Socialist party had to react to the involve-

ment of the United States in the First World War. The party's decision to oppose American intervention alienated some groups and attracted others. Comparison across these two elections indicates that it is not possible to speak of the socialist propensities of individuals in the abstract without referring to the programs and strategies of the political parties they supported. Some immigrant groups, such as the Irish, never voted for the Socialist party, no matter what strategy it pursued, while others, such as Russian Jews, consistently gave it disproportionate support. But there are also immigrant groups, such as the Germans, whose level of support responded to specific political appeals. The existence of significant shifts over a span of just eight years attests to the fact that the causal path from individual propensities to political behavior traverses powerful intervening variables related to the political opportunities available under specific historical circumstances.

## APPENDIX A Ethnic profiles of states, 1910 and 1920

1910	IL	MN	NY	OH	PA	WI
Total population (thousands)	5,638	2,075	9,113	4,767	7,665	2,333
Percentages						
Urban	61.7	41.0	78.8	55.9	60.4	43.0
Rural	38.3	59.0	21.2	44.1	39.6	57.0
Foreign-born whites	21.3	26.2	29.9	12.5	18.8	22.0
English	5.0	2.2	5.4	7.3	7.6	2.7
German	26.5	20.2	16.0	29.3	13.6	45.5
Irish	7.8	2.9	13.5	6.7	11.5	2.7
Italian	6.0	1.8	17.3	7.0	13.6	1.8
Russian	12.4	3.2	20.5	8.2	16.7	5.8
Finnish	0.2	4.9	0.3	0.7	0.2	1.1
Norwegian	2.7	19.4	0.9	0.2	0.2	11.1
Swedish	9.6	22.5	2.0	0.9	1.6	5.0
Socialist vote (1912)	7.1	8.2	4.0	8.7	6.9	8.4

APPENDIX A continued

1920	IL	MN	NY	OH	PA	WI
Total population (thousands)	6,485	2,387	10,385	5,759	8,720	2,632
Percentages						
Urban	67.9	44.1	82.7	63.8	64.3	47.3
Rural	32.1	55.9	17.3	36.2	35.7	52.7
Foreign-born whites	18.6	20.4	26.8	11.8	15.9	17.5
English	4.5	2.3	4.9	6.4	6.5	2.4
German	17.0	15.4	10.6	16.5	8.7	32.9
Irish	6.2	2.1	10.2	4.3	8.8	1.7
Italian	7.8	1.5	19.6	8.9	16.1	2.4
Russian	9.8	3.3	19.0	6.4	11.6	4.7
Finnish	0.3	6.0	0.4	0.9	0.2	1.5
Norwegian	2.3	18.6	1.0	0.2	0.2	9.9
Swedish	8.7	23.1	1.9	1.1	1.4	5.0
Socialist vote (1920)	3.6	7.6	7.0	2.8	3.8	11.5

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1910, 1920; Congressional Quarterly 1985.  
 Note: Ethnic groups are a percentage of foreign-born whites (other percentages are based upon total population).

APPENDIX B WLS regression results, 1912 and 1920

	Intercept	Wage earners	Urban	German	English	Russian	Nordic	Irish	Italian
1912									
Overall	0.022 (7.591)	0.252 (6.156)	0.042 (4.365)	-0.087 (2.138)	0.485 (1.629)	0.497 (3.295)	0.372 (11.87)	-1.805 (10.94)	0.129 (0.999)
Illinois	0.018 (5.636)	0.051 (0.596)	0.036 (2.601)	-0.031 (0.420)	1.196 (2.715)	1.638 (4.185)	-0.047 (0.522)	-1.661 (3.579)	-0.209 (1.445)
Minnesota	0.059 (1.748)	0.810 (3.223)	-0.003 (0.090)	-0.414 (1.624)	2.019 (0.681)	-0.055 (0.080)	0.243 (2.037)	-3.130 (2.618)	-0.241 (0.217)
New York	0.005 (1.004)	0.114 (1.583)	0.025 (1.465)	0.067 (0.394)	0.186 (0.514)	0.258 (1.482)	0.232 (0.912)	-0.488 (2.421)	0.037 (0.431)
Ohio	0.023 (4.274)	0.347 (2.675)	0.075 (2.596)	-0.215 (1.331)	1.799 (2.223)	0.269 (0.340)	0.259 (0.422)	-3.246 (2.636)	0.388 (0.667)
Pennsylvania	0.012 (1.287)	0.234 (2.358)	0.021 (0.643)	0.555 (1.239)	0.708 (0.552)	0.704 (1.647)	0.566 (1.496)	-2.588 (3.950)	0.675 (1.922)
Wisconsin	0.015 (0.991)	0.180 (1.172)	0.019 (0.732)	0.025 (0.204)	-0.207 (0.290)	0.923 (1.444)	0.269 (2.829)	-1.126 (1.145)	-0.196 (0.518)

1920

Overall	0.001 (0.467)	0.135 (4.651)	0.002 (0.314)	0.415 (7.165)	-0.039 (0.164)	0.865 (4.511)	0.439 (13.77)	-0.637 (3.243)	0.368 (3.624)
Illinois	0.005 (3.702)	0.042 (1.166)	0.003 (0.566)	0.112 (1.973)	0.450 (1.757)	1.575 (4.481)	0.036 (0.664)	-0.747 (2.007)	0.235 (3.368)
Minnesota	0.039 (1.892)	0.324 (2.026)	0.022 (0.896)	-0.469 (1.651)	-1.929 (0.643)	0.592 (0.677)	0.392 (4.126)	-2.358 (1.447)	0.599 (0.383)
New York	-0.003 (0.525)	0.106 (1.435)	0.002 (0.121)	0.266 (0.972)	0.714 (1.612)	0.761 (4.113)	0.247 (0.838)	-0.625 (2.157)	0.470 (2.030)
Ohio	0.004 (2.611)	0.109 (2.939)	0.008 (1.026)	0.095 (1.129)	0.509 (1.600)	0.805 (1.650)	0.062 (0.341)	-1.551 (2.063)	0.239 (1.297)
Pennsylvania	0.001 (0.315)	0.066 (1.664)	0.022 (1.665)	0.544 (1.860)	-0.018 (0.023)	0.273 (0.569)	0.079 (0.366)	-0.959 (2.330)	0.445 (2.469)
Wisconsin	0.005 (0.312)	0.390 (1.932)	-0.002 (0.051)	0.783 (3.002)	-2.855 (1.242)	0.797 (0.549)	0.284 (1.976)	-2.931 (0.933)	0.404 (0.750)

Note: Entries are multiple regression coefficients (with *t* ratios in parentheses).

## NOTES

- 1 Our selection of immigrant groups is influenced by the availability of data as well as by substantive concerns. Because of changing borders, data on Austrian and Eastern European immigrants are not comparable across the 1910 and 1920 censuses.
- 2 This estimate is based upon the U.S. Bureau of the Census's (1910: 193) classification of immigrant populations by mother tongue. Of the over 1.6 million immigrants classified as "Russian" in 1910, 52.3% reported Yiddish or Hebrew as their mother tongue, while only 2.5% reported Russian as their native language (in addition, 26.1% reported Polish, 8.6% Lithuanian or Lettish, and 7.6% German).
- 3 The census data are from "Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790–1970" (ICPSR 0003), and the election data are from "United States Historical Election Returns, 1788–1984" (ICPSR 0001). We constructed two datasets, one combining 1910 census variables with 1912 election returns and one matching 1920 census variables with 1920 returns. For 1910, the total number of counties in the six states under analysis is 475; for 1920, there is one additional case because New York County became two counties, New York and the Bronx. Because the data on the number of wage earners in manufacturing are available only in the 1920 census returns, these data are matched to the 1910 census returns by combining Bronx County and New York County into one case. In addition, because data on rural/urban population are not available in machine-readable form for 1920, we matched the 1910 census data to the 1920 dataset by designating all the population in Bronx County as urban. Data on religious affiliation by county is obtained from the Census of Religious Bodies for 1916. Since these data are not available in machine-readable form, we entered the data for Roman Catholics, Jews, and "total religious affiliation" for each county. Protestants are defined as the total affiliated minus the number of Catholics and Jews. We checked the influence of these religion variables at various points in our analysis but do not include them in Table 1 because they have little influence on the remaining coefficients.
- 4 The independent variables, number of foreign-born immigrants, wage earners in manufacturing, and urban population, are divided by the total county population in order to mitigate the influence of population. The dependent variable, number of votes for the Socialist party, is divided by the total number of votes cast in the county for the presidential election. Although there has been some debate over the possibility of obtaining biased estimates when using ratio variables, Firebaugh (1988) demonstrates that while the use of ratio variables may lead to biased correlation coefficients, no systematic bias is introduced by the use of ratio variables in regression equations. In addition to OLS, we also estimate the parameters using weighted least squares (WLS). The weight is constructed as a function of the residual of the OLS equation, that is, the absolute value of the residuals are regressed on the predicted value from the OLS equation, with the weight calculated as the reciprocal of the square root of this predicted value (Gujarati 1988: 340). Since the WLS results do not vary substantially from those reported in Table 1 using OLS

- (see Appendix B), we have chosen, for ease of presentation, to report the OLS results.
- 5 Table 1 combines the percentages of Finns, Norwegians, and Swedes into one variable, Nordic immigrants. The relative smallness and the skewed geographical distribution of these groups makes it impractical to analyze each individually, yet, given our finding (discussed below) that their presence was strongly associated with socialist voting, we attempt to control for their joint influence.
  - 6 Although the proportions of Russians in New York County (1912) and Bronx County (1920) are the highest among the counties we analyze, neither New York nor the Bronx is an “influential” case in this analysis using the DFITS measure (Bollen and Jackman 1985). The DFBETAS measure indicates that these cases do have a relatively larger influence than other cases on the Russian coefficient. When we exclude New York (1912) and New York and the Bronx (1920) from the analysis, however, the coefficients for the proportion of Russian immigrants change only slightly.
  - 7 Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1910: 193) on mother tongues of Russian immigrants are broken down by geographic divisions. The Middle Atlantic (New York and Pennsylvania) had 63% Yiddish and Hebrew speakers compared with only 37% in the East North Central (which includes Wisconsin, Illinois, and Ohio), and 26% in the West North Central (which includes Minnesota).
  - 8 Among the counties under consideration in this study, Milwaukee County is an outlier as a result of both the large percentage of foreign-born German immigrants and the high level of support for the Socialist party. For both 1912 and 1920, Milwaukee has the largest standardized residual of any of the cases that we analyze. In addition, examination of the DFITS and DFBETAS measures indicates that Milwaukee County is an influential case (Bollen and Jackman 1985), although when we exclude Milwaukee from the analysis the overall fit and coefficients do not change substantively.
  - 9 When we include variables for the percentage of Protestants and the percentage of Catholics, the coefficient for Germans decreases from  $-0.123$  to  $-0.166$  and remains statistically significant ( $t$  ratio = 2.776). When we include interaction terms (percentage German times percentage Catholic and percentage German times percentage Protestant) in the equation, however, the German coefficient decreases ( $b = -0.556$ ,  $t$  ratio = 1.928), but neither of the interaction terms is significant for 1912.

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