

# Social Background of German Elites and Members of the Clergy (1800–1919)

## Abstract

Social mobility was an essential component of German economic development. While some successful businessmen came from the middle or lower strata of German society, the great majority came from the upper echelons, being the sons of lawyers, doctors, and professors (generally included among the educated middle classes or *Bildungsbürgertum*). As the second table shows, the sons of workers and lower officials were rarely appointed to the clergy. One exception to the national pattern, however, was the Catholic southwest (Württemberg), where many priests came from lower-middle-class backgrounds.

## Source

### I. Social Background of Members of the Elite Classes (Entrepreneurs and University Teachers)

--	a) of important entrepreneurs <sup>[1]</sup>	a) of important entrepreneurs <sup>1</sup>	b) of university teachers <sup>[2]</sup>	b) of university teachers <sup>2</sup>
Father's profession	1800–1870 NDB <sup>1</sup> (%)	1871–1914 NDB <sup>1</sup> (%)	1860–1889 (%)	1890–1919 (%)
Higher civil servants	4	6	11	11
Officers	1	-	2	2
University teachers	2	2	16	1
Teachers (higher schools)	grouped with the above	grouped with the above	6	7
Clergy	3	1	11	6
Lawyers	-	1	2	2
Physicians, pharmacists <sup>[3]</sup>	1	2	14	10
Artists and journalistic professions	-	-	3	2
Large landowners	2	2	2	1
Entrepreneurs <sup>[4]</sup>	54	53	6	12
<b>Higher strata</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>64</b>
Artisans, retailers, tavern-keepers	23	20	13	19
Farmers	2	4	5	4
Mid-level/ lower civil servants	5	6	3	5
Salaried employees/foremen	1	2	-	-
Workers	-	-	2	2
Teacher	-	1	4	4

<b>Middle / lower strata</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>
Number of cases	235	297	1,273	3,012

## II. Social Background of Protestant and Catholic Clerics

--	c) of Protestant clergy	c) of Protestant clergy	d) of Catholic clergy	d) of Catholic clergy
Father's occupation	Prussia 1887–1900 (%) <sup>[5]</sup>	Württemberg 1876–1900 (%) <sup>5</sup>	Prussia 1887–1900 (%) <sup>5</sup>	Württemberg 1876–1900 (%) <sup>5</sup>
Higher civil servants	4	4	1	1
Officers	1	0	0	-
Professors, teachers (higher schools)	3	5	1	0
Clergy	23	34	-	-
Lawyers		0	-	0
Physicians, pharmacists	1	3	1	2
Large landowners	0	1	0	0
Entrepreneurs	5 <sup>6</sup>	7	5 <sup>6</sup>	0
<b>Higher strata</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>
Artisans, retailers	-	-	-	-
Tavern-keepers	16 <sup>[6]</sup>	14	31 <sup>6</sup>	32
Farmers	11	3	26	35
Mid-level civil servants	14	8	13	4
Salaried employees	2	2	3	1
Teachers	18	17	14	13
<b>Middle strata</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>85</b>
Workers	1	2	4	3
Domestics	0	-	0	-
Lower civil servants	-	3	-	7
<b>Lower strata</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
Number of cases	5,769	1,350	2,195	1,089

### NOTES

[1] The compilation is based on the eight published volumes of *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB). These volumes, however, only include the leading entrepreneurs or those also active in leadership positions in other areas.

[2] Kaelble calculates his data on the basis of Christian Ferber, "Die Entwicklung des Lehrkörpers der deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen 1864–1954," in Helmuth Plessner, ed., *Untersuchungen zur Lage der deutschen Hochschullehrer*. Göttingen, 1956, vol. 3, p. 178. The university teachers included in the data were *Habilitation* cohorts.

[3] Also: veterinarians, chemists, architects, engineers.

[4] Here: industrialists and wholesalers. "Merchants" were assigned to the first position of the

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middle class, since the majority of them were most likely small-scale tradesmen.

[5] Calculated on the basis of the background of theology students.

[6] These are estimates. It is only after 1900 that university statistics in Prussia divide self-employed tradesmen into entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and artisans, retailers, etc., on the other hand. The average ratios from 1901–1911 (physicians: 29% entrepreneurial fathers vs. 71% fathers from the commercial middle class; teachers at higher schools: 26% to 74%) are posited here as the most favorable approximation.

Source: Hartmut Kaelble, "Sozialer Aufstieg in Deutschland 1850–1914," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 60 (1973): 52, 56, 63; data reprinted in Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka, and Gerhard Ritter, eds., *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1870–1914*. 2nd edition. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 125–26. Republished with permission.

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