

Election Campaign Posters Targeting Women Voters (1930/1932)

Abstract

Women comprised a majority of the German electorate throughout the entirety of the Weimar Republic, and parties across the political spectrum certainly wanted to appeal to female voters. Most parties continued to make those appeals using images of men, however. Election posters from 1919 to 1932 still predominantly featured the faces of male national party leaders, for instance; or a generic male worker, soldier, or farmer; or even just a clearly male body part, such as a bicep or a gripping hand.

A few parties, such as the Social Democrats (SPD) and the German Democrats (DDP), seem to have featured women more regularly and prominently in their election posters, and all parties seem to have increasingly used female figures in their election advertising by the 1930s. Such generalizations remain somewhat tentative, though, given that local party offices also produced a vast and diverse number of posters, and that the distribution of different poster designs varied widely. The famous and widely circulated photographs of campaign posters crowding Berlin's ubiquitous advertising columns (Litfaßsäule) at election time have given historians some indication of the circulation and popularity of individual poster designs in the capital city, but this may not have reflected circulation in regional cities, let alone in rural areas.

Still, a comparison of selected posters from different political parties in early 1930s that featured women can yield suggestive observations. This grouping of posters from the 1930 and 1932 election campaigns highlights some starkly contrasting approaches to depicting women.

A 1930 poster for the Catholic Center Party (Zentrum) bore the message "Who is protecting family, home, and work?," and it featured the woman as a mother who depended on the protection of a man carrying the shield of the Catholic Center party. A 1930 poster for the German State Party (Deutsche Staatspartei, DStP) similarly presented the woman as a mother, at least in two of the background images, but these mothers did not visibly rely on a male defender. Moreover, the featured female figure was not marked as a mother at all and could easily have been perceived by viewers as a career woman. Although the State Party had charted a markedly conservative path in 1930, after it had formed from of a merger between the liberal DDP and a right-wing association, the central figure reflected, perhaps, a lingering trace of the party's liberal legacy. The message "For unity, progress, [ethnic] people's community!" also contained both a nod to its liberal branch, with the word "progress," and to its conservative one, with the explicit reference to ethnic nationalism.

A 1930 poster for the Communist Party (KPD), which bore the message, "Fight with us!," depicted a female agricultural worker carrying a sickle, but she stood behind the male worker holding up a hammer, who occupied the poster's spotlight. The SPD produced a poster for the 1932 election that—alone among the examples here—presented the woman on her own, without a man or a family behind, beside, or in front of her. The straightforward message "Women—for Freedom and Peace! Vote for the Social Democrats" made the appeal to women explicit. The woman appeared especially confident and even joyous—as did, perhaps to a lesser degree, the women in the KPD and DStP posters. Given that the 1930 elections took place in September, over ten months into the economic depression, such optimistic images sought to project hope amidst the increasing hardships.

Finally, the two 1932 posters for the National Socialist Party (NSDAP)—one from the April Presidential election, which Hitler lost to Hindenburg; and one from the July Reichstag election, in which the Nazis

emerged as the most successful party by far, attracting over one-third of the electorate—showed two different approaches by the Nazis to depicting and appealing to women. The poster for the presidential election featured the woman as a mother, but, unlike the Center Party poster from 1930, she did not seem to rely on the protection of her husband. Instead, she stared at the viewer with what looked like grim determination, and her husband’s downcast gaze suggested that this woman played the protector role at least as much as he did. The poster nevertheless clearly ascribed to her a position in the home and caring for her family, since only the millions of men (“without work”) and millions of children (“without a future”) have, ostensibly, experienced a status change as a result of the economic depression. By contrast, the NSDAP election poster for the national elections two months later appealed to women not as mothers, but as voters who had, presumably, a full range of political interests. Like the SPD, KPD, and DStP posters, these two figures appeared confident and energized.

Historians have done a lot of research in recent years on the visual imagery of election campaigns in the Weimar Republic, and they continue to debate and to further explore the representativeness of various visual tropes. These six posters, from roughly the same time period, make no claim to representativeness, but they at least offer a small visual sampling of how Weimar Germany’s political parties framed at least some of their appeals to voting female citizens.

Source





Source: Zentrum poster, 1930. Unknown artist. Deutsches Historisches Museum P 62/984. [wikimedia commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zentrum_Poster_1930.jpg)

Deutsche Staatspartei poster, 1930. Unknown artist. Deutsches Historisches Museum P 62/1376

KPD poster, 1930. Bundesarchiv, Plak 102-073-007. Artist: John Heartfield.

SPD poster, 1932. Unknown artist. Württembergische Landesbibliothek 3.1/333

NSDAP poster for presidential election, 1932. Artist: Felix Albrecht. Deutsches Historisches Museum P 62/1063.1

NSDAP poster for Reichstag election, 1932. Artist: Felix Albrecht. Bundesarchiv Plak 002-042-064

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