

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 (next page), 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)

Father's profession	a) of important entrepreneurs ¹	1871-1914 NDB ¹ (%)	b) of university teachers ²	1890-1919 (%)
	1800-1870 NDB ¹ (%)		1860-1889 (%)	
Higher civil servants	4	6	11	11
Officers	1	-	2	2
University teachers	12	12	16	11
Teachers (higher schools)			6	7
Clergy	3	1	11	6
Lawyers	-	1	2	2
Physicians, pharmacists ^a	1	2	14	10
Artists and journalistic professions	-	-	3	2
Large landowners	2	2	2	1
Entrepreneurs ^b	54	53	6	12
Higher strata	67	67	73	64
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
Middle / lower strata	31	33	27	34

Number of cases	235	297	1,273	3,012
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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*, vol. 3 (Göttingen, 1956), p. 178. The university teachers included in the data were *Habilitation* cohorts.

3) Calculated on the basis of the background of theology students.

a. Also: veterinarians, chemists, architects, engineers.

b. Here: industrialists and wholesalers. "Merchants" were assigned to the first position of the middle class, since the majority of them were most likely small-scale tradesmen.

c. 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.

II. Social background of Protestant and Catholic Clerics

Father's occupation	c) of Protestant clergy		d) of Catholic clergy	
	Prussia 1887-1900 (%) ³	Württemberg 1876-1900 (%) ³	Prussia 1887-1900 (%) ³	Württemberg 1876-1900 (%) ³
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 ^c	7	5 ^c	0
Higher strata	37	54	8	3
Artisans, retailers	-	-	-	-
Tavern-keepers	16 ^c	14	31 ^c	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
Middle strata	61	44	87	85

Workers	1	2	4	3
Domestics	0	-	0	-
Lower civil servants	-	3	-	7
Lower strata	1	5	4	10
Number of cases	5,769	1,350	2,195	1,089

3) Calculated on the basis of the background of theology students.

a. Also: veterinarians, chemists, architects, engineers.

b. Here: industrialists and wholesalers. “Merchants” were assigned to the first position of the middle class, since the majority of them were most likely small-scale tradesmen.

c. 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.; reprinted in Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka and Gerhard Ritter, eds., *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1870–1914*. Munich, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 125–26.

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