Did Karl Marx Party in 1891? The Effect of SPD’s Erfurt Program on Karl Marx’s Citations

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Abstract

The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) is often proposed as a pre-Soviet popularizer of Marxist economic theories due to its electoral successes in Germany in the decades before World War I. Using the Synthetic Control Method (SCM), we examine whether German-language print references to Karl Marx responded to the SPD’s adoption of the Marx-inspired Erfurt Program of 1891. In doing so, we account for the near-simultaneous repeal of censorship laws in Germany that impeded the publication of socialist works. Evidence of a boost to Marx’s citations from the Erfurt Program is modest and ambiguous. These results suggest that the SPD’s role in popularizing Marx was minor compared to later events such as the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Keywords: History of Economic Thought; Causal Inference; Synthetic Control; Karl Marx; Erfurt Program; Marginal Revolution; Socialism

JEL Codes: B14, B24, B31, B51, Z10

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1 Introduction

The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) has a complicated historical relationship with the works of Karl Marx. The SPD was founded in 1863 by Marx’s rival Ferdinand Lassalle, and Marx himself famously attacked the party’s 1874 platform statement in his Critique of the Gotha Program (Marx 1875) – although Marx’s followers limited dissemination of this text until after his death. In 1891 however, a group of Marx’s followers led by August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, and Wilhelm Liebknecht succeeded in infusing Marxist theory into the party’s updated platform, the Erfurt Program. Kautsky – “the principal architect of the [Erfurt] program” (Schorske 1955, p. 4) – expanded on Marxist doctrine in his 1892 book length treatise The Class Struggle (Kautsky 1892). Although Marx’s longtime collaborator Friedrich Engels (1891) criticized a draft of the new platform in a letter to Kautsky, he compared it “very favourably from the former programme” from Gotha and praised it as an improvement over the earlier document’s “outmoded traditions – both the specific Lassallean and vulgar socialistic.” With this nod in hand and Engels’ acquiescence signaled through the party’s journal Die Neue Zeit, figures such as Bebel, Kautsky, and Bernstein effectively established their interpretation of Marx’s theories as the “official gospel of German Social Democracy,” to quote historian Carl Shorske (1955, p. 4). “From the days of the Erfurt programme to the programme that the party accepted at its Heidelberg conference in 1925 and even beyond,” echoes W.L. Guttman (1981, pp. 328f.), the SPD “subscribed to a basically Marxist analysis of society and politics.”

The SPD’s political adoption of Marxist theory in 1891 contrasts with the rapid rejection of his doctrines among the contemporary economists who evaluated his work. Just four years after the publication of Capital (Marx 1867), “the Marxian theory of value was...shattered by destructive criticism,” to quote J.S. Nicholson (1920, p. 26). The famous Marginal Revolution of 1871 (Jevons 1871; Menger 2007) effectively displaced the labor theory of value that Marx used to construct his doctrine of surplus value and derivative theory of exploitation. Marx faced a further complication in the attempted implementation of his
system through the so-called “Transformation Problem” - a mathematical circularity that arises from the need to convert labor as a production input into a price for labor performed. By the time of the SPD’s electoral rise in the early 20th century, most economists who wrestled with Marxist theory had come to the conclusion that it was internally contradictory and built upon obsolete concepts (Magness and Makovi 2023).

As a further complication, the SPD’s own role in the promotion of explicitly Marxist theory, as distinct from a general pro-labor political platform, is more ambiguous than the Erfurt Program would suggest. Although this transmission route has intuitive appeal, the noted Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1998) has cautioned against using the SPD as a proxy for Marxist political support. Marx’s doctrines were well known to the party’s leadership, yet as Hobsbawm notes they appear to have seen only limited circulation among its rank-and-file.

Since Marxist economic doctrine reached a dead end in the economics profession shortly after its introduction, a posited dissemination through alternative routes presents an intriguing explanation for Marxism’s revival as an organizing doctrine for socialist political regimes in the twentieth century and his continued intellectual influence today. A number of scholars from across the political spectrum have suggested that Marx occupied a position of relative obscurity at his death in 1883 and in the decades that immediately followed.\(^1\) Marx’s reputational growth, including to a position of widespread intellectual influence in multiple academic disciplines today, must have accordingly come from one or more posthumous sources.

In this paper we empirically investigate whether the SPD leadership’s intellectual commitments to Marxism in the Erfurt Program era (1891-1913) translated into the popular dissemination of Marxist theories to a broader segment of German society. We adapt the approach of Magness and Makovi (2023) to measure patterns of textual references to Marx

\(^1\)For examples of commentaries in this vein, see Hyndman (1911), Hobsbawm (1998), Wittfogel (1960, p. 16), Sowell (1985), Ryan (2014, p. 41), and Badiou and Lancelin (2019, ch. 1).
in German-language sources in the Erfurt era, using the Synthetic Control Method (SCM). Our results show that the 1891 Erfurt Program provided only a modest boost to German-language print citations of Marx, particularly when compared to the large and statistically significant increase after the Russian Revolution of 1917. These findings suggest that Hobsbawm’s word of caution about the SPD is warranted, while offering further evidence of the primacy of the Soviet Union in initiating the broader dissemination of Marxist doctrine.

2 Historical Background

Scholars have long wrestled with the question of whether and to what degree the SPD served as a vehicle for the instruction of the party’s working class membership in Marxist economic theory (Steinberg 1976, 1979; Bonnell 2002). Indeed, Guttsman (1981, p. 329) concedes that we “do not know how widely such convictions were shared at the grass-roots level of the party.” The Erfurt program emerged from several days of committee debate, only to be adopted without debate by unanimous proclamation in the closing hours of the party’s convention. The document that they produced was clearly a product of careful political design. Although the Erfurt Program’s preamble articulates an abbreviated synopsis of Marxist class theory, its text makes no mention of Marx by name and its policy planks emphasize a generic set of labor and social reforms for broader electoral appeal.\(^2\) He adds that “those who had read the program knew that on some points [Wilhelm] Liebknecht’s summary did not correspond to the written word,” thereby likely dampening protests against

\(^2\)Most of the platform’s enumerated planks are not unique to Marxist theory. Among its positions are calls for universal suffrage, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, separation of church and state, universal public education, and the adoption of worker protection laws. “It has often been observed that there was nothing socialist in the demands made by most European socialist parties” in the late nineteenth century, to quote Gary Steenson (1991, pp. 76f.). He continues by noting that ”This was certainly true of the demands attached to the theoretical portion of the Erfurt program,” although he also caveats the observation by noting that it reflected the political reality of operating in a “bourgeois or semifeudal state.”
his overtly Marxist characterizations of the document. Nonetheless, Steenson continues, “the Marxist influence in the party apparently carried the day.” The resulting document was both a “theoretically accurate” articulation of Marxist theory, but also “turgid and convoluted.” These tensions made it somewhat ill-suited as a rallying call to Marxist political action within a party that still had substantial Lassallean elements, and that was operating in an electoral rather than revolutionary position.

To the extent that they occurred in the Erfurt-era SPD, dissemination of Marx’s doctrines by name would have come from party publications that reprinted his works or that offered commentaries on the same by theorists such as Kautsky. Certain SPD officials blended elements of Marxist doctrine into their speeches and pamphlets, but the rank and file may well have been considerably less versed in the socialist philosopher’s ideas. No less than Kautsky admitted as much many years later in his memoirs: “In the Party, I was made aware of Marx’s Capital, considered the Bible of socialism,” he wrote, but “only a few had read it, and even fewer were those who understood it” (Kautsky 1960, p. 375).

Kautsky’s comments hinted at a deeper divide within the SPD, which retained elements of non-Marxist labor activism well into the Erfurt era. Followers of Lassalle and Johann Karl Rodbertus – rival socialists who were both personally despised by Marx and Engels – remained a presence in the party, as did competing interpreters of Marx that presaged later divisions with the Bolsheviks. Carl August Schramm, a follower of Rodbertus and Lassalle, summarized these sentiments in 1885, stating “I don’t give a damn about Marxism. And the overwhelming majority of the working class feels the same” (Steinberg 1979, p. 37). The successes of the Marxist factions at Erfurt in 1891 certainly signalled the ascendance of his ideas within the party leadership, but the SPD itself remained a large and fractious organization.

The persistence of these internal divisions and the need to sustain a large political coalition appear to have induced the SPD’s leadership to build their electoral messages around specific labor reform planks, rather than the explicit theoretical doctrines of Marx or his
rivals. Promotion of the comparatively accessible *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Marx and Engels (1848) did not fare much better than *Capital* in the SPD’s hands. Various socialist organizations reprinted and translated this shorter political treatise, particularly after it received renewed interest in the wake of the Paris Commune of 1871. Yet as the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1998, p. 8) cautions, “there was no strong correlation between the size and power of social-democratic and labour parties and the circulation of the *Manifesto*” in the decades before World War I. In the case of Germany, the SPD printed “not many more than 16,000 copies of the Manifesto in the eleven years 1895 to 1905,” compared to 120,000 copies of the Erfurt platform. As Hobsbawm concludes, “readers of the *Manifesto*, though they were part of the new rising socialist labour parties and movements, were almost certainly not a representative sample of their membership.”

In perhaps an unusual twist, Hobsbawm’s observation finds support in commentaries from the opposite end of the political spectrum. The Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1943) proposed that the SPD leadership was “prudent enough not to express [revolutionary Marxism] in public” because it would have “jeopardized their chances in election campaigns.”

_A number of authors have observed similarly limited dissemination of Marx’s works in other countries. Arthur Balfour, a future British Prime Minister and avid reader of philosophical treatises, observed in 1885 that while “Marx is but little read in” Great Britain, “Mr. (Henry) George has been read a great deal” (Dilke 1885, p. 344; Mackay 1985, p. 33). In 1909, the U.S. based *International Socialist Review* (Publishers' Department 1909, p. 569) remarked that the “literature of modern International Socialism” including Marx, Engels, and Kautsky “was practically unknown in America” prior to the magazine’s founding in 1900. The Black Marxist intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois similarly observed in 1933 that “until the Russian Revolution, Marx was little-known in America. He was treated condescendingly in the universities, and regarded even by the intelligent public as a radical agitator whose curious and inconvenient theories it was easy to refute.” Willis (1977, p. 419) refers to the “inescapable fact” that “the Marxist alternative was rejected by an overwhelming majority of late nineteenth century Englishmen – whether economists, labour leaders, workers, politicians, or intellectuals.” Referring to Marx’s transatlantic dissemination, Bloom (1943, p. 494) observes that “a few academic people, German immigrant circles, certain Europeanized writers, and the small and unimportant Socialist party troubled themselves about Marxism. . . Specifically, it was the Bolshevik Revolution of November, 1917, that brought the United States rather suddenly face to face with Marxism.”

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Elaborating on this point in 1944, Mises (2010, p. 154) divides the party between a “very small groups of zealous Marxians” within its intellectual leadership and a much larger rank-and-file that took an interest in labor reform but had little direct contact with Marx’s works. While Kautsky penned lengthy tracts on Marxist doctrine for fellow socialist intellectuals, “[t]he millions voting the Social Democratic ticket paid no attention to these endless theoretical discussions concerning the concentration of capital, the collapse of capitalism, finance capital and imperialism, and the relations between Marxian materialism and Kantian criticism.”

According to Hobsbawm (1998, p. 9), “this situation changed after the October Revolution” of 1917. With the rise of the Soviets, the “dichotomy” between effective electoral strategists and a much smaller group of high-minded Marxian theorists like Kautsky and “faded away.” “Unlike the mass parties of the Second International (1889–1914), those of the Third (1919–43) expected all their members to understand – or at least to show some knowledge of – Marxist theory.” Breaking from the limited dissemination of Marx’s texts through the SPD, Lenin’s strategy made the “publication and popular distribution of Marx’s and Engels’s texts...far more central to the movement.” An explosion of mass printings, foreign language translations, and collaborative scholarly collections of Marx’s works, such as the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, followed, “all backed by the – for these purposes – unlimited resources of the Soviet Communist Party.” Marx’s works “accordingly entered the teaching programme of universities,” Hobsbawm continues, and from there became a mainstay of the philosophical canon by the middle of the twentieth century.⁴

It is likely no coincidence that this posited route of Marx’s popularization follows the path of the internal struggles among his followers and other socialist factions in the early twentieth century. Bernstein in particular developed an evolutionary “revision” of Marx that

⁴Alan Ryan (2014, p. 41) similarly posits that “If the German government had not sent Lenin across its territory and back to Russia in a sealed train in early 1917, we might today regard Marx as a not very important nineteenth-century philosopher.” See also Copleston (2003, p. 306) and Lomasky (1989, p. 131).
shed much of its revolutionary doctrine in pursuit of a reformist political platform, seeking to implement socialism through incremental legislative channels. Vladimir Lenin (1917, ch. 6; 1918) famously denounced the SPD and its “renegade” intellectuals such as Kautsky as promulgators of a “vulgar” form of Marxism. The SPD, he contended, had abandoned Marx’s revolutionary disposition and his underlying theory of material struggle in favor of incrementalism through legislative reform. Soviet mass-dissemination of Marx’s works thus became a conscious strategy in the internecine contest for Marx’s name.\(^5\)

In the immediate aftermath of 1917, socialist and non-socialist intellectuals alike openly acknowledged that the unfolding events breathed new life into Marx’s reputation by resuscitating his revolutionary doctrines. The Western Marxist theorist Karl Korsch (1970, p. 67) admitted as much in 1923, noting that what revolutionary Marxists such as “Lenin in Russia have done, and are doing, in the field of Marxist theory is to liberate it from the inhibiting traditions of the Social Democracy of the second period.” Several decades later, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (2003, p. 161) made a similar observation, noting that while the SPD “did adopt Marxist theory,” it “seriously distorted its principles in an evolutionist-economistic-reformist direction.” In Althusser’s assessment, Marxism realized success “for the first time in the world in 1917 in Russia,” which united Marxist theoreticians with a workers movement. “Without this union, Marxist theory would have remained a dead letter.”

\(^5\)The literature on this subject traces to the time of the original debates. As an outside observer, sociologist Max Weber (1967, p. 27) remarked that key tenets of orthodox revolutionary Marxism had been “expressly and without exception relinquished as incorrect by all varieties of Social Democrat.” The revolutionary alternative was truer to the theory of class conflict set forth in the *Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1848), though as Weber (1967, p. 44) also warned its unfolding Soviet iteration only functioned insofar as it “took violent possession of the villages, extorted contributions and shot down anyone who opposed them.” Louis Fischer (1964, p. 481) notes that Marx’s political expositors in the SPD even “gradually accommodated themselves to capitalism as capitalism accommodated itself to modern requirements.” In a sense, Lenin thus “rescued Marx” in his original revolutionary form at a time that this dimension was “being Bernsteinized out of existence.”
A number of critics of Marxism on both the right and left arrived at even stronger conclusions in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Harvard economist Thomas Nixon Carver (1922, p. 363) quipped at the time that “while his professed followers are few, there is undoubtedly a revival of interest in Marx due to the Russian relapse into barbarism.” G.D.H. Cole, a non-Marxian socialist from Britain’s Fabian Society, offered a parallel assessment in 1924. Having faced decades of withering criticism, Marx’s “sterile formulae” had been reduced to “mere mouthing of Social Democrats who disputed endlessly and barrenly about the precise meaning of this or that text of the Marxian gospel.” Before 1917, Cole continued, “Marx’s works lay securely buried in the grave of their author. Lenin altered all that.”

These contemporary accounts are consistent with the suggestion that Marxist theory remained a relatively niche intellectual subject during the Erfurt era, officially guiding the SPD’s leadership but showing only limited penetration into the party’s rank-and-file. Throughout this same period, the SPD’s own claim to Marx faced growing challenges from other Marxists, who accused its theorists of watering down or abandoning Marx’s doctrines in exchange for political influence. The onset of the first World War struck a final blow as many of Europe’s labor-oriented parties fell into line with the wartime nationalism of their home countries. In Germany, this left the SPD as a contested claimant to Marx that, in the eyes of many Marxists and anti-Marxists alike, had fallen far short of being a standard bearer for Marx’s philosophy. To investigate this question further, we accordingly turn to comparative measurement of Marx’s text citation patterns in the Erfurt period vis-à-vis their

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6For over two decades, Carver taught the main course in socialist economics at Harvard University. The course, first offered by Carver in 1901, consisted of a survey of schools of socialist thought, including French-Utopian, Marxist, Lassallian, Georgist, and similar competing traditions. As per his 1922 assessment, the “debacle in Russia” was likely responsible for a surge of popular interest in Marx’s writings. To Carver, their salience among the Bolsheviks contrasted with the fact that “No economist today accepts a single one of the dogmas of Marx...If there is so little of economic soundness in this book, how could it possibly have had so much influence?” Acknowledging the difficulty of measuring Marx’s reach in that era, he nonetheless noted that among his observations of Marx’s followers he had “found many a pronounced Marxian who has never read Marx.”
documented rise after 1917.

3 Empirical Design

In the recent study by Magness and Makovi (2023), the authors examine the dissemination of Marx’s ideas into printed works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using a database compiled from the Google Ngram series of printed books and a parallel series of scanned newspapers, they show that text citations of Karl Marx’s name received a large and statistically significant boost from the Russian Revolution. In the decade that followed, text references to Marx by name increased approximately threefold compared to their pre-1917 rates.

While these findings indicate that Lenin and the Soviets played a primary role in elevating Marx’s ideas into mainstream intellectual discourse, a lingering question remains about whether and to what degree Marx’s dissemination also built upon earlier political advocacy of his ideas, including through non-revolutionary channels such as the SPD. To investigate this question more closely, we adapt Magness and Makovi (2023)’s empirical approach to study the effect of the SPD’s Erfurt Program on the dissemination of Marx’s name in print materials. Building from the German-language Ngram database, we use the Synthetic Control Method (SCM) to test whether print references to Marx increased relative to an expected baseline in the years following the platform’s adoption. Furthermore, we use their repli-

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7Econometric analysis of citations, or bibliometrics as it is sometimes described, is a relatively recent addition the history of economic thought subfield. Two recent applications of this approach study the effect of the 2008 Great Recession on citation rates: Dalton and Gaeto (2022)’s study of Joseph Schumpeter and John Maynard Keynes and Needler (2023)’s study of Hyman Minsky.

8In applying this method, we adopt the same underlying assumptions about the Ngram corpus as Magness and Makovi (2023), and elaborated upon in their descriptive appendix. We recognize the limitations of Ngram, including its restriction to a subset of Google Books which excludes periodicals, difficulties with identifying names that have multiple iterations (e.g. Pyotr Kropotkin vs Peter Kropotkin), and the limitations on comparing absolute citation levels as distinct from relative changes in citation rates. Consistent
cation dataset as well (Magness and Makovi 2022), which includes Google Ngram citations for more than 200 authors from a variety of genres and ideologies, including many political authors – such as Locke, Kant, Kropotkin, and Proudhon – but also literary authors and scientists – such as Shakespeare, Darwin, Kelvin, and Shelley. This dataset also includes indicator variables such as publication year, publication language, and genre (political and/or socialist).

As with the Russian Revolution of 1917, the events of 1890-91 present a clearly defined treatment event to examine patterns in Karl Marx’s popularization. If conventional claims about the SPD are correct, we may reasonably expect to see a boost to Marx’s textual mentions as a result of two near-simultaneous events: the expiration of Otto von Bismarck’s anti-socialist censorship laws in September 1890 and the SPD’s adoption of the Erfurt Pro-

with this literature, we operate from the assumption that biases arising from Ngram are random and apply to the entire dataset, meaning there is no reason to believe that they introduce acute distortions that are distinctive to Karl Marx alone. For example, Google Ngram is restricted to a subset of Google Books with excellent OCR (optical character recognition), but any error from this should be I.I.D. Additionally, unlike panel OLS, synthetic control minimizes bias from unobservable, time-varying, unit-specific shocks (Abadie 2021, p. 400). As with standard SCM, p-values are based on placebo testing, because the p-value is defined as the probability of a treatment effect at least as large as that experienced by the treated unit, under the assumption of the null hypothesis. Effect sizes are standardized by RMSPE (root mean squared prediction error). Annual p-values are the percentage of placebos who experienced a standardized effect size at least as large as the treated unit’s in that year. The joint post standardized p-value is the percentage of placebos whose ratio of post-treatment RMSPE to pre-treatment RMSPE is at least as large as the treated unit’s. A novel form of the p-value introduced to SCM by Magness and Makovi (2023) deserves repetition: two forms of meta-analysis are used to aggregate the annual p-values into overall p-values comparable to the joint post standardized p-value – specifically, the AEP (asymptotically exact p-value) by Wilson (2019) and the Simes (1986) method. These two methods are similar in spirit to Fisher’s method of aggregating independent p-values into a single meta p-value, except the AEP and Simes are robust to arbitrary dependence among p-values.

In the appendix, we perform tests of Karl Kautsky and Karl Liebknecht, who are not included in Magness and Makovi (2022). Accordingly, we add them. And in section 4.2, we use citations from a database of German newspapers, detailed there.
gram in October 1891. Combined, these factors present a clearly identifiable window in which Marxist theory became an official feature of the SPD’s leadership and platform, accompanied by the repeal of an obstacle to the print dissemination of Marx’s work. Per our hypothesis, if the SPD played a significant pre-Soviet role in the dissemination of Marx’s ideas to broader audiences, a noticeable increase in German-language print references to Karl Marx should be visible in the decade that followed the Erfurt Program of 1891.

Given the two nearly simultaneous events – the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890 and the adoption of the Erfurt Program in 1891 – our empirical strategy is intended to over-estimate the treatment effect on Marx’s citations and yield an upper-bound estimate. The repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws would have benefited all socialists, not just Marx specifically. But like Magness and Makovi (2023), we seek to discover why Marx in particular is one of the most famous social thinkers of all time. Therefore, the effect of this repeal should be discounted or subtracted when evaluating the causes of Marx’s own particular renown. However, SCM can only estimate the effect of a break in time, and it cannot distinguish the effects of two near-simultaneous events. Therefore, in our primary specifications, we omit all socialists besides Marx from the donor pool, leaving Marx as the sole treated unit. This means that Marx is hypothesized to experience two positive treatment effects, one genuine or relevant to our question (the Erfurt Program) and one spurious or irrelevant (the Anti-Socialist Law’s repeal). Therefore, any estimated treatment effect is an upper-bound estimate of the effect of the Erfurt Program alone in boosting Marx’s citations relative to other social thinkers and philosophers, including other competing socialists.

If this upper-bound treatment effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program is only modest compared to the Soviet revolution in 1917, or lacks statistical significance, this finding would suggest

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10 The “Anti-Socialist Laws” or “Socialist Laws” were designed by Bismarck, passed by the Reichstag and Bundesrat, and finally signed by Kaiser Wilhelm I on 22 October 1878. Over the years, the law was renewed four times (31 May 1880, 28 May 1884, 20 April 1886, and 18 March 1888), but on 25 January 1890, renewal failed, effectively repealing the law. The law continued to operate until 30 September 1890. For statistical purposes, with annual data, we consider the law to operate from the beginning of 1879 to the end of 1890.
that the Marxist intellectual commitments of the SPD leadership in the Erfurt era did not widely transmit to the party’s rank-and-file, let alone accelerate the general distribution of Marx’s ideas in wider audiences. Such a result would confirm the observations of Hobsbawm and others, indicating that the SPD’s electoral strength is not a reliable proxy for the pre-Soviet circulation of Marx’s theories beyond the party’s intellectual leadership.

Our approach here differs from previous investigations of the SPD’s role in disseminating Marxist theory. In addition to the aforementioned work of Hobsbawm, several studies have attempted to approximate the exposure of SPD voters to Marx’s ideas by inference from trade union library contents (Steinberg 1976, 1979) and by references in pamphlet literature or campaign speeches (Bonnell 2002) from the period between the Erfurt Program and the outbreak of World War I. Their findings are mixed, suggesting that rank-and-file SPD readership of Marx’s works was uncommon, as Kautsky indicated. As Stefan Berger and Stefan Braun (2015, p. 182) note, high-minded Marxist theory may have triumphed in the ideological battles among the SPD’s intellectual leaders, but it “had little impact on the day-to-day practice of the party, which was resolutely reformist.” Hans-Josef Steinberg’s investigations of German library records suggest that few SPD voters checked out copies of Marx’s treatises during the Erfurt period. At the same time, Andrew Bonnell (2002, p. 15) argues that some aspects of Marxist theory may have been transmitted in “very simplified forms” through SPD pamphlets and political speeches. Bonnell suggests that counting library records in the Erfurt period may tend “towards academic purism” by setting “unrealistically high standards” for the average voter. The question thus remains of whether the Erfurt program directed increased attention to Marx, even if in an extremely simplified form. Taking a different tack, Jacobs (2022) measures semantic similarities in wording to track the adoption of distinctively Marxian and other socialist terminology in radical publications from the late nineteenth century. His findings suggest that Marxian terminology had become a “default language” of socialist intellectuals in the years following the Erfurt Program, although his sample of texts is intentionally drawn from known socialist literature.
While these approaches reveal interesting and somewhat conflicting internal dynamics within the SPD, they fall short of both establishing the party as a widespread popularizer of Marx to broader audiences, or challenging the same notion.

Turning beyond internal aggregations of socialist libraries and literature, we look to the influence of the Erfurt Program on mentions of Marx’s name in a general sample of all printed German-language books. In studying this question, we aim to shed light on the question of whether the Erfurt Program elevated Marx’s reception beyond the theoretician-interpreters of his works and into general audiences. By searching for all textual mentions of Karl Marx, we are able to obtain a broader measure that encompasses simple passing references to his name as well as in-depth Marxist treatises. If SPD electioneering expanded the public’s familiarity with even a watered down version of Marx’s doctrines, we should accordingly expect to see a detectable increase in overall text mentions of Marx’s name relative to the pre-treatment baseline. If, by contrast, Hobsbawm’s observations are correct, we should see little or no evidence of a treatment effect between the adoption of the Erfurt Program in 1891 and the Soviet Revolution in 1917.

4 Synthetic Control Method Tests

4.1 Google Ngrams in 1891

4.1.1 Sub-sample: non-socialists only

We begin by testing the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program on Karl Marx’s Ngram citations in German. To avoid spillover bias and attenuation bias, we omit all socialists from the donor pool (besides Marx himself, of course), since they would have experienced a treatment effect from the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws at the end of 1890. Marx alone therefore experiences two separate treatment effects: the repeal of the laws in 1890 and the adoption of the Erfurt Program in 1891. We begin the pre-treatment period in 1879, after the Anti-
Socialist Laws have been passed, and begin the post-treatment period in 1891, when the laws have been repealed and the Erfurt Program is adopted.

In figure 1, we present a graph of outcomes over time for the real Karl Marx and his synthetic counterfactual. We depict the outcomes until 1932 so that the effect of 1891 can be visually compared with the effect of 1917 (cf. Magness and Makovi 2023). Visually, there appears to be a treatment effect in 1891, with citations of the real Karl Marx exceeding those of his synthetic counterfactual after 1891. However, we can also see in figure 1 that whatever the effect of 1891, its magnitude pales in comparison with the effect of 1917. Even if 1891 did increase Marx’s citations and renown, the 1917 Russian Revolution had at least as much an effect, if not more so, consistent with Magness and Makovi (2023).

In table 1 – which presents p-values for a shorter treatment period of 1891-1901 – we do see that the effect of 1891 is statistically significant. The joint post standardized p-value is 0.076, the AEP standardized p-value is 0.087, and the Simes standardized p-value is 0.105.

4.1.2 Full sample

The previous specification tested the combined effects of both the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws and the adoption of the Erfurt Program, making it an upper-bound estimate of the Erfurt Program alone. Therefore, we proceed to test the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program with the full sample, i.e. with socialists included in the donor pool.\textsuperscript{11} By including socialists who experience a treatment from the repeal of the Anti-Socialists, we may be able to isolate the effect of the Erfurt Program alone, net of the repeal.\textsuperscript{12} Marx’s treatment effect will be

\textsuperscript{11}We add an indicator variable for the socialist genre. Otherwise, the model specification is the same as before.

\textsuperscript{12}However, we still omit the primary contributors to the Erfurt Program – Karl Kautsky, August Bebel, Eduard Bernstein, and Wilhelm Liebknecht – from the donor pool. In Magness and Makovi (2023), testing
the combined effect of both the repeal and the Erfurt Program relative to a donor pool whose members sometimes experience only the effect of the repeal but not the Erfurt Program.

In figure 2, we present the SCM graph for the effect of 1891 on Karl Marx, using the full sample (including socialist donors). We see that at first, there is a treatment effect, but it disappears by 1903.

In table 2, we present p-values for the period 1891-1901. We see the results are often statistically significant or at least nearly so – the overall p-values are 0.112 (joint post), 0.111, and 0.159.

Observe, however, that the p-values are less statistically significant than before, when socialists were omitted. Also observe that these p-values hold for the period 1891-1901, whereas we visually saw that the treatment effect dissipated after 1903. Despite the presence of statistical significance for the period 1891-1901, the visual disappearance of the treatment effect by 1903 suggests that at most, the Erfurt Program had merely a temporary effect lasting only a few years. By contrast, Magness and Makovi (2023) show that the effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution lasts into the 21st century, although they are hesitant to extrapolate so far into the future.

The dissipation of the treatment effect by 1903 in figure 2 using the full sample suggests that some socialists are experiencing a treatment effect from the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws. Marx’s treatment effect in 1 using only non-socialist donors is apparently
over-estimated, combining the effects of both the repeal and the Erfurt Program. Once socialists are added to the donor pool to net out the effect of the repeal, Marx’s treatment effect largely disappears.

4.1.3 Sub-sample: non-socialists only

To confirm this interpretation, we proceed to test the effect of 1891 on Marx using a sample of exclusively socialists.\textsuperscript{13} Since every author in this sub-sample experienced the effect of the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws, the only remaining treatment should be the effect of the Erfurt Program on Marx.

The result, in figure 3, looks virtually identical to the full-sample result in 2. Once again, Marx experiences a brief boost which dissipates by 1930.

In table 1, we see the p-values are statistically significant for the period 1891-1901. The treatment effect of the Erfurt Program is apparently real but short-lived. Whatever effect the SPD’s electoral success had on Marx’s renown apparently did not last. Thus, the 1917 Russian Revolution is a more convincing explanation of Marx’s contemporary renown, as claimed by Magness and Makovi (2023).

[Figure 3]

[Table 3]

4.1.4 English-language Google Ngrams

Next, we test the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program using English-language Google Ngrams. We do this for two reasons: first, because Magness and Makovi (2023) primarily tested the effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution on Marx’s English Ngrams, it is appropriate to compare their result to the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program in English. Second, because although

\textsuperscript{13}We omit indicator variables for “Socialist” and “Political” as well as several unnecessary language indicator variables, as these variables have zero variance in this sub-sample.
Magness and Makovi (2023) did perform an in-time placebo test in 1889 to test the effect of 1917, they included Bebel and Bernstein in their donor pool. By contrast, we exclude all socialists – especially but not limited to Bebel and Bernstein – to minimize the possibility of attenuation bias, which would strengthen any positive result for 1917 but weaken the value of a negative result for 1889.\footnote{Assuming Marx experienced an effect in 1891 due to the Erfurt Program, it is possible that Bebel and Bernstein – as authors of that program – would have experienced the same effect.} By excluding all socialists besides Marx to estimate an upper-bound, the following test of the 1891 Erfurt Program in English may serve an improvement over the 1889 in-time placebo by Magness and Makovi (2023).

In figure 4, we depict the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program on English-language Google Ngrams. We see that there is no visual effect of the 1891 program at all. The earliest date of any effect appears to be about 1905, which is likely related to the 1905 Russian Revolution, as discussed by Magness and Makovi (2023).

In table 4, we present p-values for the period from 1891 until 1901. We see that all of the p-values fail to remotely approach conventional thresholds for statistical significance.

We may conclude that despite the short-lived effect of the Erfurt Program on Marx’s citations in German, there was no effect at all in English. By contrast, Magness and Makovi (2023) found statistically significant effects in 1917 in both English and German. Once again, the 1917 Russian Revolution appears to be the more plausible explanation for Marx’s contemporary prominence.

Furthermore, by comparing the three different results in German to this result in English, we may be able to tease out precisely what was significant in 1891. Using the German-language, we found that Marx’s citations increased relative to non-socialists but not relative to fellow socialists. And in English, we found no effect at all. This suggests that 1891 was significant because of the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws, not because of the Erfurt Program. Apparently, citations of socialists in general increased by a modest amount, but Marx’s citations specifically – relative to other socialists – did not increase at all.
effect was only in Germany. In English-speaking countries, neither the repeal of the German law nor the electoral success of the SPD with its Erfurt Program had any effect. Even this effect is modest compared to the much larger effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution on Marx’s citations specifically - and this effect occurred in both German and English.

[Figure 4]
[Table 4]

4.2 German newspapers

Magness and Makovi (2023) robustness-test their primary results (English-language Google Ngrams) using an alternative dataset, English-language newspaper mentions according to Newspapers.com. We follow suit by using German-language newspaper mentions according to deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de.

By web-scraping deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de for mentions of the same list of authors as used for the German-language Google Ngrams, we obtain total mentions for each author in each year. Then we subtract each author’s mentions in two SPD newspapers – Vorwärts and Der Sozialdemokrat – because we wish to measure Marx’s reception outside of the party’s own literature.15 Next, we divide each author’s mentions by the total number of unconditional mentions in order to imitate Google Ngrams, which measures mentions as a percentage. Finally, we normalize mentions by dividing by the sample maximum to facilitate SCM’s numerical convergence.

We test Marx in both 1891 and 1917 in order to compare the relative effects of the two possible treatments. Consistent with our primary specification, we use only non-socialists (besides Marx) in order to estimate an upper-bound for 1891, and we use the same subsample for 1917 for the sake of consistency. Furthermore, for consistency, both tests begin their pre-treatment periods in 1879 - when the Anti-Socialist Laws were first instituted.

15In the appendix, we retest while including these socialist newspapers.
4.2.1 1917 Russian Revolution

First, we test the effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution on Marx’s citations using the German-language newspapers. We use the restricted sample of non-socialists only and begin the pre-treatment period in 1879 so that the results of the 1917 treatment can be compared to the 1891 treatment.

In figure 5, we visually depict the SCM results up until 1932. We see that after 1917, the real Marx’s citations tend to exceed those of the synthetic Marx, although not as strikingly as they did in Magness and Makovi (2023), which used Google Ngrams in both English and German.

In table 5, we present p-values for the period 1917-1932. The overall p-values are statistically significant – 0.099, 0.046, and 0.084. Thus, the effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution using German newspapers is consistent with the effect found by Magness and Makovi (2023) using English- and German-language Google Ngrams and English newspapers. The 1917 Russian Revolution is robustly and replicably associated with a large and statistically significant increase in Marx’s citations.

[Figure 5]
[Table 5]

4.2.2 1891 Erfurt Program

Using the same German newspaper data and sample of non-socialists only, we test the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program. Once again, this estimate will be an upper-bound, combining the effects of the Erfurt Program and the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws.

In figure 6, we plot SCM results for the treatment effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program using German newspaper mentions. We see that visually, there is no treatment effect until about 1917.

In table 6, we present the p-values for the period 1891-1904. The overall p-values are
0.521, 0.690, and 0.825, which are about as non-significant as possible. The annual p-values have similar levels of non-significance.

Using German newspaper data, the effect of the 1891 Erfurt Program lacks significance, despite it being an upper-bound which combines the effects of both the Erfurt Program and the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws. Including socialists in the donor pool would likely attenuate the effect because they would be treated by the repeal as well. By contrast, the effect of the 1917 Russian Revolution is clear and statistically significant.

[Figure 6]
[Table 6]

5 Interpretation & commentary

Using the SCM, we observe a very modest visual increase in textual mentions of Karl Marx after the Erfurt Program in 1891. This observation carries two substantial caveats. First, it almost certainly reflects a near-simultaneous treatment for all socialists in the wake of the repeal of Germany’s censorship laws, rather than the distinctive popularization of Marx by the SPD. As such, this component of our results displays an upper-bound estimate of the cumulative treatment. Second, attempts to further isolate Marx through additional testing, including the consideration of citation patterns for other socialist beneficiaries of the censorship repeal, shows that even this modest treatment rapidly dissipates. By contrast, the later treatment provided to Marx’s citations in 1917 is both persistent and unambiguous.

Our empirical findings diverge from the seemingly intuitive assumption that Marx’s reputation and reach received a sizable boost from the Erfurt Program’s adoption of a Marxist theoretical framework. This conclusion diverges from the segment of the historical literature that links the Erfurt era SPD to the popularization of Marxist theory (e.g. Schorske 1955), although it also confirms Hobsbawm’s (1998) descriptive assessment of the SPD’s publishing
outputs.

We accordingly suggest a number of possible explanations for why our results find only modest and ambiguous treatment effects after the Erfurt Program. First, an expected treatment in Marx’s citations after 1891 might have been dampened by the internal debates over Marxist theory among the SPD’s intellectual leaders and other socialist factions. Second, and contrary to orthodox Marxism’s portrayal of itself as a mass proletarian movement, most historical attempts to effect a Marxist political transformation have originated from small groups of intellectual elites who expressed intense devotion to Marx’s theories. Together, these characteristics may have disadvantaged the wider dissemination of Marx’s theories to the SPD’s rank-and-file voters, let alone the larger German population, during the Erfurt period. This finding is not inconsistent with recognition that the Erfurt program simultaneously fostered intense theoretical dialogues about Marxist theory among a much smaller group of party intellectuals, such as Kautsky, Bebel, and Bernstein, or with competing Marxist factions of a more explicitly revolutionary character.

The history of the SPD’s adoption of Marxism is itself fraught by complications from the party’s internal debates and strategies. Even in the Erfurt period, the legacy of Marx’s late rival Ferdinand Lassalle continued to draw the party toward legislative, rather than revolutionary, reform (Lovell 1984, pp. 96-97). No less than Bebel (1911, ch. 10) would acknowledge that he “came to Marx by way of Lassalle. Lassalle’s writings were in our hands before we knew any work by Marx and Engels.” Whether explicitly or by way of this inherited legacy, the Erfurt era SPD remained an amalgamation of multiple socialist and labor reform traditions. Even its preamble, informed by Marxist theory, contrasts with a substantially more generic list of reformist planks that were designed to have electoral appeal well beyond Marxist intellectuals.

The SPD’s relationship to doctrinaire Marxism was further complicated by the emergence of Bernstein’s “Revisionist” challenge to orthodox Marxism (Harding 1996, pp. 59-65; Ball and Dagger 2023, s.v. “Revisionism and revolution”). By the late nineteenth century,
Marx’s collaborator Friedrich Engels had virtually codified an orthodox version of Marxism or “scientific socialism” which emphasized dialectical materialism - including the historical inevitability of the socialist revolution as well as the irrelevance of morality and idealism (Berman 2003). The most well-known example is Engels’s “Anti-Dühring,” excerpted as “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” (Engels 1878, 1880). In turn, it was Karl Kautsky who popularized this orthodoxy as the author of the primary – and sometimes only – Marxist works that were readily available in print (Berman 2003). Kautsky characterized the capitalist system as one doomed to its own demise by growing crises and the immiseration of the working class (Berman 2003). Conscious human action and moral ideals had little place in Kautsky’s system, which predicated the inevitability of the socialist revolution on material conditions (Berman 2003).

At the same time, portions of Marxist theory were “being falsified by social reality,” to quote David Lovell (1984, p. 97). Marx’s immiseration thesis, which predicted a long-term decline in the living standards among the working classes, appeared to conflict with emerging economic trends such as the growth of a German middle class (Morgan 1979, p. 527; Morgan 2015, p. 657; Berman 2003; Harding 1996, p. 61). The role of revolution in bringing about a “scientifically” determined transition to socialism had failed to materialize as predicted. Moreover, orthodox Marxism offered little clarity about political action. It was not clear what political parties such as the SPD were supposed to do as they awaited the inevitable collapse of capitalism (Berman 2003). The SPD’s own success caught the party in a paradox: on the one hand, aspects of its rhetoric and theoretical objectives were committed to socialist revolution. On the other hand, its electoral achievements and its success in creating a network of social security schemes and associational clubs – a “state within the state” – gave the SPD a stake in preserving the peace (Harding 1996, pp. 55f.).

In the late 1890s, in such works as Problems of Socialism (1898) and The Prerequisites for Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy (1899), Bernstein articulated a Revisionist strategy for social democratic parties to attain desired reforms through peaceful means,
including the legislative process. Bernstein argued that if capitalism was not ordained to collapse on its own, then activists could advocate socialism for moral and idealistic reasons and take political action to institute socialism (Berman 2003). Bernstein’s policies had much in common with English Fabian socialism, though it is debated how much inspiration Bernstein actually drew from the Fabians (Morgan 1979, p. 529; Harding 1996, p. 65).

The Revisionism debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century produced sharp divides among Marxist intellectuals (Lovell 1984), presaging Lenin’s tirades against “vulgar Marxism” a decade later. Bernstein’s revision of orthodox Marxism - and its transformation from scientific socialism back into utopian socialism – was particularly incendiary because he was not only a prominent figure of the SPD, but he was even the executor of Engels’s will (Berman 2003; Harding 1996, pp. 59, 65). The 1891 Erfurt program embodied these tensions, simultaneously calling for “minimum programs” such as universal suffrage as well as “maximum programs” such as nationalization of key industries and resources (Harding 1996, pp. 57ff.).

In a series of congresses and writings, Karl Kautsky, Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Rosa Luxemburg, and other members of the SPD criticized Bernstein’s revisionism for sapping the pillars of Marxism. In 1903, the SPD passed a formal resolution affirming orthodox Marxism against revisionism (Berman 2003). And yet despite these controversies, Bernstein died as a member of good standing of the SPD (Morgan 1979, pp. 526ff.). Was Bernstein an admirable reformer, trying to reconcile Marx’s theories to the political and economic realities of his day? Or was he a heretic against “scientific” Marxism who had jettisoned Marx’s most important insights about the role of material conflict in effectualizing a transition to socialism? These debates presaged the revolutionary upheaval of 1917 in Russia, but they also reveal that the SPD’s own relationship with Marxist theory was continuously in flux in the Erfurt period.

The outbreak of World War I compounded this issue further. Many European socialist parties voted to support their own countries’ war efforts, destroying the Second International
Many socialists went as far as “embracing a communitarian, corporatist, and even nationalist approach” (Berman 2003). Vladimir Lenin – then an obscure figure living in Galicia – was appalled by the apparent betrayal, which at first he assumed was bourgeois propaganda (Harding 1996, pp. 52f.). Lenin considered Bernstein to be a traitor to Marxism as well (Harding 1996, pp. 59, 65, 77). In some ways, Leninism may be understood as a ‘restatement” of orthodox Marxism (Harding 1996, p. 59) following Kautsky (Harding 1996, p. 72), despite the later dispute between Kautsky (1918) and Lenin (1918). In response to the war, Lenin reaffirmed the centrality of revolution and declared revisionism a heresy (Harding 1996, pp. 75-78). Previously, in 1902, Lenin had argued (in What is to be Done?) that the workers could not be trusted to stage the revolution, and therefore, a “vanguard party” must commit the revolution on their behalf and exercise the “dictatorship of the proletariat” until the revolution was complete (Ball and Dagger 2023, s.v. ”Revisionism and revolution; Morgan 2015, pp. 657f.). During the course of the Russian Revolution, Lenin (1917) reaffirmed this revolutionary form of Marxism. Lenin was criticized by both orthodox Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky as well as anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin, who argued that Lenin’s vanguard party would degenerate into a dictatorship over the proletariat (Morgan 2015, p. 658). Lenin (1918) published The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky in response to Kautsky’s 1918 The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, which criticized the Bolsheviks’ rejection of democracy.

The preamble of the Erfurt Program notwithstanding, the Revisionism controversy belies the notion of the SPD as a cohesive articulator and disseminator of Marxist theory. Our empirical results are consistent with this finding. They suggest a relatively limited transmission of Marx to broader audiences at a time when Marxist intellectuals were locked in heated internal debates over the interpretation and modification of Marx’s theories.

Our empirical findings are consistent with a further complication of not only the Erfurt period but of socialist political organizing in general. Marxist political theory, whether in
its Leninist revolutionary forms or its political reformist variations, presents itself as an exercise in large-scale collective action among proletarian constituencies. Setting aside the intricate doctrinal disputes that have characterized historical Marxist movements, most of its iterations are predicated on Marx’s observations about the numerical strength of the laboring classes.

In practice, numbers have always posed a challenge for those seeking to implement a Marxist political movement. Mancur Olson (1971, p. 106) traced this difficulty to the problem of collective action more generally, namely that Marxist political organizing is highly vulnerable to free ridership. Whereas Marx presupposes that laborers, as a class, attain benefit from revolutionary action, “the individual [worker] would find that he would get the benefits of the class action whether he participated or not.” Olson thus expresses little surprise “that the ‘Marxian’ revolutions that have taken place have been brought about by small conspiratorial elites that took advantage of weak governments during periods of social disorganization.”

While Olson’s original commentaries pertained to the Leninist-Trotskyist variations of Marxism, it is not difficult to see how similar dynamics affected the dissemination of Marx through more conventional political channels in the Erfurt-era SPD. To the extent that they encountered Marx’s theories at all, the rank-and-file SPD member in this era essentially assumed the position of free-rider on the heavy theoretical discussions of Marx’s texts by the party’s intellectual elites. If Kautsky, Bebel, Bernstein, and others like them took on the task of interpreting high level Marxist theory into an actionable political organization, we should not expect to see a corresponding pattern of rank-and-file familiarization with the same theories due to a literary free-ridership in the absence of an explicit mass-dissemination program around Marx’s works.

Our empirical findings suggest that an Olsonian explanation is at least plausible for the Erfurt era SPD, producing the same dichotomous groupings that Hobsbawm observed in publication records: a small group of intellectual theorists who intensely studied and
debated Marx, and a much larger electorate to whom Marx’s theoretical works were little-known. Absent a consciously constructed education program in Marxist texts, as seen in the Soviet Union after 1917 when Lenin made this objective a personal priority, we should not expect wide dissemination of theoretical works in the SPD rank-and-file. A collective action explanation therefore may help to resolve the seeming paradox of how a Marx-aligned political party achieved relatively little in broadly disseminating familiarity with Marx as a thinker, even at the peak of its electoral strength.

6 Conclusion

Our analysis of German language Ngram data in the aftermath of the 1891 Erfurt Program suggests no clear evidence that the SPD popularized Karl Marx among a broader German language readership. Visual analysis via the SCM reveals only a short-lived uptick in Karl Marx’s citation patterns after 1891. Furthermore, our findings suggest that any observed increase of Marx’s citations in the Erfurt period are small compared to the substantial and statistically significant boost that Marx received in the wake of later events, such as the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Combined, these findings suggest that the Erfurt period SPD was not a major contributor to the popularization and dissemination of Karl Marx’s theories beyond the party’s intellectual leadership. These findings are consistent with Hobsbawn’s observations about SPD print numbers of Marx’s texts, and with earlier studies suggesting that Marx’s works attained only modest circulation as ascertained from library records. They also lend credence the finding of Magness and Makovi (2023), suggesting that the Russian Revolution of 1917 boosted Marx’s intellectual stature from a position of relative obscurity and into the intellectual mainstream.

While our findings with regard to the Erfurt Program are somewhat counter-intuitive when compared to historical accounts that depict the SPD as a pre-Soviet popularizer of
Marx’s ideas, they are consistent with a deeper examination of the SPD’s internal debates over “Revisionism” and the political attainment of the party’s reformist planks. This suggests an ongoing need to reevaluate Marx’s legacy in the history of economic ideas, with greater attention to the role of political factors in shaping the dissemination of his work. Contrary to Marx’s own predictions, large-scale labor movements have seldom functioned as mass-popularizers of socialist doctrine. Rather, Marx’s ideas have almost always developed within small groups of politically aligned intellectuals. In the well-known case of the Bolsheviks, intellectual elites fostered the dissemination of Marx’s theories through the heavy investment of state resources into Marxist education. Our findings suggest that the SPD, by contrast, largely contained Marxist theorizing to its own intellectual leadership, resulting in very little spillover to either the party’s rank-and-file or to the German-speaking public.

7 Data Availability

Data and code replicating the results in this article can be found in XXX
References


Bernstein, E. (1898). *Probleme des Sozialismus (Problems of Socialism)*.


Kautsky, K. (1918). *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*.  


Figures

Figure 1: Karl Marx, German Ngram cites, treatment 1891, non-socialists only: actual vs. synth counterfactual
Figure 2: Karl Marx, German Ngram cites, treatment 1891, full sample: actual vs. synth counterfactual
Figure 3: Karl Marx, German Ngram cites, treatment 1891, socialist donors only: actual vs. synth counterfactual
Figure 4: Karl Marx, English Ngram cites, treatment 1891: actual vs. synth counterfactual

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4460785
Figure 5: Karl Marx, German newspaper cites, treatment 1917: actual vs. synth counterfactual
Figure 6: Karl Marx, German newspaper cites, treatment 1891: actual vs. synth counterfactual
Tables

Table 1: Karl Marx, German Ngram cites, treatment 1891, non-socialists only: p-values

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Table 2: Karl Marx, German Ngram cites, treatment 1891, full sample: p-values

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Table 5: Karl Marx, German newspaper cites, treatment 1917: p-values

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### Table 6: Karl Marx, German newspaper cites, treatment 1891: p-values

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A  Online Appendices

A.1  A

A.2  B