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Abstract

The analysis presented in this article uses attendance at imperial diets (1521-1613) to estimate how politically well-integrated the Holy Roman Empire was. In doing so, it tests two conceptualisations of the political geography of the Empire: Moraw's distinction between zones 'close to' and 'distant from' the monarch and its application to early modern history, and Schmidt's distinction between an 'Empire of the German nation' and a larger 'feudal Empire'. The analysis finds that Moraw's zones retained at most a transient importance. Extending his model to early modern history thus risks misrepresenting political geography. The analysis also finds that geographical distance had a significant influence on the representation of the estates at the diets, with those geographically close to the diets attending increasingly often and those located in the geographical periphery increasingly staying away. Moreover, geographical distance had a consistent, strong, and significant effect on the personal presence of rulers. The Empire thus developed a well-integrated core that had the potential to form a state such as the one conceptualised by Schmidt, while the outlying regions were in increasing danger of dropping away.

1. Introduction: The political geography of early modern Germany

How politically well-integrated was the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century? And how did political integration develop over time? It is hard to overstate the importance of these questions. They take us into the middle of a debate that has dominated much of the research on the early modern Empire since

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the turn of the century. The trigger was Georg Schmidt's publication of his seminal book on sixteenth- to eighteenth-century German history in 1999. The work carried the programmatic sub-title 'State and Nation in the Early Modern Age', and in it, Schmidt interpreted the Empire as an early modern nation state on a par with its western neighbours.¹ Over the preceding decades, most historians had begun to accept the idea that the Empire was less dysfunctional than traditional historiography – primarily interested in explaining and justifying Prussia's rise to dominance – had made it out to be.² However, presenting it as a state still came as a shock. While some scholars have adopted Schmidt's interpretation, others believed he took things too far.³ They prefer to describe the Empire as a political system (sometimes as a system that was partially modernised in the sixteenth century), or to focus on the symbolic and ritualistic aspects of politics – this occasionally to an extent that lets the Empire appear as 'essentially fictive'.⁴ In either case, it is interpreted as lacking statehood.

The debate has far-reaching implications for how we see modern Germany in the context of the history of that country as well as of contemporary Europe. Thus, Heinrich August Winkler insisted on the validity of the traditional master narrative, which argued that state formation in Germany took place not at the level of the Empire but rather at that of the territories. At the same time, he warned against modern Germany taking on a supra-national role in Europe – a role he saw as a continuation of the supra-national pretensions of the Holy Roman Empire, which claimed a higher rank than its European neighbours and a

¹ Georg Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches: Staat und Nation in der Frühen Neuzeit 1495-1806* (München: Beck, 1999).

² See Len Scales and Joachim Whaley, "Rewriting the History of the Holy Roman Empire," *German History* 36, no. 2 (2018), pp. 340-346.

³ Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, vol. I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 6-7.

⁴ Volker Press, "Das römisch-deutsche Reich - ein politisches System in verfassungs- und sozialgeschichtlicher Fragestellung," in *Das Alte Reich: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Volker Press and Johannes Kunisch (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1982/2000); Heinz Schilling, "Reichs-Staat und frühneuzeitliche Nation der Deutschen oder teilmodernisiertes Reichssystem: Überlegungen zu Charakter und Aktualität des Alten Reiches," *Historische Zeitschrift* 272, no. 2 (2001); for the empire being 'fictive' see André Krischer, "Conclusion: New Directions in the Study of the Holy Roman Empire - A Cultural Approach," in *The Holy Roman Empire Reconsidered*, ed. Jason P. Coy, Benjamin Marschke, and David Warren Sabean (New York: Berghahn, 2010), p. 267.

universal mission at least until the Peace of Westphalia.⁵ The contrast to, for example, Johannes Burkhardt is stark. Burkhardt explicitly aimed at establishing a new master narrative. He followed Schmidt in interpreting the Empire as a state, and what is more, as a state from where modern Germany derives some of its most fruitful political traditions, among them federalism, broad political participation, the rule of law, and the structural inability to attack its neighbours.⁶ The implication is that the Holy Roman Empire cannot only be compared to the European Union, but can serve as a kind of loose model of how the Union might develop in future.⁷

Why is the issue of political integration relevant in this context? To understand this, consider the classical definition of integration proposed by Amitai Etzioni in 1965. For Etzioni, a country is politically integrated if '(a) it has an effective control over the use of the means of violence ... (b) it has a centre of decision-making that

⁵ Heinrich August Winkler, "Der lange Schatten des Reiches: Eine Bilanz deutscher Geschichte," *Merkur* 56, no. 635 (2002).

⁶ Johannes Burkhardt, *Deutsche Geschichte in der frühen Neuzeit* (München: Beck, 2009), pp. 8, 128.

⁷ See also Georg Schmidt, "Das frühneuzeitliche Reich - Sonderweg und Modell für Europa oder Staat der deutschen Nation?," in *Imperium Romanum - irregulare corpus - Teutscher Reichs-Staat*, ed. Matthias Schnettger (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002); Joachim Whaley, "The Old Reich in Modern Memory: Recent Controversies Concerning the 'Relevance' of Early Modern German History," in *German Literature, History and the Nation: Papers from the Conference 'The Fragile Tradition', Cambridge 2002*, ed. Christian Emden and David Midgley (Oxford: Peter lang, 2004), p. 34; "The Holy Roman Empire: European Disunion done Right," *The Economist*, 22 December, 2012; Brendan Simms, "The Ghosts of Europe Past," *The New York Times* 9 June 2013; Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (o.O.: Penguin, 2015), p. 92; Peter H. Wilson, "The Holy Roman Empire can help inspire a different European Union," *Financial Times*, 20 Jan. 2016; Dalibor Rohac, "The Holy Roman Union," *The American Interest* (Washington, D.C.), 7 May 2019; Timothy Garton Ash, "Since Reunification, Germany Has Had its Best 30 Years. The Next 30 Will Be Harder," *The Guardian*, 20 Sep. 2020; Johannes Burkhardt, "Europäischer Nachzügler oder institutioneller Vorreiter? Plädoyer für einen neuen Entwicklungsdiskurs zur konstruktiven Doppelstaatlichkeit des frühmodernen Reiches," in *Imperium Romanum - irregulare corpus - Teutscher Reichs-Staat: das Alte Reich im Verständnis der Zeitgenossen und der Historiographie*, ed. Matthias Schnettger (Mainz: Zabern, 2002), p. 316; Peter Claus Hartmann, *Das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation in der Neuzeit 1486 - 1806* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), p. 9. For a social scientist who arrived at similar ideas see David Pan, "European Union and Holy Roman Empire," *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 176 (2016), p. 207, and for a political scientist who does not adopt the statist interpretation of the Empire, but still sees it as a model for Europe Marlene Wind, "The European Union as a Polycentric Polity: Returning to a Neo-Medieval Europe?," in *European Constitutionalism Beyond the State*, ed. J.H.H. Weiler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), pp. 124-127. Also see Peter Haldén, *Stability Without Statehood: Lessons From Europe's History Before the Sovereign State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 51-67.

is able to significantly affect the allocation of resources and rewards throughout the community; and (c) it is the dominant focus of political identification for the large majority of politically aware citizens'.⁸ Point (a) refers to Max Weber's definition of a state, which has been widely adapted by the social sciences,⁹ point (b) to the ability to raise and redistribute revenues, which is the coercive authority most often associated with statehood.¹⁰ In the context of the present article, point (c) is of particular interest. It will, therefore, be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Political integration does not preclude regional autonomy. Political theorists stress that the control of the means of violence and the ability to tax may be shared by different levels of government.¹¹ This matches the way Schmidt interprets the early modern Empire, where he distinguishes three levels of statehood: that of the central, decision-making authority, that of the ten circles into which the Empire was divided since the early sixteenth century, and that of the territorial states. According to him, the three levels played complementary roles, making up a functional whole.¹² Next to this form of autonomy, certain, often peripheral regions may be accorded an autonomous status by the political centre.¹³ Such regions existed in the sixteenth-century Empire: Lorraine after 1543 is one example, Burgundy after 1548 is another one.¹⁴ What is at issue when we ask how politically

⁸ Amitai Etzioni, *Political Unification: A Comparative Study of Leaders and Forces* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 4. For surveys of how political integration can be defined see Leon N. Lindberg, "Political Integration: Definitions and Hypotheses," in *The European Union: Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration*, ed. Brent F. Nelsen and Alexander C-G. Stubb (London: Palgrave, 1994) and Ben Rosamond, "Theories of Political Integration," in *The European Union Handbook*, ed. Jackie Gower (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁹ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures. "Science as a Vocation", "Politics as a Vocation"*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett, 1918/2004), p. 33; for modifications of Weber's definition see e.g. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, ed. Charles Tilly, Studies in Social Discontinuity, (Cambridge/MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 1; Scott Abramson, "The Economic Origins of the Territorial State," *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (2017), p. 101.

¹⁰ Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichte im 16. Jahrhundert: 1500-1618* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 220; Abramson, "The Economic Origins of the Territorial State", p. 103.

¹¹ Rosamond, "Theories of Political Integration", p. 38.

¹² Schmidt, *Geschichte*, p. 44.

¹³ Frederik Harhoff, "Institutions of Autonomy," *Nordic Journal of International Law* 55, no. 1-2 (1986), p. 31.

¹⁴ Siegfried Fitte, *Das staatsrechtliche Verhältnis des Herzogtums Lothringen zum deutschen Reich seit dem Jahr 1542* (Strassburg: Heitz & Mündel, 1891), pp. 12-27; Nicolette Mout, "Die

well-integrated the early modern Empire was is not such a status but rather the informal or de-facto autonomy that results from the writ of the centre of the polity not running in certain parts of the country, despite the centre being interested in exerting control.

This is the kind of autonomy that Peter Moraw captured in an influential article published in 1976. There, Moraw modelled the political geography of the late medieval Empire, distinguishing several political zones:¹⁵ First, there was the territorial power base (*Hausmacht*) of the ruling dynasty – in the case of the Habsburgs, this was Austria plus the duchies and counties linked to it, the splinter territories in Swabia and the Upper Rhine region, and, since 1477, the Burgundian lands in the west of the Empire. Moraw's second political zone consisted of the territories held by rival dynasties such as the Luxemburgs and Wittelsbachs. A third zone was formed by the lands of those electors who were 'seriously interested in the king', while the lands 'close to the king' formed a fourth zone. 'Closeness' meant that these were lands whose rulers had good reasons for maintaining close links with the king, who was, however, no longer able to shape their political structures.¹⁶ Other regions, which Moraw called 'open to the king', formed a fifth zone, while a sixth zone was 'distant from the king'.

More recently, Moraw's model has been adapted to early modern history. What is stressed most often – for example, by Peter Wilson – is the ongoing importance of the distinction between regions 'close to' and 'distant from the king'.¹⁷ If this approach is correct, that is, if 'emperor and Empire' (the term under which the decision-making centre was subsumed in the early modern period) were less

Niederlande und das Reich im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Alternativen zur Reichsverfassung in der Frühen Neuzeit?*, ed. Volker Press and Dieter Stievermann (München: Oldenbourg, 1995), p. 147.

¹⁵ Peter Moraw, "Franken als königsnahe Landschaft im späten Mittelalter," *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* N.F. 112 (1976), p. 125; *ibid.*, "Die Verwaltung des Königtums und des Reiches und ihre Rahmenbedingungen," in *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*, ed. Kurt G.A. Jeserich, Hans Pohl, and Georg-Christoph von Unruh (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), p. 24.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, "Franken", p. 126.

¹⁷ Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of Europe's History* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), pp. 180-181; cf. Wolfgang Reinhard, *Probleme deutscher Geschichte 1495-1608: Reichsreform und Reformation 1495-1555*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp et al., Gebhardt: Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte 9, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), p. 71.

influential in what in the late Middle Ages used to be regions ‘distant from the king’ than in those ‘close to the king’, the implication would be that the post-medieval Empire was politically weakly integrated and could hardly function as a state.

Unsurprisingly, Moraw’s model, and in particular its application to early modern history, has not gone unchallenged. Schmidt suggested an alternative: a distinction between what he calls the ‘Empire of the German nation’ on the one hand and ‘the surviving medieval feudal Empire’ on the other. While the ‘feudal Empire’ included Burgundy, large parts of northern Italy, and Bohemia, in early modern Germany it overlapped with ‘the Empire of the German nation’.¹⁸ Acknowledging that Moraw’s model remained relevant far into the sixteenth century, Schmidt claimed that by the seventeenth century, the ‘upper German Empire of the late Middle Ages’ – covering regions Moraw considered ‘close to the king’ – had evolved into the ‘early modern German nation’ – an increasingly unified whole capable of purposeful action.¹⁹ In short, the distinction between a core traditionally ‘close’ to the political centre and a periphery ‘distant’ from the centre was no longer valid. Who is right? This is the question addressed in the present article for the period identified as crucial in this context: the time from the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, that is, the century between the accession of Charles V in 1519 to the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in 1618. Specifically, the analysis aims to estimate the degree of political integration and its changes over time, thus providing empirical evidence for or against the interpretation of the Holy Roman Empire as a state.

Below, in Section 2, the method applied in this article is introduced. Section 3 discusses the evidence in detail, and Section 4 presents the analysis and its

¹⁸ Georg Schmidt, "The State and Nation of the Germans," in *The Holy Roman Empire: 1495-1806*, ed. Robert John Weston Evans, Michael Schaich, and Peter H. Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 46.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, "Integration und Konfessionalisierung: Die Region zwischen Weser und Ems im Deutschland des 16. Jahrhunderts " *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 21, no. 1 (1994), p. 1; *ibid.*, *Geschichte*, p. 41.

results. The conclusion (Section 5) summarises the results and discusses them in the light of the debate sketched above.

2. Method: Operationalising political integration

Answering the questions addressed in this article requires operationalising the concept of political integration. That is not straightforward. There is a vast literature that concerns pre-modern *economic* integration. This branch of research has assembled evidence and developed sophisticated approaches that have extended our knowledge of this issue far beyond what was conceivable even a few years ago.²⁰ Nothing remotely comparable exists where pre-modern *political* integration is concerned. Still, Etzioni's definition quoted above provides a useful starting point. Trying to quantify the extent to which a government had 'effective control over the use of the means of violence' is probably futile, even more so as Etzioni's qualification 'effective' introduces a fuzziness into this criterion that cannot be eliminated within the scope of this article. By contrast, it should in principle be possible to determine whether emperor and Empire were 'able to significantly affect the allocation of resources and rewards throughout the community'. In fact, since Winfried Schulze analysed the Empire's fiscal response to the threat of an Ottoman invasion in the sixteenth century, scholars have regularly stressed that the imperial estates paid a high percentage of the 'Turkish aids' agreed by the diets.²¹ However, this type of evidence is scattered, and systematic information on the fiscal policies and revenues of the Empire and the estates (and on the use to which the money was put) is still fragmentary.²² The present article, therefore, focuses on Etzioni's third criterion, that is, on determining to what extent the Empire was the 'dominant focus of political

²⁰ In place of the broad literature on this subject see Giovanni Federico, Max-Stephan Schulze, and Oliver Volckart, "European Goods Market Integration in the Very Long Run: From the Black Death to the First World War," *The Journal of Economic History* 81, no. 1 (2021).

²¹ Winfried Schulze, *Reich und Türkengefahr im späten 16. Jahrhundert: Studien zu den politischen und gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen einer äußeren Bedrohung* (München: Beck, 1978), esp. pp. 223-363; Burkhardt, *Deutsche Geschichte*, p. 50.

²² See Maximilian Lanzinner, *Friedenssicherung und politische Einheit des Reiches unter Kaiser Maximilian II. 1564-1576*, Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 45, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), pp. 173-178.

identification for the large majority of politically aware' inhabitants.²³ This criterion unites two components: political identification on the one hand, and political awareness on the other. Once we have determined who was 'politically aware', we can examine how we can measure identification (and, by implication, integration).

As indicated above, historians such as Burkhardt are considering broad political participation as one of the core features of the political culture of the Empire, implying that large parts of the population were 'politically aware'.²⁴ However, for most – that is, for peasants and townsmen; women got rarely involved in politics – participation primarily meant taking part in decisions at the local level, for example in the context of their rural or urban commune.²⁵ At the regional level, the 'common man' was represented in the diets of the Tyrol and Vorarlberg, as well as in the Austrian territories in Swabia, in Württemberg and Baden, and in spiritual principalities such as the bishoprics of Chur and Basel and the archbishoprics of Mainz and Salzburg. The settlements that ended the Peasants' War of 1525 determined that he should also be admitted to the regional assemblies of territories ruled by large imperial abbeys such as Kempten.²⁶ By contrast, the 'common man' was not involved in politics at the level of the Empire. Here, it was the imperial estates who were politically aware and active. Therefore, the focus is on the estates and on how they did (or did not) express their identification with the Empire. This identification can be approximated by their attendance at imperial diets. The underlying assumptions are first, that an estate identified the

²³ Etzioni talked of citizens, which is an anachronism in an early modern context. 'Inhabitants' is a neutral term.

²⁴ Cf. Schmidt, *Geschichte*, pp. 249-350.

²⁵ Peter Blickle, *Landschaften im Alten Reich: Die staatliche Funktion des gemeinen Mannes in Oberdeutschland* (München: Beck, 1973), pp. 439-461; *ibid.*, "Kommunalismus, Parlamentarismus, Demokratie," *Historische Zeitschrift* 242, no. 3 (1986); *ibid.*, "Begriffsverfremdung: Über den Umgang mit dem wissenschaftlichen Ordnungsbegriff Kommunalismus," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 22, no. 2 (1995).

²⁶ *ibid.*, "Beschwerden und Polizeien: Die Legitimation des modernen Staates durch Verfahren und Normen," in *Gute Policy als Politik im 16. Jahrhundert: Die Entstehung des öffentlichen Raumes in Oberdeutschland*, ed. Peter Blickle, Peter Kissling, and Heinrich Richard Schmidt (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2003), p. 118; Kersten Krüger, *Die landständische Verfassung* (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), p. 70.

stronger with the Empire, the more often it attended the diets, and second, that the more often it attended, the better it was politically integrated with the Empire.

There are several reasons why attendance is a good proxy of integration. The estates were probably more willing to implement politics made at the level of the Empire if they had been involved in the negotiations that led to the decision. This was likely the case because the diets followed procedures that developed over time, but whose core principles – the discussion of issues within the three separate colleges of the electors, princes and cities, and the ‘polling’ procedure where the estates voted sequentially in order of their rank – remained stable.²⁷ According to Niklas Luhmann, the mere fact that there is a framework of rules which structure the way decisions are made may lend them legitimacy.²⁸ This is the case if the actors expected to observe and implement the decisions take part in the decision-making procedures. By becoming ‘enmeshed’ in these procedures – to use Michael Sikora’s term – they implicitly acknowledge not only the legitimacy of the procedures themselves but also of their results.²⁹ The procedures, in turn, are perceived as legitimate because they were agreed in advance, when none of those involved in making decisions knew which position they would take in the discussions. Such a process does not result in a consensus.³⁰ Rather, the result is that the actors involved in making the decisions regard even those that go against their interests as legitimate; they are therefore assumed to be more willing than otherwise to spend resources on the implementation what has been decided.

Historians of a culturalist bent consider the imperial diet particularly important, too. Thus, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger argues that diets ‘were more than, and different from, mere political decision-making processes; that is to say, they were the central site at which the Empire was symbolically embodied as an entirety

²⁷ Oliver Volckart, "Voting Like Your Betters: The Bandwagon Effect in the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire," *German History* 49, no. 1 (2023).

²⁸ Niklas Luhmann, *Legitimation durch Verfahren*, 11 ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1969/2019), p. 11.

²⁹ *ibid.*, *Legitimation*, pp. 87-89; Michael Sikora, "Der Sinn des Verfahrens: Soziologische Deutungsangebote," in *Vormoderne politische Verfahren*, ed. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), p. 32.

³⁰ Luhmann, *Legitimation*, pp. 30, 119.

composed of members'.³¹ Evidently, the fewer estates attended a diet, the worse it was at symbolically embodying the Empire 'as an entirety'; so from this perspective, too, attendance appears as a suitable proxy of integration. Note that whether an imperial estate attended was no either-or decision. Attendance could take several forms and have several aspects. Most importantly, a ruler, or in case of the imperial cities a burgomaster, could merely send a delegation, or he could join the delegates and be present in person (or even come alone).

One of the main questions asked in this article is whether or to which extent these forms of attendance depended on the political zones into which Moraw divided the empire, with the focus being on regions identified as 'close to' and 'distant from' the king in the late Middle Ages. Specifically, did estates from these regions attend diets significantly more or less often? Still, it is unlikely that attendance depended only – or perhaps even primarily – on the political zone in which an estate was located. It is therefore necessary to examine the decisions of the estates in more general terms. This requires taking other factors into account – factors such as, for example, the distance between an estate's usual place of residence and the diet. The question here is whether geographical distance had a negative effect on the representation of the estates at imperial diets within the area Schmidt conceptualised as the 'Empire of the German nation'. Other potentially relevant factors are the wealth of the estates, the age of the ruler, whether the estate held a 'viril vote' that allowed it to vote individually or a 'collegiate' vote that required voting jointly with others of similar status, whether it was Protestant or Catholic, etc. They are discussed in detail in section 3. However, it is useful to note here that the analysis presented in Section 4 only concerns factors that applied recurringly. Idiosyncrasies of momentary importance for individual decision making are left out of account.

³¹ Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, "On the Function of Rituals in the Holy Roman Empire," in *The Holy Roman Empire 1495-1806*, ed. R.J.W. Evans, Michael Schaich, and Peter H. Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 368-369.

The approach sketched above has three advantages. First, it complements sociological research that aims at explaining why and when norms set by a central authority are being observed. As mentioned above, the hypothesis is that becoming 'enmeshed' in political procedures increases the likelihood of decisions being implemented. Thus, if the analysis finds that certain estates regularly failed to become 'enmeshed', this may help explain why decisions of the diet were occasionally ignored. This concerned, for example, the payment of dues to the Empire or the implementation of imperial law.³² Second, the present analysis addresses the underlying question of how the constitution of the Empire worked in practice. The aim is transcending the traditional approach (based on the interpretation of the Empire by prominent eighteenth-century lawyers) which was focused on formal rules; this had led to a view of the Empire that stressed continuities to an extent that made it look ossified.³³ If we want to see how the Empire worked in practice and changed over time, we cannot only study normative texts; rather, we must analyse the actual behaviour of political actors. The approach pursued here allows doing so without relying on anecdotal evidence whose representativeness must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. A final advantage is that attendance at imperial diets is very well-documented.

3. Sources: The evidence

The most comprehensive sources that allow us to see who attended the imperial diets are the concluding documents or recesses called *Reichsabschiede*, which summarised the decisions reached by the emperor and the estates. Over the century of interest, there was only one diet that ended without such a 'recess': the diet of 1608, which collapsed in the face of religious polarisation and after a

³² See Whaley, *Germany*, I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648, p. 305; Oliver Volckart, "Bimetallism and its Discontents: Cooperation and Coordination Failure in the Empire's Monetary Policies, 1549-59," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 105, no. 2 (2018).

³³ Cf. Press, "Das römisch-deutsche Reich - ein politisches System in verfassungs- und sozialgeschichtlicher Fragestellung", pp. 22-23.

walkout of the electoral Palatinate.³⁴ In all other cases, the *Abschied* agreed by the participants ended with the solemn statement that:

‘we the electors, princes, prelates, counts, barons and the delegates and authorised representatives of the Holy Empire’s free and imperial cities confirm publicly with this recess that each and every point and article listed above was discussed, negotiated and decided with our good will, conscience and counsel, that we also approve one and all of them through this document, and we promise and pledge with right, good and true trust to observe, implement and execute them upright- and steadfastly for ourselves or for our lords or friends who sent or authorised us.’³⁵

There followed a list of every elector, prince, and burgomaster present, and in the case of those who did not attend in person, the names of the accredited delegates whom they had sent to negotiate on their behalf. These lists are imperfect as some princes probably did not stay until the *Abschied*, but they are still the most comprehensive evidence we have.³⁶

For the reign of Charles V (1519-58), Rosemarie Aulinger and Silvia Schweinzer-Burian have collated and published comprehensive information on who represented which imperial estate at what diet.³⁷ Their dataset contains almost 6,700 observations. Aulinger and Schweinzer-Burian took part in a monumental project which, under the aegis of the Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, aims at critically publishing the acts of the imperial diets up to the second half of the seventeenth century. Since the 1990s, this project has made rapid progress; as of 2023, the only pre-Thirty-Years-War diets not covered

³⁴ Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 224-225.

³⁵ Erwein Eltz, ed., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.: Der Reichstag zu Augsburg 1550/51*, vol. 2, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Jüngere Reihe Bd. XIX* (München: Oldenbourg, 2005), no. 305, p. 1606.

³⁶ Maximilian Lanzinner, "Fürsten und Gesandte als politische Akteure beim Reichstag 1566," in *Religiöse Prägung und politische Ordnung in der Neuzeit: Festschrift für Winfried Becker zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Bernhard Löffler and Karsten Ruppert (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), p. 58.

³⁷ Rosemarie Aulinger and Silvia Schweinzer-Burian, "Habsburgische und reichsständische Präsenz auf den Reichstagen Kaiser Karls V. (1521-1555) im Spiegel der Reichsmatrikel von 1521: Eine prosopographische Erfassung," in *Handlungsräume: Facetten politischer Kommunikation in der Frühen Neuzeit. Festschrift für Albrecht P. Luttenberger zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz Hederer et al. (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2011).

are those of 1576, -94, -98 and of 1603, -08 (without *Abschied*) and -13.³⁸ For these diets, the edition of the *Reichsabschiede* published by Heinrich Christian von Senckenberg and Johann Jacob Schmauß in 1747 has been used.³⁹ The sources covering the post-1555 diets yield more than 5,200 further observations.

The focus of the analysis below is on explaining which factors determined whether an imperial estate would be represented at any of the diets that took place between 1521 and 1613. In addition to this, the aim is to discover what determined the form that attendance would take. Would the ruler of an estate (an elector, prince, count or baron, prelate or, in the case of the imperial cities, a burgomaster) be present in person, or would he merely send a delegation? To answer these questions, the two variables that are to be explained are being defined first. These variables are dichotomous (so-called ‘dummies’): ‘Represented’ and ‘Ruler present’ take the value of 1 if an imperial estate was represented at a diet (in whichever form) or if the ruler was personally present, respectively, and else are 0. In a second step, a series of regression analyses establishes how strong and significant the influence of several independent variables (or predictors) on these dependent variables was.

The benchmark against which the dependent variables are measured is the total number of estates privileged to attend the diets. This is a complicated issue. The imperial register of 1521 lists 384 estates, among them individuals like the ‘duke of the Mase’, who has never been satisfactorily identified,⁴⁰ and towns like

³⁸ Maximilian Lanzinner, ed., *Der Reichstag zu Speyer 1570*, vol. 2: Akten und Abschied, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556-1662 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988); Maximilian Lanzinner and Dietmar Heil, eds., *Der Reichstag zu Augsburg 1566*, vol. 2, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556–1662 (München: Oldenbourg, 2002); Josef Leeb, ed., *Der Kurfürstentag zu Frankfurt 1558 und der Reichstag zu Augsburg 1559*, vol. 3, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556-1662 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); *ibid.*, ed., *Der Reichstag zu Augsburg 1582*, vol. 2, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556-1662 (München: Oldenbourg, 2007); *ibid.*, ed., *Der Reichstag zu Regensburg 1556/57*, vol. 2, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556-1662 (München: Oldenbourg, 2013); Wolfgang Wagner, Arno Strohmeier, and Josef Leeb, eds., *Der Reichstag zu Regensburg 1567 und der Reichskreistag zu Erfurt 1567*, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Reichsversammlungen 1556-1662 (München: Oldenbourg, 2007)

³⁹ Heinrich Christian von Senckenberg and Johann Jacob Schmauß, eds., *Neue und vollständigere Sammlung der Reichs-Abschiede*, vol. 3: Reichs-Abschiede von dem Jahr 1552. bis 1654. inclusive (Frankfurt: Koch, 1747).

⁴⁰ Adolf Wrede, ed., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, vol. 2, Deutsche Reichstagsakten, jüngere Reihe 2 (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1896), no. 56, pp. 424-443.

Danzig/Gdańsk and Elbing/Elbląg, which were not members of the Empire. The updated register of 1545 contains 381 entries.⁴¹ Moreover, while there was no diet where everyone listed in the registers was represented, we encounter attendants *not* listed there. For example, Margrave John of Küstrin, the younger brother of Elector Joachim II of Brandenburg who had received a principality of his own on the death of their father in 1535, was a very active participant despite not being mentioned in the revised register of 1545. For practical purposes it has, therefore, been assumed that everyone listed at the end of a *Reichsabschied* was an imperial estate and recognised as such by the other estates, regardless of what the registers say.⁴² This approach leads to a total number of 451 estates over the period 1521 to 1613. While it is probable that authorities present at diets but not listed as imperial estates in the registers did not enjoy this status over the whole period, there is no way to determine how many estates (including those not represented) existed at the time of each diet. Still, it is likely that the benchmark against which the dependent variables are measured is somewhat too high.

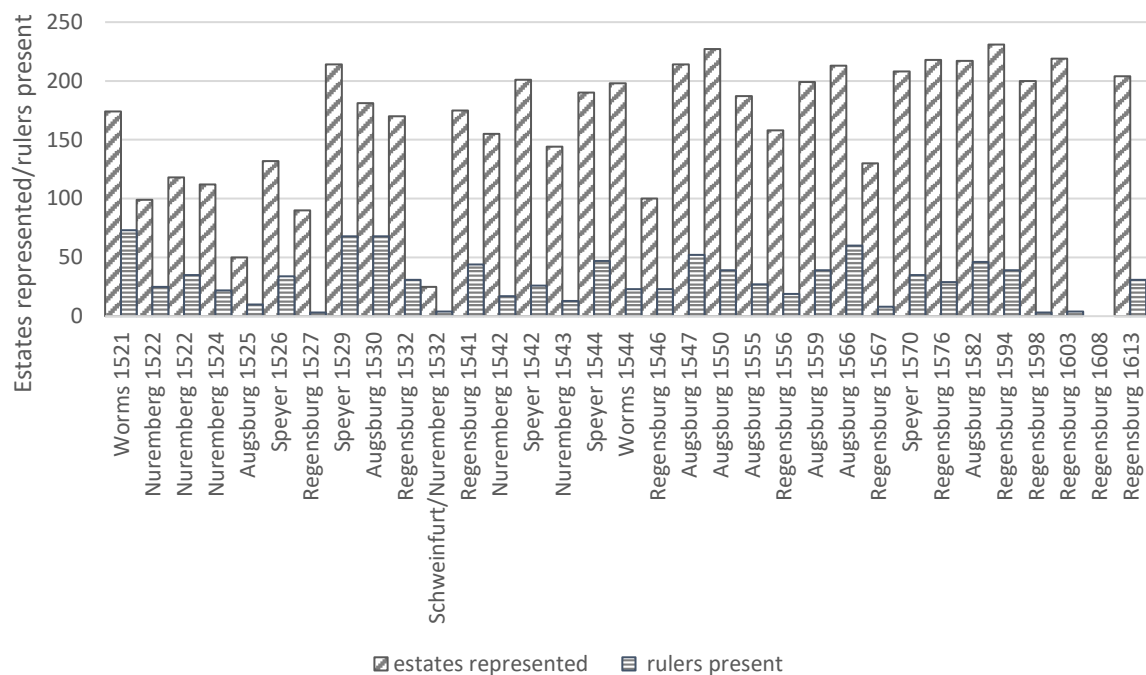
Figure 1 gives a first impression of changes over time. Over the reign of Charles V, Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, attendance climbed from on average about 124 estates in the 1520s to 213 in the 1570s. For the rest of the period – the reign of Rudolph II and Matthias – it hovered at about that value. Far fewer rulers attended in person. The only decade when more than 40 princes of the Empire or burgomasters of imperial cities visited the diets in person was the 1590s; before and after, a decadal average in the mid-30s was typical.

For hypotheses concerning the identity of the ‚duke of the Mase‘ see Gerhard Oestreich, *Verfassungsgeschichte vom Ende des Mittelalters bis zum Ende des alten Reiches*, ed. Herbert Grundmann, Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte 11, (München: dtv, 1982), p. 139 and Rosemarie Aulinger, ed., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.: Der Reichstag zu Worms 1545*, vol. 2, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Jüngere Reihe Band XVI (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), p. 1088 with FN 4.

⁴¹ For the imperial registers see Wrede, *Reichstagsakten*, no. 56, pp. 424-442 and Aulinger, *Reichstag zu Worms 1545*, no. 113B, pp. 1084-1098.

⁴² This matches the criteria that early modern experts in constitutional law applied to determine who was an imperial estate. See e.g. Carl Friedrich Häberlin, *Repertorium des Teutschen Staats und Lehnrechts*, vol. 4: P-R (Leipzig: Weidemannsche Buchhandlung, 1795), p. 645.

Figure 1: Attendance at imperial diets (in absolute numbers), 1521-1613



Among the predictors used to explain the dependent variables, the zones ‘close to’ and ‘distant from the king’ in the late Middle Ages take centre stage. These predictors are dummies that take the value of 1 if an estate was located in one of these zones, otherwise, they are 0. Moraw, who developed the distinction, provided a relatively precise definition of the zone he considered ‘close to the king’ in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to him, it consisted of Franconia, certain parts of Swabia (especially along the upper Danube), the middle-Rhine and lower-Main region and, the successively shrinking and smallest zone, the area along the river Saale and the middle Elbe.⁴³ For the middle-Rhineland, Moraw mentioned the counts of Leiningen, for the Saale-region the counts of Schwarzburg.⁴⁴ In the present article it is being assumed that Württemberg and Baden did *not* belong to this zone, whereas the Swabian and Franconian spiritual princes – the bishops and prelates – did. This assumption was made because

⁴³ Moraw, "Franken", p. 125; *ibid.*, "Die Verwaltung des Königtums und des Reiches und ihre Rahmenbedingungen", p. 24.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, "Franken", p. 127.

spiritual rulers formed part of the core clientele of the Habsburgs;⁴⁵ if there was a region where they were open to the influence of the emperors, it should, therefore, have been here. Other conceptions of the zone ‘close to the king’ are possible. Len Scales, for example, considers the whole early-fifteenth-century Rhineland a ‘monarchical landscape’.⁴⁶ However, here a narrower definition is given preference. This is done in order not to dilute the effect of closeness to the king by including estates whose status may be doubtful. The approach should, therefore, bias the results of the analysis *in favour* of support for the hypothesis that Moraw’s distinction shaped politics both in the late Middle Ages and in the early modern period.

Regarding the zone ‘distant from the king’, Moraw merely mentioned regions ‘mainly’ in the north and the extreme south-west of the Empire.⁴⁷ One region in the extreme south-west was the Swiss Confederacy that, having resisted closer political integration at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, ceased to take part in the political life of the Empire.⁴⁸ It is, therefore, left out of account. Concerning the north, the present analysis defines those imperial estates touching the coast of the North Sea and the Baltic as ‘distant from the king’.⁴⁹ Again, this is a restrictive definition and other conceptualisations are possible. Thus, Peter Wilson argues that the ‘frontier zones of northern and eastern Germany remained peripheral for most of the Middle Ages’,⁵⁰ which means that at least the New March of Brandenburg – John of Küstrin’s principality (1535-71) – should be included. Ernst Schubert argues that all Lower Saxony was ‘distant from the king’ in the late Middle Ages, with other scholars explicitly mentioning the prince-

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Empire*, pp. 87-94; Whaley, *Germany*, I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648, p. 274.

⁴⁶ Len Scales, *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1245-1414* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 130.

⁴⁷ Moraw, "Die Verwaltung des Königtums und des Reiches und ihre Rahmenbedingungen", p. 24.

⁴⁸ Thomas A. Brady, *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire, 1450-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 38-40.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Joachim Whaley, who stresses that ‘the Hanseatic Cities of the north’ were ‘distant from the old imperial heartlands and with often only tenuous connections with the Reich’ at the time of the Reformation. Whaley, *Germany*, I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648, p. 240.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Empire*, p. 182

bishopric of Hildesheim far inland.⁵¹ However, including imperial estates further south than on the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic would likely mean watering down the effect of 'distance from the king'. Hence, like in the case of 'closeness to the king', using a restrictive definition biases the results of the analysis in favour of support for Moraw's model.

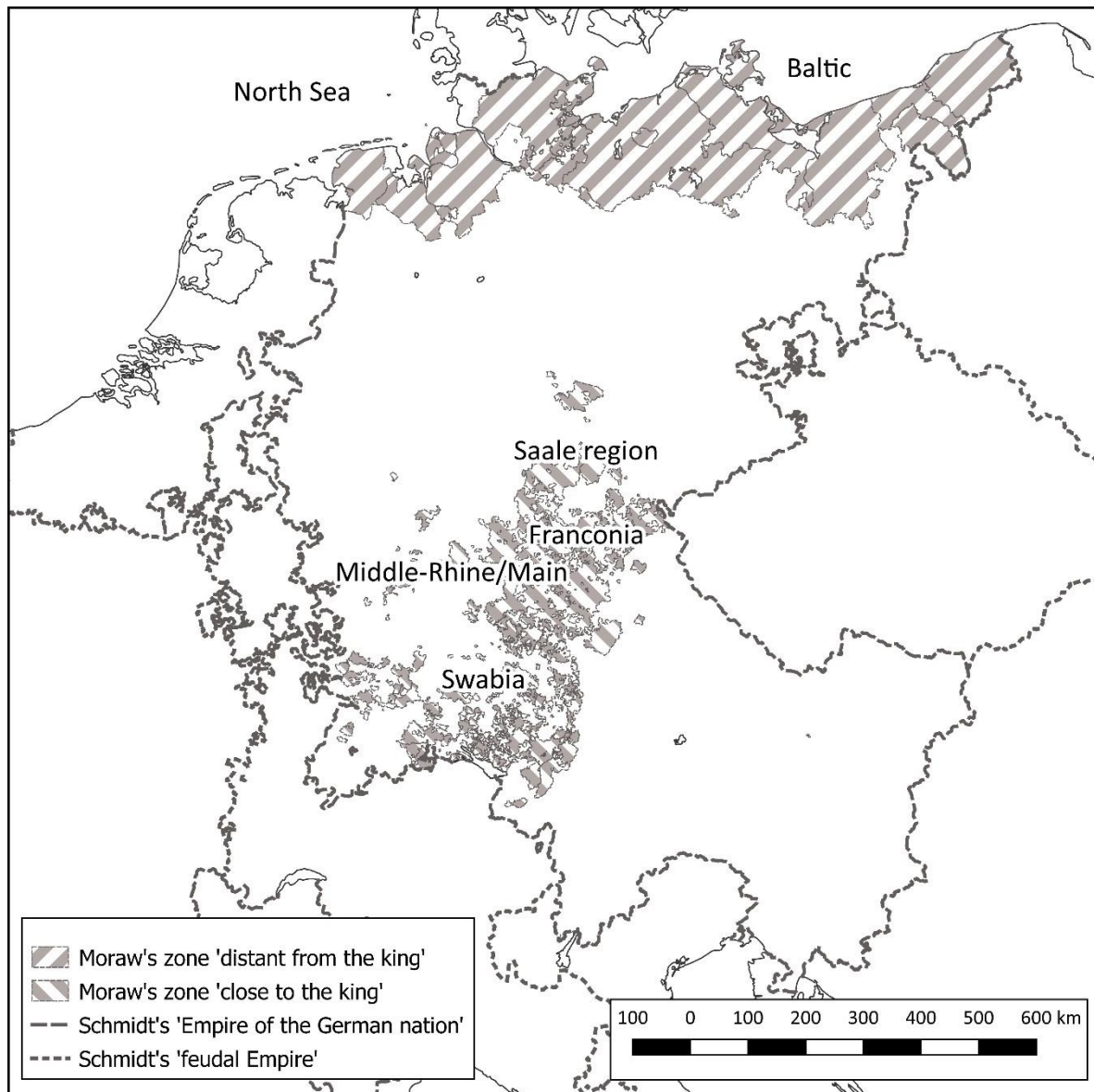
As indicated above, political integration was potentially influenced by other factors, among them geographical distance. There is no dispute that distance played an important political role in the late Middle Ages. Moraw, for example, stressed how difficult it was to overcome space, given that continuous contacts, written records, and maps were inadequate.⁵² In this article, the geographical distance between the location of an imperial diet and the places of residence of the imperial estates is used as a proxy for the costs the estates had to bear to reach the diet. It is an imperfect proxy, but as the precise routes taken on the journey to a diet and the exact costs spent travelling are in most cases unknown, distance should serve well enough. Research has shown in other contexts that it had essential importance for the frequency and duration of the meetings of early modern representative assemblies.⁵³ If it had a significant effect on the attendance at imperial diets, too, the implication would be that Schmidt's 'Empire of the German nation' was poorly integrated, which would in turn imply that his conceptualisation of the political geography of the Empire fails to take into account an essential factor that undermined its character as a state. Figure 2 presents the two contrasting conceptions of political geography tested in the analysis below.

⁵¹ Ernst Schubert, *Geschichte Niedersachsens*, vol. 2, Teil 1: Politik, Verfassung, Wirtschaft vom 9. bis zum ausgehenden 15. Jahrhundert (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1997), pp. 575-582; Nathalie Kruppa and Jürgen Wilke, *Das Bistum Hildesheim: Die Hildesheimer Bischöfe von 1221 bis 1398*, ed. Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, Germania Sacra N.F. 46, 4, (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2006), p. 149.

⁵² Moraw, "Die Verwaltung des Königtums und des Reiches und ihre Rahmenbedingungen", p. 27.

⁵³ David Stasavage, "When Distance Mattered: Geographic Scale and the Development of European Representative Assemblies," *The American Political Science Review* 104, no. 4 (2010).

Figure 2: Two conceptions of the political geography of the Holy Roman Empire (mid-sixteenth-century borders)



The more costly overcoming space was, the more important should the wealth of the imperial estates have been. Comprehensive information on this wealth and its change over time does not exist. However, there are data that can be used to approximate it. Thus, the Roman Month payments listed in the imperial register were expected to reflect the prosperity of the estates. This was made explicit during their renegotiation in the 1540s, with the document concluding the Diet of Regensburg in 1541 stating that the contributions of some estates should be reduced 'because of their impoverishment', whereas others, 'whose wealth has

obviously increased', should pay more.⁵⁴ For the first few decades, the values listed in the register of 1521 are being used, from 1545 onwards those given in the revised register.⁵⁵ Occasional later changes are documented in an eighteenth-century source.⁵⁶ Presumably the *Kammerzieler* payments used to maintain the imperial chamber court and defined in 1521 reflected the wealth of the estates, too.⁵⁷ Revenue data have been preserved unevenly and are in any case hard to compare in the absence of a common currency before 1559/66. However, occasionally Italian diplomats who visited Germany sent home lists of the revenues of the imperial estates. One such list was compiled by Alois Mocenigo, a Venetian who spent the years from 1546 to 1548 at the imperial court.⁵⁸ Many of the values he listed were based on guesswork, but whatever their accuracy, they are at least consistent in terms of monetary units (they are given in gold florins) and relatively comprehensive in terms of geographical coverage. Not surprisingly, the estates' Roman Month and *Kammerzieler* payments and their revenues are correlated.⁵⁹ The issue is addressed through a principal component analysis, a statistical technique used for data reduction that allows extracting the common factor underlying the three variables.⁶⁰ This common factor (*wealth*) is then used in the regression analysis. The expectation is that the wealthier estates were, the more often they would attend the imperial diets.

Another factor that may have influenced at least the personal attendance of rulers is their age. This has been extracted from a broad range of genealogical literature, using Max Wilberg's 'Regenten-Tabellen' and Hermann Grote's 'Stammtafeln' as

⁵⁴ Albrecht Luttenberger, ed., *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.: Der Reichstag zu Regensburg 1541*, Deutsche Reichstagsakten: Jüngere Reihe XI (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), no. 941, p. 3620.

⁵⁵ Wrede, *Reichstagsakten*, no. 56, pp. 424-442; Aulinger, *Reichstag zu Worms 1545*, no. 113b, pp. 1084-1098.

⁵⁶ Heinrich Sigmund Georg Gumpelzhaimer, *Die Reichs-Matrikel aller Kreise; nebst den Usual-Matrikeln des kaiserlichen und Reichs-Kammergerichts* (Ulm: Stettinische Buchhandlung, 1796).

⁵⁷ Wrede, *Reichstagsakten*, no. 56, pp. 424-442.

⁵⁸ Cornel Zwierlein, "Deutsche und Italienische Staatsbeschreibungskunst: Die Einkünfte aller Reichsstände, ca. 1547/48 nach einer unbekannten Quelle," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 39, no. 4 (2012), pp. 609-610, 624.

⁵⁹ The 1550-correlation coefficients of Roman Month and *Kammerzieler* payments is 0.91, that of Roman Month and revenues 0.90, and that of *Kammerzieler* and revenues 0.79.

⁶⁰ Ian T. Joliffe and Jorge Cadima, "Principal Component Analysis: A Review and Recent Developments," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 374 (2016).

starting points.⁶¹ In some cases – especially where smaller counties or baronies are concerned – it turned out to be impossible to determine who was the head of the family. Imperial cities are another problem, especially if their constitution determined that several – often two – burgomasters were to govern side by side. For these reasons, the data on age are more fragmentary than the others mentioned above.

Instead of using a simple numerical age value, the analysis assumes that minors would be unlikely to attend a diet. Male members of the late medieval nobility often came of age when they were fourteen, while princes could be declared adults at any point between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two.⁶² Any line separating youth from adulthood is therefore to some extent arbitrary. Here, it is drawn at twenty-one years; a dummy ('ruler minor') is defined that takes the value of 1 if a ruler was younger than that. A similar dummy ('ruler adult') captures whether a ruler was between twenty-one and sixty years old. Rulers who had reached old age – generally considered to begin at sixty – are expected to have been less likely to attend a diet.⁶³

Finally, there are several other controls that reflect whether an estate held a 'viril vote' that allowed it to vote individually or a 'collegiate' vote that required voting jointly with others, or whether it was a member of the cities' college that held 'consultative votes' only. Likewise, the analysis takes into account whether an estate was spiritual or temporal and Protestant or Catholic.⁶⁴ Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics of the predictor variables.

⁶¹ Max Wilberg, *Regenten-Tabellen* (Frankfurt a.O.: Paul Beholtz, 1906); H. Grote, *Stammtafeln. Mit Anhang: Calendarium medii aevi* (Leipzig: Hahn'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1877).

⁶² Cordula Nolte, "Die Familie im Adel: Haushaltsstrukturen und Wohnverhältnisse im Spätmittelalter," in *Die Familie in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters*, ed. Karl-Heinz Spieß, Vorträge und Forschungen 71 (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2009), p. 95; Pauline Puppel, *Die Regentin: Vormundschaftliche Herrschaft in Hessen 1500-1700*, Geschichte und Geschlechter 43, (Frankfurt, New York: Campus Verlag, 2004), p. 121.

⁶³ Cf. Paul Münch, *Lebensformen in der Frühen Neuzeit 1500 bis 1800* (Frankfurt, Berlin: Ullstein, 1996), pp. 161-163.

⁶⁴ For the problems involved in determining this see Oliver Volckart, "The Dear Old Holy Roman Realm: How Does it Hold Together? Monetary Policies, Cross-cutting Cleavages and Political Cohesion in the Age of Reformation," *German History* 38, no. 4 (2020), pp. 371-372.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, explanatory variables

VARIABLES	Observations	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Distant from emperor	14,337	0.03	0.20	0	1
Close to emperor	14,337	0.36	0.48	0	1
Distance residence - diet	13,389	167.88	88.31	0.14	634.22
Roman month	11,667	295.59	485.66	0	3,840
<i>Kammerzieler</i>	11,253	111.43	134.00	0	900
Revenue	9,459	26,804.74	54,928.55	2,000	400,000
Ruler age	7,232	43.47	15.75	2	98
Viril vote	14,337	0.24	0.42	0	1
Consultative vote	14,337	0.16	0.37	0	1
Protestant	14,337	0.17	0.39	0	1
Spiritual estate	14,337	0.24	0.44	0	1

4. Analysis: Representation and personal presence

The dataset is structured as a panel, that is, there are observations for 451 imperial estates for thirty-two of the diets that took place between the one of Worms in 1521 and the one of Regensburg in 1613 (the diet of 1608 is being ignored). Each observation is uniquely identified by the combination of the ID of the estate with that of the diet. Table 2 presents the results of eight logistic regressions (the appropriate model when the dependent variable is dichotomous). What is first to be explained is whether an estate was represented at a diet (in whatever form, ‘represented’ as dependent variable, Table 2, columns 1 to 4). Next, we are looking at the personal presence of rulers (‘ruler present’, columns 5 to 8). To discover changes over time, the panel has been split into 4 sub-periods: The first and second period (columns 1, 2, 5 and 6) cover the reign of Charles V; columns 3 and 7 represent the reigns of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, and columns 4 and 8 the reigns of Rudolph II and Matthias.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ To capture unobservable diet-specific idiosyncrasies, diet-fixed-effects are being used. Controlling for unobservable characteristics of the imperial estates (for example, by including estate-fixed effects or dummies that indicate in which of the ten circles, into which the Empire was divided, each estate was located) is not possible. This captures geographical areas and thus cancels out much of the effect of the distance variable that is at the core of analysis.

Table 2: Which factors determined the attendance of the imperial estates at the diets? Regression results

VARIABLES	(1) (1521-32) represented	(2) (1541-55) represented	(3) (1556-76) represented	(4) (1582-1613) represented	(5) (1521-32) ruler present	(6) (1541-55) ruler present	(7) (1556-76) ruler present	(8) (1582-1613) ruler present
distant from emperor	-0.645 (0.840)	-1.183 (0.787)	-1.095 (1.091)	-0.173 (1.480)	0.302 (0.742)	0.318 (1.052)	2.060** (0.974)	0.379 (1.232)
close to emperor	0.505 (0.363)	0.262 (0.370)	0.676 (0.518)	0.155 (0.598)	0.203 (0.320)	0.170 (0.352)	-0.561* (0.339)	-0.260 (0.399)
geo. distance	-0.00344** (0.00153)	-0.00653*** (0.00150)	-0.00884*** (0.00217)	-0.0152*** (0.00358)	-0.00981*** (0.00178)	-0.0124*** (0.00225)	-0.0167*** (0.00266)	-0.0105*** (0.00273)
ruler minor	-0.634 (1.044)	0.262 (0.470)	0.193 (0.511)	0.537 (0.950)	-0.381 (0.833)	-0.397 (0.859)	0.110 (0.788)	
ruler adult	0.225 (0.287)	0.376 (0.320)	0.805** (0.393)	1.151*** (0.413)	1.161*** (0.347)	1.312*** (0.347)	1.223*** (0.395)	1.871*** (0.460)
wealth	0.905*** (0.136)	0.785*** (0.127)	1.206*** (0.221)	1.163*** (0.257)	0.502*** (0.0864)	0.414*** (0.0809)	0.298*** (0.0787)	0.431*** (0.109)
protestant	0.799 (0.538)	0.397 (0.363)	1.054*** (0.395)	0.132 (0.560)	0.324 (0.388)	-0.0767 (0.373)	0.406 (0.348)	-0.508 (0.427)
spiritual estate	1.675*** (0.458)	1.274*** (0.466)	1.118** (0.556)	1.225* (0.685)	-0.105 (0.453)	0.282 (0.457)	-0.271 (0.397)	0.608 (0.480)
viril vote	0.579 (0.493)	1.253*** (0.460)	0.190 (0.581)	-0.343 (0.699)	1.231*** (0.452)	2.283*** (0.447)	0.245 (0.395)	-0.639 (0.492)
consultative vote	3.819*** (0.505)	2.682*** (0.479)	3.235*** (0.638)	3.532*** (0.695)	0.488 (0.477)	1.616*** (0.497)	-0.165 (0.519)	0.532 (0.608)
Constant	-6.901*** (0.668)	-0.574 (0.529)	1.163 (0.726)	2.222** (1.000)	-5.845*** (0.760)	-3.548*** (0.650)	-0.694 (0.680)	-2.129*** (0.791)
Diet fixed effects	yes	yes	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	2,915	2,365	1,515	1,257	2,915	2,365	1,515	1,226
Number of estates	268	280	255	254	268	280	255	254

Standard errors (clustered at the estate level) in parentheses
 *** significant at 1%, ** significant at 5%, * significant at 10%

Regarding the representation of the estates at imperial diets (columns 1 to 4), the coefficients of both ‘distant from’ and ‘close to the emperor’ have the expected signs (with distance decreasing and closeness increasing the likelihood of attending a diet) but are never significant. Here, the late medieval political zones identified by Moraw had evidently lost all importance. For the personal presence of rulers, however, the results look different (columns 5 to 8). Surprisingly, in the third quarter of the sixteenth century (column 7), rulers from the zone ‘distant from the emperor’ were significantly *more* likely to attend the diets in person, while those ‘close to the emperor’ came less often. Possibly, this result must be seen in the context of the policies of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, whose confessional ambivalence may have encouraged the mostly Protestant rulers of coastal regions in the North of the Empire to make up for their previously patchy attendance by coming particularly often.⁶⁶ Conversely, the traditional clientele of the emperors, located in the zone ‘close to the king’ in the late Middle Ages, may have been put off by the religious stance taken by Ferdinand and Maximilian.

What does the coefficient of ‘distant from the emperor’ (2.060) mean in practical terms? This can be demonstrated by looking at the marginal effect of the location of an estate within or out of this zone. Doing so shows that the rulers of politically distant estates would be personally present about 27 percent of the time, those from outside this zone 9 per cent of the time. The marginal effect of closeness to the emperor (coefficient -0.561) is 6 per cent for the rulers of estates within this zone and 10 per cent for others. Moraw’s zones thus retained some temporary importance for the personal presence of rulers. Overall, however, Schmidt’s hypothesis that they remained influential ‘far into the sixteenth century’ seems too cautious, while Wilson’s application of the model to early modern history risks misrepresenting the political geography of the Empire.⁶⁷

The analysis of the impact of Moraw’s zones in the sixteenth century also suggests that whether an estate was represented at a diet and whether the ruler was

⁶⁶ See Whaley, *Germany*, I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648, p. 348.

⁶⁷ See Schmidt, *Geschichte*, p. 41; Wilson, *Empire*, p. pp. 180-181.

present in person depended on different considerations. These considerations become clearer when we examine the effect of the geographical distance between the places of residence of the estates and the diets. The distance-coefficient has the expected sign and is significant throughout. Moreover, for ‘represented’ (Table 2, columns 1 to 4) it grows over time, for ‘ruler present’ (columns 5 to 8) it does so until the third quarter of the sixteenth century. The marginal effect of distance allows seeing what this meant in practice. Figure 3 illustrates it, showing how the likelihood of an imperial estate being represented at a diet was related to the distance between the estates’ place of residence and the location of the diet.

Figure 3: The marginal effect of geographical distance on ‘represented’

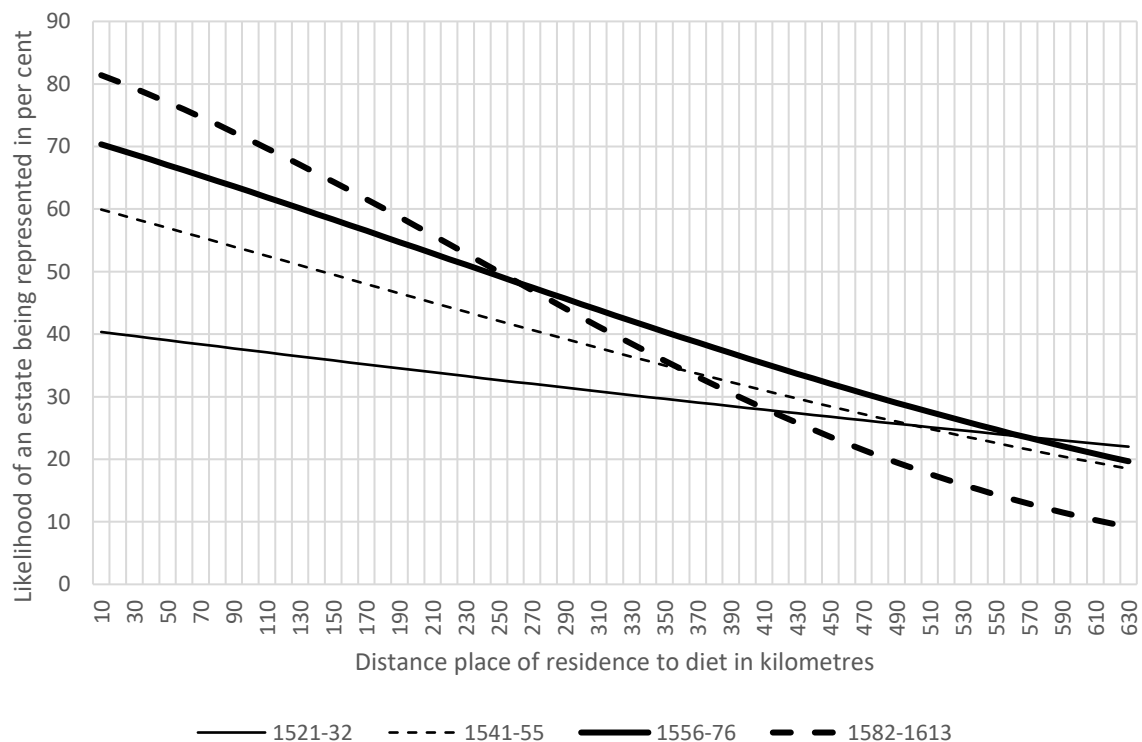
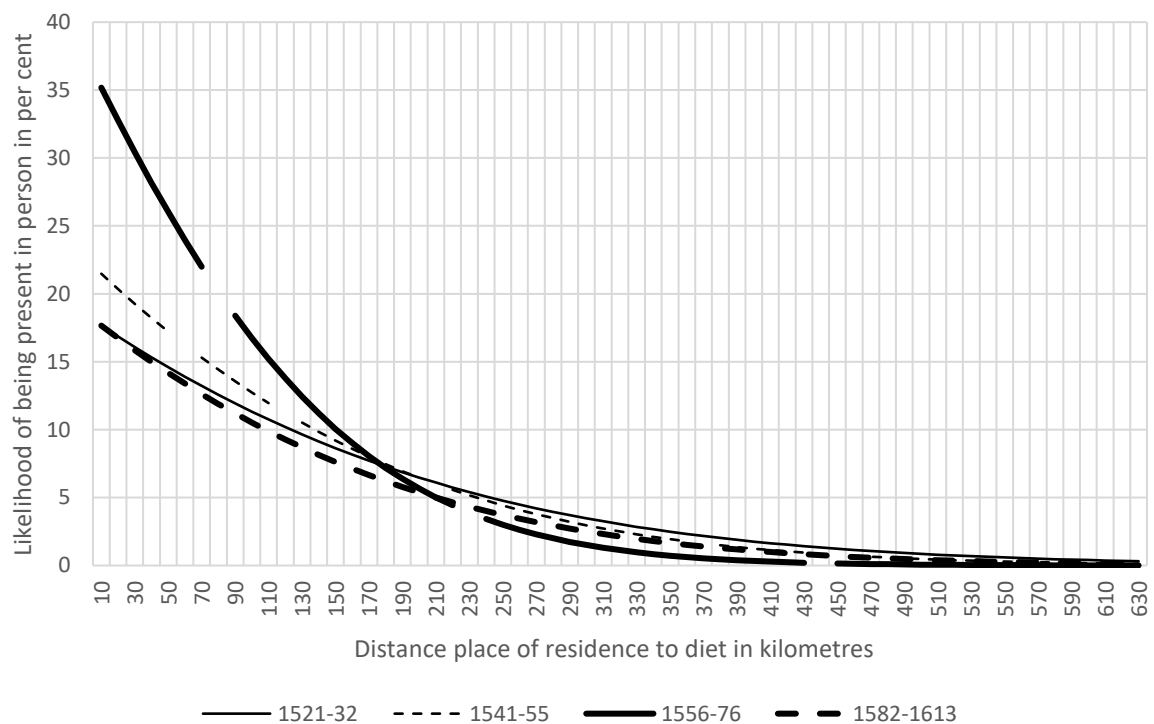


Figure 3 suggests that travel costs played an important role for whether the estates were represented at the diets. After all, these costs increased arithmetically when distance grew: Other things being equal, each additional kilometre cost as much as the last kilometre, and a journey of, for example, 300 kilometres was twice as expensive as one of 150 kilometres. One would therefore expect a broadly linear ‘distance-decay’, that is, a negative correlation between distance and the likelihood of representation, such as the one shown in Figure 3

for all four sub-periods. The fact that over time the curves become steeper (the one for 1521-32 is flattest, the one for 1582-1613 steepest) cannot reflect changes in travel costs (for example, a fall in these costs would have shifted the curves upward instead of affecting their slope). As time went on, estates close to the diets evidently tended to attend more frequently (which suggests that their identification with the Empire became stronger), whereas those distant from the diets stayed away more often. For example, in the period 1521-32 the likelihood of attendance was less than 40 per cent for an estate 50 kilometres from the diet; by 1582-1613, it had grown to almost 80 per cent. At the same time, the likelihood of attendance of estates 500 kilometres from the diet dropped from c. 25 to about 15 per cent. The conclusion is that while the Empire was no longer split in political zones of the kind Moraw envisaged, it developed an increasingly well-integrated core centred on Upper Germany, where the diets took place. Outlying regions – even those within the borders of Schmidt’s ‘Empire of the German nation’ – did not merely remain poorly integrated but disintegrated towards the end of the period analysed here.

While representation at the imperial diets depended to a large extent of travel costs, the picture emerging for the personal presence of rulers is different. Figure 4 shows this.

Figure 4: The marginal effect of geographical distance on ‘ruler present’



Strikingly, we find an exponential correlation instead of a linear one: It made a large difference whether a ruler had to travel, for example, 50 or 150 kilometres to reach a diet, whereas it mattered much less whether the distance was 350 or 450 kilometres. Social scientists have found similar exponential distance-decay functions in many contexts (e.g., in commuter movements); explanations seem to depend primarily on the respective circumstances.⁶⁸ Regarding the personal presence of rulers at diets, it is unlikely that travel costs were decisive. Certainly, coming in person involved other and often higher costs than sending a delegation.⁶⁹ However, this did not affect the basic relation of distance to costs. If travel costs had been decisive, we would see a linear decline such as the one we observe for ‘represented’. It seems more likely that rulers were the less willing to

⁶⁸ For the intensity of commuter movements, population and the number of places of employment are crucial. Marián Halás, Pavel Klapka, and Petr Kladiivo, "Distance-Decay Functions for Daily Travel-to-Work Flows," *Journal of Transport Geography* 35 (2014); see also Giulia Carra et al., "Modelling the Relation Between Income and Commuting Distance," *Journal of The Royal Society: Interface* 13, no. 119 (2016).

⁶⁹ See Erwein Eltz, "Die Reise zum Reichstag," in *Alltag im 16. Jahrhundert: Studien zu Lebensformen in mitteleuropäischen Städten*, ed. Alfred Kohler and Heinrich Lutz (Wien: Verlag fuer Geschichte und Politik, 1987), pp. 216-217; Lanzinner, "Fürsten und Gesandte als politische Akteure beim Reichstag 1566", p. 60.

leave their place of residence, the longer the time spent travelling was relative to the time they expected to spend at the diet – a factor they did not take into account when sending their councillors. In any case, not being present during the talks offered advantages: It allowed disputing if not the validity of the diet's decisions in principle, then their applicability to oneself.⁷⁰ The analysis suggests, therefore, that rulers were using the time they had to spend travelling as an excuse for not attending in person.

The effect of the variables discussed above must be seen in the context of the controls. 'Wealth' had a consistent and strongly significant positive influence on attendance in any form, suggesting that the larger the financial stake was that an estate had in the Empire, the higher was the likelihood of it being represented at a diet, or of the ruler coming in person. While material concerns thus seem to have been paramount, note that the estates paid their dues to the Empire voluntarily: In theory, those who failed to pay could be outlawed, but this never happened in practice.⁷¹ Hence, the significance and size of the 'wealth'-coefficient is a clear indicator of how strongly the estates identified with the Empire. None of the other factors has such a consistent effect, though 'consultative vote' is strongly and positively correlated at least with 'represented'. At first sight this is counterintuitive, given that the cities' college had the lowest status and no formal chance of influencing the outcome of the negotiations. However, those among the cities that felt threatened by neighbouring territorial rulers needed the support of emperor and Empire,⁷² while all of them were interested in learning in time what the other estates were planning to do with the dues they paid to the Empire. Again, as the dues were paid voluntarily, this points to the strength of their identification with the polity. The fact that spiritual estates were represented significantly more often than others must likely be interpreted differently. Many archbishops, bishops and abbots of imperial abbeys were clients of the emperors, on whose

⁷⁰ Cf. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *The Emperor's Old Clothes: Constitutional History and the Symbolic Language of the Holy Roman Empire* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), pp. 36-37.

⁷¹ Schulze, *Türkengefahr*, pp. 352-353.

⁷² Volker Press, "Die Reichsstadt in der altständischen Gesellschaft " in *Neue Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Reichsgeschichte*, ed. Johannes Kunisch (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1987), p. 14.

support they depended in the face of protestant neighbours interested in secularising their lands.⁷³ Here, material concerns of the estates (their interest in preserving their lands) do not seem to be grounded in their identification with the Empire.

5. Conclusion

At this place, a caveat is in order. As highlighted in the introduction, political integration is a multi-faceted concept. Etzioni did not only take into account whether the politically aware inhabitants considered their country as their dominant focus of political identification, but also the existence of a monopoly of force and the ability of the government to raise and redistribute revenues. For reasons explained above, this article restricts itself to analysing to which extent the imperial estates identified with the Empire, using their attendance at imperial diets as a proxy. Even if it is a good proxy, the analysis therefore captures only one aspect of integration. The use of alternative measures and the quantitative examination of other aspects must await further studies, which will modify the results of the analysis presented above.

The starting point of the analysis are two competing conceptualisations of the political geography of the Empire. Regarding the late Middle Ages, Moraw distinguished zones that were politically ‘close to’ from others politically ‘distant from the king’ – a model that more recent authors have applied to the early modern history of the Empire, too. Schmidt, by contrast, draws a distinction between an ‘Empire of the German nation’ that ruled roughly the area of modern Germany and Austria, and a ‘feudal Empire’ that in addition to these lands covered neighbouring regions to the west, south and east. Analysing the determinants of

⁷³ *ibid.*, "Die Territorialstruktur des Reiches und die Reformation," in *Reformation und Revolution: Beiträge zum politischen Wandel und den sozialen Kräfte am Beginn der Neuzeit. Festschrift für Rainer Wohlfeil zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Rainer Postel and Franklin Kopitzsch (Stuttgart: 1989), pp. 257-259, 266; Whaley, *Germany, I: From Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia 1493-1648*, p. 334.

political integration allows to test how valid these conceptualisations of the political geography of the Empire are.

One of the core findings is that irrespective of whether representation at diets or personal presence of rulers is concerned, Moraw's model retained at most temporary importance in the sixteenth century. It occasionally affected the personal presence of rulers but apart from this, it had lost any significance for the attendance of the estates at the diets. The implications are first, that applying the model to the history of the Empire after the accession of Charles V risks misinterpreting its political geography, and second, that the Empire was significantly better integrated than in the time for which Moraw developed the model, that is, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Analysing the effects of geographical distance modifies this conclusion. Distance mattered throughout, with travel costs being a crucial factor that affected the representation of the estates at imperial diets. This is no surprise given that prior research found a clear link between the geographical size of a polity and the frequency with which its representative assembly met.⁷⁴ What is surprising is that over time, the slope of the marginal effect of distance on the representation of the estates became steeper. This suggests that on the one hand, the Empire developed an increasingly well-integrated core. Unlike the shape and location of Moraw's zone 'close to the emperor', that of the core depended on the distance to the diets; it was therefore centred on those Upper German imperial cities where diets met. On the other hand, the geographical periphery of the Empire, distant from the diets, dropped away, with the estates located in this region deciding increasingly often that attending was not worthwhile. The core thus had the potential to form a state of the kind Schmidt conceptualised as the 'Empire of the German nation', but a state that was threadbare at the edges and become more so over time. Another finding is that geographical distance had a consistent, significant, and strongly negative effect on the personal attendance of rulers – a result that is

⁷⁴ Stasavage, "When Distance Mattered: Geographic Scale and the Development of European Representative Assemblies".

particularly important when seen in the light of Luhmann's theory of procedural legitimacy (p 9): Non-attendance offered an excuse for not implementing the decisions of the diet. The upshot is that while Moraw's model does not help to conceptualise the political geography of the sixteenth-century Empire, Schmidt's does so better for the Empire's Upper German core than for the increasingly detached periphery.

How do these results speak to the debate about the statehood of the Holy Roman Empire mentioned in the introduction? Two points are important. First, the analysis presented in Section 4 contributes to clarifying not *whether* the Empire was a state, but rather to what extent it fulfilled a *precondition* of functioning like one. Evidently, it did so only in part, and it did so the better, the smaller the distance to the locations of the imperial diets was. Second, determining whether the Empire functioned as a state would require at the minimum examining Etzioni's two other criteria of political integration: the existence of a monopoly of force and the re-distributive function of the political centre. In turn, such an analysis would require analysing how smoothly the interplay between the three levels of power (the estates, the imperial circles, and the Empire as a whole) functioned. Doing so is beyond the scope of the present article.

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