

# **The Protestant Reformation and the Transformation of Society: The Rise of the Vernacular**

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## **Abstract :**

A distinct feature of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther's intentional use of the vernacular (German), rather than Latin, in his writings in order to engage the laity in theological discussions. Focusing on the Holy Roman Empire, we provide causal evidence that the Reformation led to an increase in vernacular printing output in Protestant printing cities relative to Catholic ones. Hence, more knowledge and ideas became accessible to broader segments of the society. We also show that the increased use of the vernacular after the Reformation lowered the entry barriers for authors, allowing broader segments of society to contribute to the market for knowledge and ideas. In addition, the works covered a wider range of fields. Finally, we provide evidence for two underlying mechanisms for the increased use of the vernacular in printing: an increase in religious competition and the advancement of the standardization of the German language following the Reformation.