Polonia Inter Gentes, nr 6, 2025, ISSN: 2719-8871, eISSN: 2956-3224

Karl Cordell
K.Cordell@plymouth.ac.uk

School of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences
The University of Plymouth (United Kingdom)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5565-5248
https://doi.org/10.56583/pig.3046

Where Have all the Germans Gone? Poland's Diminishing German Minority

Abstract

Following the end of the Second World War, Poland hosted many more former Germans than is commonly realised. Despite steady voluntary migration to Germany since the end of the post-war forced migrations in 1949[1], Poland still hosts an indigenous German minority. The number of self-declared Germans residing in Poland today is a matter of conjecture. What does appear certain is that their number is diminishing. This paper seeks to establish why this is the case and argues that the answer is to be found in the nature of contemporary Polish society and the post-Communist value system. It also considers the role of evolving national identities in shaping minority self-identification.

Key words: German minority in Poland, Post-war migrations, Self-identification, Post-Communist society, Poles in Germany

Zusammenfassung

Nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs lebten in Polen weit mehr ehemalige Deutsche, als gemeinhin angenommen wird. Trotz der kontinuierlichen freiwilligen Auswanderung nach Deutschland seit dem Abschluss der nachkriegszeitlichen Zwangsumsiedlungen im Jahr 1949 besteht in Polen weiterhin eine autochthone deutsche Minderheit. Die genaue Zahl der heute in Polen lebenden, sich selbst als

[1] For many years after the war, members of German refugee organisations and many other Germans failed to comprehend the fact that the forced migrations that affected civilian Germans were part of a much wider internationally sanctioned policy that blighted other nationalities, especially Poles. In addition, ethnic Germans began fleeing westward across what became the post-war German-Polish border as early as January 1945. See, for instance, M Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, München, 2011, pp.67–78.

Deutsche deklarierenden Personen lässt sich jedoch nur schwer bestimmen. Sicher erscheint lediglich, dass ihre Zahl rückläufig ist. Der vorliegende Beitrag geht der Frage nach, welche Ursachen diesem Befund zugrunde liegen, und argumentiert, dass diese im Charakter der gegenwärtigen polnischen Gesellschaft sowie im postkommunistischen Wertesystem zu verorten sind. Darüber hinaus wird die Rolle sich wandelnder nationaler Identitäten für die Selbstzuschreibung von Minderheiten in den Blick genommen.

Schlüsselwörter: deutsche Minderheit in Polen; Nachkriegsmigrationen; Selbstidentifikation; postkommunistische Gesellschaft; Polen in Deutschland

Counting Heads

According to at least one estimate, when the Polish Citizenship Law of 1951 came into effect, there were 1.1 million Polish citizens who had previously held German citizenship[2]. In other words, although post-war Poland was ethnically far more homogenous than its pre-1939 predecessor, the country still hosted an apparently sizeable German minority, comprised a number of, sometimes overlapping groups. In fact the German element of the population was larger in both absolute and percentage terms in 1951 (4.47%) than it had been in 1931 (2.3%),[3] which given the attempt to recreate Poland as an ethnically homogenous state, presented Poland's communist rulers with something of a conundrum. The minority mostly comprised of pre and post-war Polish citizens who during the period of German occupation had for whatever reason had affirmed their affinity to Germany by having registered on the *Volksliste*; which itself was divided into four categories according to presumed levels of allegedly observable affinity to German culture[4]. If we delve a little more deeply into this phenomenon, we find that a number of distinct groups collectively comprised the majority of post-war Polish citizens who had previously held German citizenship.[5]

[2] J. Kulczycki, *The National Identity of the "Natives" of Poland's Recovered Lands*, "National Identities", Vol3, No3, 205–219, 2001.

[3] P. Eberhardt, *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe*, London, 2003, pp.113–141. The census of 1931 gave the German minority as constituting 741,000.

[4] H. Weidelener und F. Hemberger, *Deutsches Staaatsangehörigkeitsrecht*, München, 1993, pp.149/150.

[5] T. Urban, *Deutsche in Polen: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Minderheit*, München, 1994, pp.67/93, discusses the subtleties of the situation

In many cases, the root of the issue with regard to former German citizens lay in the contested national provenance and belonging of some culturally-distinct groups of people who inhabited areas of post-war Poland that for centuries had been Polish-German cultural borderlands. They were the Mazurs of East Prussia; the Kashubes of Pomerania; and especially the *Slazaks* (Silesians) of rural Upper Silesia. In addition to inhabiting cultural borderlands, these three groups were united by a variety of commonalities. It is important to note that as a rule adherents to these groups did not speak either standard Polish or German in everyday discourse, although individuals often had a working knowledge of both or either 'national' language[6].

The Kashubes differed slightly in the sense that, although knowledge of both German and Polish was relatively widespread, in everyday life the Kashubian language was the common means of communication and dialogue. Inevitably, with regard to the Kashubes, Mazurs and *Slazaks*, this cultural mix together with their position as the inhabitants of primarily rural backwaters contributed to the growth of collective identities that were contingent, situational and to the outsider sometimes completely contradictory[7]. Moreover, from the early nineteenth century with the arrival of modern nationalist ideology, these such groups found themselves to be at the centre of a kind of bidding war on the part of both Polish and German nationalists, whose arguments concerning the historical provenance and claimed national characteristics of these three groups of people were of course diametrically opposed. During the Second World War, this contest for 'hearts and minds' reached its nadir with the construction of the aforementioned *Volksliste* initially at the behest of the Gauleiter of Danzig-West Prussia, Albert Forster and then *Reichsführer* SS Heinrich Himmler. In short, an attempt was made in German occupied Poland to separate the Polish and German populations from one another and to establish an ethnic hierarchy with Germans and other Aryans at the top with Poles being regarded as barely human[8].

Other groups in post-war Poland who had previously enjoyed German citizenship were smaller in terms of their composition. The first consisted of people who although possessing some German cultural characteristics, had never actually been registered on the *Volksliste*. This was so, because

---

[6] A. Evans, *Sojourn in Silesia 1940–1945*, Ashford, 1995

[7] T. Kamusella, P Kacir, *Upper Silesia 1918–45* in ed K. Cordell, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Central Europe,* Houndmills, 2000, pp. 92–126.

[8] *T Piotrowski, Poland's Holocaust*: *Ethnic Strife*, *Collaboration* with *Occupying Forces* and *Genocide* in the *Second Republic*, *1918–1947, Jefferson North Carolina, 2007, Passim.*

in the autumn of 1943 Himmler effectively abandoned the whole project on the grounds that far too many Poles were managing to masquerade as Germans[9]. That may or may not have been the case. Whatever the truth of the matter, the upsurge in interest in parts of the former cultural borderlands, with a past connection with Germany in the 1990s showed the existence of such individuals and their descendants. Related to this group were the much more numerous indigenous *Ślązacy* from pre-war Germany, primarily in the area around Opole, who were not deported from post-war Poland on the grounds that they were Poles who had acquired a German veneer by virtue of their having lived under varieties of German rule for several centuries[10]. The final group consisted of members of Poland's pre-war German minority who had not fled or been expelled and following incarceration in forced labour camps were offered restitution of Polish citizenship[11]. Some accepted the offer. Needless to say, the majority to whom this offer was made, elected for Germany even though the only German state they had been citizens of was the Nazi variant that had occupied Poland and regardless of the fact that many school age Germans had only become functional in German after having been transferred into 'Aryan schools' with the collapse of Poland in September 1939.

To this number must be added another group of people who did not possess Polish citizenship and were clearly and obviously German. As the Red Army rolled westward in 1945, huge numbers of German civilians resident in pre-war Germany also fled in a westerly direction. Just how many were left within the boundaries of post-war Poland is a matter of dispute which will never be satisfactorily resolved. A figure of five million comprising of residents of pre-war residents of Germany to the east of the Oder-Neisse river boundary plus wartime refuges from western Germany is as good an estimate as any. The large majority of such people was deported to occupied post war Germany: initially at least with great brutality. However, within months of the end of hostilities it became clear to both the Soviet military and the incoming Polish authorities that there was now a distinct lack of manpower in certain industries. As a result, in the industrialised parts of Upper Silesia and much of neighbouring Lower Silesia, and in the city of Koszalin in Pomerania skilled workers and their families were forbidden from leaving. The objective was to eventually replace them with Polish co-

[9] T. Kamusella, P. Kacir, *Upper Silesia 1918–45*….. 104–110.

[10] K. Cordell & S. Wolff, *Germany's Foreign Policy Towards Poland and the Czech Republic: Ostpolitik Revisited*, Abingdon, 2005, pp. 30–40.

[11] H. Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer*, Berlin, 1998, Passim.

unterparts, which is what eventually did happen, but the fact of the matter is that as of 1950, when the forced migrations had been officially completed, there were up to 250,000 former *Reichsdeutsche* living in post-war Poland, who had in effect been rendered stateless[12].

Pathways to Migration

During the period of Communist rule, there was continuous migration to Germany on ancestral grounds, which apart from the years 1952–55, always exceeded 1,000 individuals a year[13]. There were, however, considerable variations in the annual totals. The first upward shift occurred in 1957–58, when following further changes to Polish citizenship laws over 200,000 people migrated from Poland to the Federal Republic. The migrants were overwhelmingly composed of former *Reichsdeutsche* who were allowed to leave for either German state as by that time there were sufficient skilled Polish workers to perform those jobs previously held by Germans[14]. It was also at this point that *Reichsdeutsche* were given the option of obtaining Polish citizenship and of becoming members of the newly-established German minority organisations.[15] Information on numbers is sketchy, but in the city of Walbrzych in Lower Silesia, (where the organisation was headquartered) there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that an obvious German presence was discernible until the early 1970s.

Emigration then tailed off again, until 1971, when in the wake of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and the de facto recognition by Bonn of Poland's western border, migration for that year passed the 25,000 mark[16]. From that year and up until 1987, migration to the Federal Republic by people acknowledged by the government in Bonn as having some degree of German ancestry ranged from 7,000 to 27,000 per annum with the exception of 1980

---

[12] K. Cordell & S. Wolff, *Germany's Foreign Policy* …. pp. 30–40

[13] https//www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/information-statistik-und-dokumentation/spaetaussiedler/aktuelle-aussiedlerstatistik.html, accessed 9 May 2025

[14] B. Linek, *Polish and Czech Silesia Under Communist Rule*, in ed. K. Cordell, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Central Europe*, Houndmills, 2000. pp131–132

[15] C. Eichenberger, *Die Deutschen in Polen: Von der verleugneten Minderheit zur anerkannten Volksgruppe*, Augsburg, 1994, pp.34–85, for an account of the overall situation of the German minority in Poland in the years 1949–1988.

[16] https//www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/information-statistik-und-dokumentation/spaetaussiedler/aktuelle-aussiedlerstatistik.html, accessed 9 May 2025.

when in the midst of renewed political turmoil in Poland it topped 50,000[17]. The theme of migration to Germany, was still very much a taboo subject in Poland, but during the 1970s the first questions began to be asked in the Federal Republic about the extent to which these latest post-war migrants were really German. In the German Democratic Republic, the question of post-war migration of ethnic Germans from post-war Poland and elsewhere in Communist-ruled Europe was no more a topic for discussion that were the post-war forced migrations[18]. As stated earlier, the inhabitants of the former cultural borderlands possessed multiple cultural characteristics: local; Polish and German. Having lived in an authoritarian nationalising Polish state, where manifestations of German culture were frowned upon, real knowledge of modern Germany was often lacking. In addition, those claiming German ancestry were allowed to bring immediate family members with them, who despite the largely endogenous nature of these communities, were sometimes clearly Polish and who, like the children of such marriages invariably spoke only Polish (and to a lesser degree the obligatory Russian). The consequence was that large sections of the host German society looked askance at their new compatriots[19].

As the political situation in Poland as elsewhere in Communist-ruled Europe began to deteriorate apace from late 1988, so the number of migrants to the Federal Republic shot up. Between 1989 and 1991 over 400,000 people migrated from Poland to the Federal Republic on the grounds that they had at least one German grandparent or were the close family members of someone who had such lineage[20]. The extent to which such migrants to Germany had any real affinity with their new homeland is open to debate. Clearly in some cases, kinship did play a role. However, two other factors should also be considered. First, given the ongoing political uncertainties, some decided to leave for the Federal Republic as a kind of insurance policy, lest the political situation deteriorated further. Secondly, in this *Ausreiswelle* as in all

[17] https//www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/information-statistik-und-dokumentation/spaetaussiedler/aktuelle-aussiedlerstatistik.html, accessed 9 May 2025.

[18] See K. Cordell and S. Wolff, *Germany as a Kin-State: The Development and Implementation of a Norm-Consistent External Minority Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe*," Nationalities Papers", Vol. 35, No. 2, pp.289–316, 2007, for a substantive discussion of how this difficult legacy was overcome.

[19] See K. J. Bade *Fremde Deutsch*e in Hrsg. K. J. Bade, *Deutsche in Ausland: Fremde in Deutschland*, München, 1993, pp. 401–410, for an assessment of how *Spätaussiedler* were received in the Federal Republic.

[20] Bund der Vertriebenen, https//www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/information-statistik-und-dokumentation/spaetaussiedler/aktuelle-aussiedlerstatistik.html, accessed 9 May 2025.

such others, economics played a role. Poland's post-war recovery paled into insignificance in comparison to that of the Federal Republic and in the 1980s the gap drew ever wider. To those, especially younger people and parents with young families, migration to the Federal Republic presented an opportunity for betterment. Other sections of Polish society took a sceptical view of this sudden enthusiasm for Germany on the part of their compatriots and the (ironic) term *Volkswagendeutsch* (as opposed to *Volksdeutsch*) came to be employed to describe this particular group of migrants[21].

A Changing Landscape

According to official figures, when the Communist regime finally crumbled in 1990, the German minority had effectively ceased to exist[22]. Mazurs, Kashubes and *Slazaks* were categorised as Poles, regardless of who they might have viewed themselves. After successive waves of migration since 1950 to both German states and especially the Federal Republic, given the lack of any overt German presence in everyday life, that assumption could have been taken to be not too far off the mark. However, as Communist rule crumbled in Poland, in Opole and Upper Silesia in particular, a somewhat surprising development took place.[23] By late 1990, some adherents to various German Friendship Circles and related organisations (including in Germany itself), that had sprung up in different parts of the country were claiming that anywhere up to 1.1 million Polish citizens had some kind of German background. This estimate was clearly absurd, and in the opinion of this author its close correspondence to the 1951 figure of former German citizens having been accorded Polish citizenship, is not necessarily accidental. By the same token, it was soon obvious that the official estimate of 3,500 was equally wide of the mark. The question remained though, of just how many people of (part) German extraction remained in Poland. Without wishing to become sidetracked into methodological issues, a figure of approximately

[21] The implication being that more often than not, such migrants used their sometimes tenuous familial links to Germany as a means of escaping the bleak reality of Poland in the 1980s.

[22] B. Ociepka, Institute of Institute of International Studies, University of Wrocław, interview with A. Dybczński, 4 May 2004.

[23] W. Borodziej, Die Katastrophe: Schlesien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Hrsg. B. Schlanstein usw. Als die Deutsche weg waren, Reinbek, 2011, pp.84–114, offers a comprehensive account of German life in Silesia in the aftermath of the war.

500,000 Polish citizens of partial or wholly German descent for the year 1990 is not unreasonable[24].

The various German societies, most of which came together under the umbrella of the *Verband der deutsche sozial-kulturellen Gesellschaften in Polen* (Association of German-Cultural Societies in Poland/VdG) have never claimed such numbers among their membership[25] and successive census returns have shown a decline in the number of declared Germans since the census of 2002. In that census 152, 897 respondents declared themselves to be German, whereas by 2021, the number had dropped to 144,177[26]. Similarly, despite obtaining a surprising seven seats in the Sejm in the first post-communist fully competitive election of 1991 plus one seat in the Senate, national returns since then have gradually diminished resulting in the failure of any German candidates to be elected to the Sejm in 2023. As it turned out, the national political weight of the German minority in post-Communist Poland proved to be ephemeral, although German minority candidates continue to maintain a presence at local and regional level in the Opole Voivodship. However, as with national elections they have been faced with diminishing returns since the peak of the early 1990s[27].

Indeed, it is in the Opole Voivodship that one today finds there to be a reasonably significant German presence[28]. Their presence in the Upper Silesian province has been reduced to a fragment in comparison to the situation in the early 1990s, let alone any other post-1945 decade. With regard to the Kashubes those who remain are overwhelmingly happy to articulate either a Kashubian or Kashubian-Polish identity, German-orientated Kashubes having long ago opted for Germany. As for the Mazurs, many of whom were actually Polish-speaking, but who regarded themselves as Polish-speaking Germans, the vast majority long ago migrated to Germany. Their adherence to Protestantism made life for them particularly difficult after 1945, given that the Catholic Church found no fault with the principle

---

[24] K. Cordell, *Nation and Citizenship in Upper Silesia*, in ed. M. Žagar et al, *The Constitutional and Political Regulation of Ethnic Relations and Conflicts*, Ljubljana, 1999, p.165.

[25] The website of the Verband der Deutschen Sozial-Kulturellen Gesellschaften Polen, cites a peak figure of 300,000 members in the early 1990s https://vdg.pl/de/ueber-den-vdg-in-polen/, accessed 9 May 2025.

[26] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Polish_census, accessed, 10 May 2025.

[27] See K. Born and K. Cordell, *The Strategy of the German List*, in "East European Politics and Societies", Vol. 15, No. 3,2001, pp. 625–648, for an assessment of the early success of the German electoral list in Opole Silesia.

[28] See E. Kuhn, *Schlesien: Brücke in Europa*, Berlin, 1997, for a general account of the aspirations of German minority organisations in the initial phase of politics in post-Communist Poland.

(if not the means), of the Communists' desire to render Poland all but ethnically homogenous[29].

The question remains however, where have all the Germans gone and what does the future hold for those who remain? Emigration to Germany provides few clues, given that it slowed to a trickle in 1992. Mortality plays a role, since those who sought German passports after 1990 were disproportionally elderly and middle aged, but these two factors do not provide us with either an individual or collective explanation. Rather, we need to examine the nature of contemporary Poland and compare it with the situation in the years after the war. With the accession to power of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), following the rigged election of January 1947, Poland lost any liberal-democratic trappings it had briefly gained with the defeat of the Nazis. Moreover, in an effort to boost its legitimacy, the PZPR had assumed the mantle of the pre-war Polish right with regard its attitude toward ethnic diversity. Prior to the destruction of Poland by the German-Soviet alliance in September 1939, as much as one third of the population of pre-war Poland were not baptised Roman Catholics. In addition to a tiny number of Polish Protestants, Poland was home to Jews, Germans, Belarusians, Czechs Lithuanians and especially Ukrainians, many of whom adhered to non-Catholic forms of Christianity. Indeed, in parts of eastern Poland, an on-off low level civil war raged between the Polish security forces and Ukrainian nationalists. In short, given sundry competing nationalist aspirations, the Second Republic's encounter with diversity was not a particularly happy one[30]. As Poland's borders were arbitrarily re-shaped in 1945 and as a consequence of the Holocaust, and forced migrations, post-war Poland found itself largely be shorn of the aforementioned minorities, the Germans to one side.

It is important to note that the post-war forced migration of Germans from Poland did not take place in some kind of vacuum but was part and parcel of a much wider process of forced migrations sanctioned by the wartime allies and sundry post-war governments throughout Europe and elsewhere. Having rid itself of the vast majority of its unwanted German population, the question then became one of what to do with the remaining Germans? As we noted earlier in the text, with regard to former *Reichsdeutsche*, the answer was easy, offer them the opportunity to leave as soon as replacement Polish labour was ready. If a few chose to stay, then so what? They could easily be accommodated. As for the *Ślązacy*, Kashubes and Mazurs and

[29] R. Blanke, *Polish-Speaking Germans? National Identity Among the Masurians since 1871*, Köln, 2001, pp147–149.

[30] A. Zamoyski, *Poland: A History*, London, 2009. pp.297–313.

others (forced) assimilation was to provide the solution. From the perspective of the government and indeed much of wider Polish society, the vast majority of such people were essentially Polish who through their contact with Germany and as a result of consequent German assimilationist pressures, had lost their true Polish essence. The task then of the government was to pursue policies that facilitated the return of these groups to the 'Polish hearth'. The means chosen to accomplish this were in effect to create a legal framework whereby it was legally impossible for members of the aforementioned groups to (publicly) manifest any signs of adherence to Germany and German culture[31].

By 1956, legal hurdles facing people of a German background had been gradually removed, but popular suspicion and hostility remained. What was constant however, was continued political uncertainty, and economic under-performance. Similarly, personal contacts with Germany, particularly the GDR, never completely ceased. As a consequence, Polish citizens of German origin have always had some kind of contemporary yardstick with which to draw comparisons, even if such comparisons owed as much to wishful thinking as they did to real knowledge of the situation in either German state. In other words, Communist-ruled Poland was not a particularly attractive proposition to the large majority of its inhabitants and those with family ties to Germany had an option, i.e. privileged migration rights that were simply not open to most of their compatriots and as we have seen, they were utilised in sometimes surprising numbers. In effect, by pursuing authoritarian assimilationist policies and failing to deliver any kind of sustained economic success, the PZPR inadvertently strengthened identification with Germany among communities that previously had either happily identified with the locale or saw no contradiction in having a national identification that was either contingent or dual[32].

Conclusion

Today's Poland is very different from its Communist predecessor. Despite an ongoing debate about such measures as German-language education,[33]

[31] B. Linek, *Polish and Czech Silesia Under Communist Rule*, ….pp. 139–142.

[32] K. Cordell, *Poland's German Minority*, in ed. S. Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2000, p.82

[33] Verband der Deutschen Sozial-Kulturellen Gesellschaften Polen, https://vdg.pl/de/ueber-den-vdg-in-polen/,

Poland It is a country that acknowledges its diversity and which does not discriminate in law against any of its (small) indigenous minorities. To be sure, the Polish right often draws dubious comparisons with regard the apparently overly-generous privileges enjoyed by the German minority in Poland in comparison to the structural disadvantages suffered by the Polish minority in Germany which as of 2016 officially totalled 866,690.[34] Having said that the number of Germans who have some Polish ancestry is certainly higher, albeit not as high as the staggering eight million claimed by some[35]. What is also open to dispute are the uglier aspects of the forced migration that took place between 1945–1949 are often glossed over in Poland or are simply denied flat out. These caveats to one side, Poland is both politically and economically a much more attractive option than it was between 1945–90. During this period there were few incentives for those with some kind of German background to identify with Poland, in the face of bitter memories of the immediate post-war era and continued opprobrium. These disincentives are now firmly in the background and those who do have a German cultural background are not disadvantaged in the same way as were those born before during or in the years immediately after the Second World War.

We must also ask ourselves to what extent have affinities with Germany lessened as a result of direct unfiltered contact with the country itself. The large majority of Germans in Germany itself has no interest in the remaining *Volksdeutsch* fragments in Poland or elsewhere. Moreover, when Polish-speaking people arrive in Germany, as far as most Germans are concerned, they are Poles, despite any protestation to the contrary. A belief that in recent years migrants from Poland and elsewhere, were and are motivated by economic as opposed to political or cultural concerns is not a solely German phenomenon. It may also be the case that contemporary encounters with Germany may have lessened enthusiasm for Germany. Moreover, enhanced freedom of movement within the European Union lessens the desire or need to migrate to a 'mother country' such as Germany.

Evidence for such a change in perceptions and priorities is fragmentary, but as we noted earlier, under certain circumstances, identities, including

[34] https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1221/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftsland/, accessed 23 July 2025.

[35] The debate over the nature and extent of the Polish minority in Germany is covered in: M. Nowosielski, *Relations Between Polish Immigrant Organisations in Germany and Institutions of the Polish and German States*, in eds. A. Udrea, D. Smith and K. Cordell, *Poland's Kin-State Policies*, Abingdon, 2022, presents a nuanced analysis of the situation.

national affiliation may be contingent and malleable. For example, just as the German minority in the *Górnośląsk* (Upper Silesian) Voivodship in recent years has fallen, the number of people in that province claiming to possess a Silesian as opposed to a German or Polish identity has risen dramatically: from 173,593 in 2002 to a remarkable 596,224 in 2021.[36] There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is anger at the consequences of environmental damage and the adjustment away from heavy industry. What the example illustrates is that national identities should sometimes be viewed as existing on a continuum and not as fixed. In other words, although many newly-minted Silesians may previously have identified with Poland, some may have previously identified with Germany.

Finally, and most importantly in trying to answer the question of 'Where Have all the Germans Gone?' we need to consider the type of society that Poland has become. Above all, the German minority in Poland continues to shrink precisely because wider Polish society has changed. This change has resulted in remaining German communities becoming less insular and in younger people feeling more comfortable with a Polish or indeed Polish-German identity, precisely because their ethnically Polish compatriots do not see Germany and the Germans in the same way in which they were viewed by previous generations. In other words, there has been an internal identity shift away from Germany towards Poland, precisely because Polish society at large is more comfortable within itself Despite the continued existence of the 'True Pole' mentality in some quarters, Polish society at large is not in thrall to nationalist dogmas as was the case following creation of the Second Republic in 1918 and right up until the collapse of Communist rule in 1990. Prior to 1990, the modern Polish nation-state had never been a fully functional liberal democracy with secure borders. It is this change above all that has facilitated the growth of a society in which ethnic identification although important, is no longer the divisive issue that it was between 1918 and the 1980s. Whether or not the German minority has a future as a minority, is another matter, but whatever the case, the most important point is that people be allowed to choose how they want to live on condition that in so doing they do not threaten others and that they are not threatened simply because of who they are. This argument applies to all minorities and not simply to the case under consideration in this paper.

[36] https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/, accessed, 10 May 2025.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bade, K. J., *Deutsche in Ausland*: Fremde in Deutschland, München, 1993, pp. 401–410.

Beer, M., *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, München, 2011, pp. 67–78.

Blanke R., *Polish-Speaking Germans? National Identity Among the Masurians since 1871*, Köln, 2001.

Born, K., Cordell K., *The Strategy of the German List*, "East European Politics and Societies", Vol. 15, No. 3, (2001) pp. 625–648.

Borodziej W., Die Katastrophe: Schlesien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Hrsg. B. Schlanstein usw. Als die Deutsche weg waren, Reinbek, 2011, pp.84–114

Bund der Vertriebenen, https//www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/information-statistik-und-dokumentation/spaetaussiedler/aktuelle-aussiedlerstatistik.htm (accessed 9 May 2025).

Cordell K., *Nation and Citizenship in Upper Silesia*, in ed. M. Žagar et al, *The Constitutional and Political Regulation of Ethnic Relations and Conflicts*, Ljubljana, 1999, p.165.

Cordell K., *Poland's German Minority*, in ed. S. Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, Oxford, 2000, p.82.

Cordell K., Wolff W., *Germany's Foreign Policy Towards Poland and the Czech Republic: Ostpolitik Revisited*, Abingdon, 2005, pp. 30–40.

Cordell K., Wolff, *Germany as a Kin-State: The Development and Implementation of a Norm-Consistent External Minority Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe*, "Nationalities Papers", Vol. 35, No. 2, pp.289–316.

Eberhardt P., *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe*, London, 2003, pp.113–141.

Eichenberger C., *Die Deutschen in Polen: Von der verleugneten Minderheit zur anerkannten Volksgruppe*, Augsburg, 1994

Evans A., *Sojourn in Silesia 1940–1945*, Ashford, 1995.

H. Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer*, Berlin, 1998.

Kamusella T., Kacir P., *Upper Silesia 1918–45* in ed K. Cordell, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Central Europe*, Houndmills, 2000.

Kulczycki J., 2001. *The National Identity of the "Natives" of Poland's Recovered Lands*, "National Identities", Vol3, No3, 2001, 205–219.

Kuhn E., *Schlesien: Brücke in Europa*, Berlin, 1997

Linek B, *Polish and Czech Silesia Under Communist Rule*, in ed. K. Cordell, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Central Europe*, Houndmills, 2000. pp131–132.

Nicholas L., *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web*, New York, 2006, pp 240–260.

Nowosielski M., *Relations Between Polish Immigrant Organisations in Germany and Institutions of the Polish and German States*, in eds. A. Udrea, D. Smith and K. Cordell, *Poland's Kin-State Policies*, Abingdon, 2022.

Ociepka B., Institute of Institute of International Studies, University of Wrocław, interview with A. Dybczński A., 4 May 2004.
Piotrowski T., Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration *with* Occupying Forces *and* Genocide *in the* Second Republic, 1918–1947, Jefferson North Carolina, 2007, Passim.
Statista.com https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1221/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftsland/, accessed, 25 July 2025.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1221/umfrage/anzahl-der-auslaender-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftsland/
Verband der Deutschen Sozial-Kulturellen Gesellschaften Polen, https://vdg.pl/de/ueber-den-vdg-in-polen/, (accessed 9 May 2025 and 18 July 2025.
Urban, T. *Deutsche in Polen,: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Minderheit*, München, 1994
Weidelener H., und F. Hemberger F., *Deutsches Staaatsangehörigkeitsrecht*, München, 1993
GUS, https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/ accessed, 10 May 2025.
Zamoyski A., *Poland: A History*, London, 2009. pp. 297–313.

Karl Cordell is Professor Emeritus at the University of Plymouth, United Kingdom. Over the years he has published a large number of books, book chapters and refereed journal articles. His research interests center around German-Polish relations, the German minority in Poland, Polish politics and ethnopolitical politics in Europe. He was a founder editor of the journal "Ethnopolitics", which he edited for many years.