Jeffrey D. Bowersox, "'Loyal Sons of the Church and Fatherland'? Center-Polish Relations in Upper Silesia, 1871-1907."[*]

In 1871 the incumbent Free Conservative deputy of Pleß-Rybnik, Viktor Moritz Karl, Duke of Ratibor, Prince of Corvey, Prince zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfurst, seemed a sure bet to win re-election in the first Reichstag elections of the newly "unified" Kaiserreich.[1] After all, the Duke of Ratibor was an influential and well-known man. He owned numerous estates in his home district and in others. He had co-founded the Free Conservative Party. As a lord of one of the oldest families in Germany, he also could claim an equal social rank to the Kaiser. In addition, the Duke was the hand-picked choice of Hans Heinrich XI, Prince of Pleß and the fourth-richest man in Prussia. Because the Prince and the Duke together owned most of the district, the majority of its inhabitants directly or indirectly depended on them for their livelihoods. Indeed, in the previous election, these factors and the ability of local magnates to dictate the elections had helped the Prince's candidate to garner 97.4 percent of the votes in the district.[2]

The Duke's opponent from the Center party was Father Eduard Müller, a little-known but devoutly ascetic priest who – despite growing up in Upper Silesia – had lived in Berlin for many years. Considering all of these factors, there should not have been cause for concern among the Duke's supporters. However, the Center ran a campaign

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[*] I would like to thank Modris Eksteins, James Retallack, Ruth Percy, and the *CJH/ACH*'s anonymous readers for their support and very helpful suggestions. Of course, any remaining oversights are my own.

[1] On the 1871 campaign in Pleß-Rybnik and the controversy it created, see Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "The Kulturkampf and the Course of German History," Central European History 19, no. 1 (1986): 95-108; idem., "Voter, Junker, Landrat, Priest: The Old Authorities and the New Franchise in Imperial Germany," American Historical Review 98, no. 5 (Dec 1993): 1464-68; idem., Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69-70; Helmut Neubach, "Schlesische Geistliche als Reichtagsabgeordnete 1867-1917," Archiv für schlesische Kirchengeschichte 26 (1968): 252, 262-63, 265.

[2] Anderson, "Kulturkampf," 101; idem., Practicing, 69-70; Neubach, "Schlesische," 262-63; Fritz Specht and Paul Schwabe, eds., Die Reichstags-Wahlen von 1867 bis 1907 (Berlin: Carl Henmanns Verlag, 1908), 88.

that encouraged Pleß-Rybnik's overwhelmingly rural, Polish-speaking population to identify with the Catholic asceticism of Father Müller rather than the opulent elitism of the Duke. In a dramatically unexpected outcome, the Center succeeded in wresting the seat away from the Free Conservatives. This sparked a national controversy over the influence of the clergy and popular mobilization in the age of universal manhood suffrage. Moreover, it led to efforts on the part of Free Conservatives and liberals to overturn the election.

After these efforts failed, Pleß-Rybnik remained one of the most secure Center seats through the rest of the century. On the strength of the Polish Catholic majority the party received as much as 99 percent of the vote in an 1892 by-election.[3] By 1907, though, the situation had changed drastically. The majority that had ensured Center dominance for three decades turned on the Catholic party. In that year's Reichstag election, the Center's vote total fell to only 10.5 percent as they lost the district for the first time to a Polish party candidate, never to reclaim it.[4]

What caused this dramatic and seemingly sudden reversal of the Center's fortunes? How was it that the Center party, the party that claimed to be the representative of all "Catholic people" in Germany, in the 1900s lost the legitimacy to represent its heretofore loyal Polish-speaking constituents in the East?[5] Could the Center party cultivate without contradiction, in the words of the Mainz Association of German Catholics, "loyal sons of the Church and of the Fatherland?"[6] Considering the stability of the Center's support among Catholics in the rest of the Empire and particularly among

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[3] Anderson, "Voter," 1466 n. 60; idem., Practicing, 70.
[4] Idem., Practicing, 142.
[5] Idem., "Kulturkampf," 112.
[6] "Aufruf des Vereins der deutschen Katholiken 1872," in Das Kaiserreich: Obrigkeitsstaat und politische Mobilisierung, ed. Wilfried Loth (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 177.

neighboring German Catholic districts of Upper Silesia,[7] this question cuts to the heart of the Center's claims to represent all Catholics in Germany.

Considering the party's claims to a universal constituency, the Center's changing relationship with its non-German voters seems to offer a useful focus for analyzing the degree to which the party evolved into a party for Catholics in Germany or a party for German Catholics. Yet most studies of the Center give little more than a token nod to Polish voters beyond amalgamating them within a broader Catholic milieu.[8] Other studies come closer to addressing the intricacies of Center-Polish relations by focusing specifically on Polish experiences.[9] These are valuable works, but because they are particularly interested in issues of Polish nationalism, they focus on Poznań and West Prussia or the industrial Ruhr, areas of Polish concentration where the separatist Polish nationalist movement had a strong and long-lasting presence. This emphasis is less valuable for addressing Center-Polish relations because the Center never could establish a presence and win over Polish voters in Poznań and West Prussia. Likewise, Polish nationalists never could mount a serious political challenge to the Center or other German

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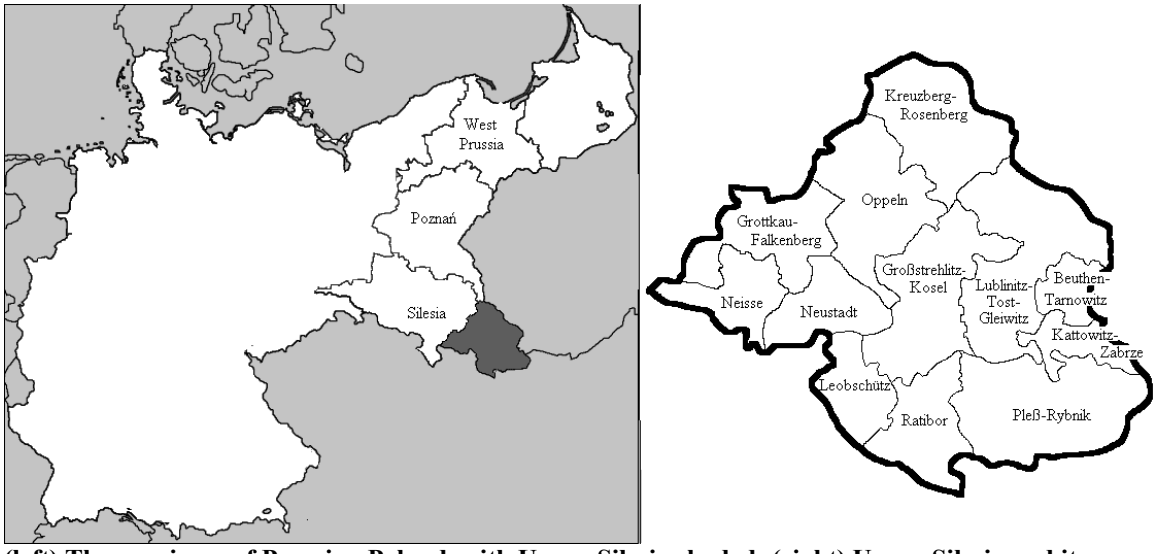
[7] For an overview of the Center's dominance in Ratibor with its majority of German Catholics and insignificant Polish-speaking population, see Neubach, "Zu den Reichstagswahlen im Wahlkreis Ratibor/Oberschlesien 1871-1918," Zeitschrift für Ostforschung 26 (1977): 117-22.

[8] For an exception that nevertheless overlooks the role of Polish nationalist voices in shaping the political culture of the Prussian East, see Helmut Walser Smith, German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914 (Princeton, N.j.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 169-205.

[9] On Poles in the Prussian East, see Richard Blanke, Prussian Poland in the German Empire (1871-1900) (Boulder, Col. and New York: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1981); William W. Hagen, Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Lech Trzeciakowski, The Kulturkampf in Prussian Poland, trans. Katarzyna Kretkowski (Boulder, Col. and New York: East European Monographs and Columbia University, 1990); Geoff Eley, "German Politics and Polish Nationality: The Dialectic of Nation Forming in the East of Prussia," in From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 200-28. On Poles in the Ruhr, see John J. Kulczycki, The Polish Coal Miners' Union and the German Labor Movement in the Ruhr, 1902-1934: National and Social Solidarity (New York: Berg, 1997); Richard Charles Murphy, Guestworkers in the German Reich: A Polish Community in Wilhelmian Germany (Boulder, Col. and New York: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1983); S.H.F. Hickey, Workers in Imperial Germany: The Miners of the Ruhr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Christoph Kleßmann, Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet 1870-1945 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

parties outside the Prussian East. Also, because these studies focus on the Polish nationalist movement and extreme cases of Polish conflict with the German population or the German government, this emphasis is also less valuable for addressing different ways of imagining and using the "nation."[10]



(left) The provinces of Prussian Poland, with Upper Silesia shaded; (right) Upper Silesia and its electoral districts

Both of these issues can be better addressed when considering an area with a concentrated Polish-speaking population that has largely evaded analysis. In 1890, one-third of Poles in the Prussian East lived in Upper Silesia (Regierungsbezirk Oppeln), constituting 61.9 percent of the local population. Although Poles only made up 57 percent of Upper Silesia's population by 1910, in absolute terms more Poles lived in the region than even in Poznań, the heartland of Polish nationalism in the Kaiserreich.[11] Unlike in Poznań and West Prussia, in the 1870s the Center was able to take advantage of the Kulturkampf's anti-Catholic atmosphere and the subsequent Catholic solidarity it created to gain the support of most Upper Silesian Catholics, German and Polish alike.

[10] For a notable exception, see Kulczycki, Polish Coal Miners' Union.
[11] Lech Trzeciakowski, "The Prussian State and the Catholic Church in Prussian Poland 1871-1914," Slavic Review 26 (1967): 618-19; Smith, Nationalism, 172.

Through unwavering opposition to measures against any Catholics, the Center held this support unchallenged until the 1890s. However, in Upper Silesia this solidarity gradually broke down amidst heightened tensions between speakers of Polish and German.

The Center's shifting relations with Catholics in Upper Silesia revolved around more than just confession. They were also intimately bound up with the process of inventing distinct and antagonistic "German" and "Polish" national identities that became a primary means through which individuals understood their relationship with the state and their neighbors.[12] With the effective end of the Kulturkampf, the Center leadership sought to maintain its status as a Catholic party while seeking a less oppositional stance towards the government. These efforts jarred with the experiences of Polish-speaking voters suffering under a continued anti-Polish atmosphere. As a result, the Silesian party leadership, unable and seemingly unwilling to stem the anti-Polish tide, increasingly alienated the local Polish population. The Prussian government's intensified anti-Polish campaigns of the 1890s and early 1900s and the Center's ambivalent response provided the backdrop for the final, widespread breach between Polish voters and the Center party in Upper Silesia in 1903 and 1907.

But while the differences between the leaders of the Silesian Center party and Polish political activists were increasingly portrayed in terms of a conflict between the interests of Germans and Poles, these definitions were fluid and depended on the local context for meaning. This story is one that illustrates the ways in which local identities interact with the national, an interaction that serves to break down monolithic notions of

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[12] The classic works on the constructed nature of the "nation" are Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983; revised and extended ed., 1991); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

"nation" or "confession." Not only do such overarching identities influence local events; local factors also shape the ways that these broad identities are constructed and understood on an everyday level. The local and the global are constantly in the process of constructing each other.[13]

In Silesia, both German and Polish Catholics were engaged in a process of imagining unique nations contingent upon their local context. Many German Catholics, including the local Center party leadership, differed from their national party leaders by defining their Silesian Heimat as a frontier zone where the integrity of the German nation had to be defended from corruption. Likewise, Upper Silesian Polish nationalists diverged from their separatist co-nationals elsewhere in the Kaiserreich by seeking accommodation with the existing political system. The coalescing of these particular national identifications translated into changes in the political culture of Upper Silesia, specifically in the shift from the dominance of confessional identities to nationalist political allegiances that subsumed confession.

Despite the reification of national boundaries in political and cultural discourse, it is worth noting that Upper Silesian Poles still were able and willing to work within the existing political system. Unlike Polish nationalists elsewhere in the Kaiserreich, Upper Silesian Poles never questioned the legitimacy of the German state. Rather, they turned first to previously existing political parties and then later to their own locally constructed

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[13] Important works that theorize this issue more thoroughly include Peter Sahlins, Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); James Retallack, ed., Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000); Alon Confino, The Nation as Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871-1918 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997); idem., "On Localness and Nationhood," Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 23, no. 2 (Nov 2001): 7-27; Celia Applegate, A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Caroline Ford, Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

parties to represent their interests. Not only does this development suggest the importance of appreciating the local peculiarities in imagining the nation, it also suggests that the Wilhelmine political system was perhaps more flexible than some have argued.[14] As their political interests changed with the political culture of their region, Upper Silesian Poles found that the system could be manipulated to meet the needs of even dissenting and marginalized groups.

This essay argues that the Center's ability to unite German and Polish Catholics in Upper Silesia did not endure because the local Center leadership failed to adapt to the changing concerns of its Polish-speaking constituency. This population was being made increasingly conscious of its separate status as Poles within a German Reich through government policy, the actions of German and Polish nationalist groups, and the rhetoric of a Center party increasingly concerned with integration into the German state. At a local level, Upper Silesian Poles became increasingly unhappy with Center policies and increasingly wary of the Center's claim to represent the interests of all Catholics in the district, much less in all of Germany. As their dissatisfaction intensified, instead of turning to separatism like other Polish nationalists, they turned to a newly organized local Polish party. In addition to evaluating the changing relationship between parties and constituencies in Upper Silesia, this study hopes to shed light both on the interaction of national and local identities and on the flexibility of the Wilhelmine political system.

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[14] See in particular Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Imperial Germany, 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State (London: Arnold, 1995); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, The German Empire 1871-1918 (New York: Berg, 1985). For a concise overview of this debate, see Retallack, Germany in the Age of Kaiser Wilhelm (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996), esp. 105-107. Works that depict a more dynamic, participatory Wilhelmine political system include Brett Fairbairn, Democracy in the Undemocratic State: The German Reichstag Elections of 1898 and 1903 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Anderson, Practicing; Eley and Retallack, eds., Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

This transition in Upper Silesia was unique in the degree to which the Center lost a significant constituency. Though the Social Democratic (SPD) and anti-Semitic parties had begun to make inroads into the Center's traditional bases of support by the 1890s and 1900s, the party still mobilized enough Catholic supporters across Germany to remain the most stable party during the Kaiserreich era.[15] This was remarkable given the lack of a widespread "Catholic" political identity at the founding of the Reich.[16]

The Center actively cultivated the loyalties of Catholics in Germany, but it could do so only within the context of the explicitly anti-Catholic measures of the Kulturkampf. Rather than unifying Germans behind a liberal, Protestant vision of Germany, the official and popular anti-Catholic campaigns divided Germany along confessional lines and resulted directly in the strengthening of the Center and Polish parties in the Prussian East.[17] By projecting itself as a "true people's party, embracing all classes and estates," and by utilizing mass mobilization methods to bring supporters to the polls, the Center could draw strength from a campaign of repression that touched all Catholics in Germany in one way or another. This repression helped to cultivate a sense of membership in a

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[15] Jürgen Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland: Die Reichstagswahlen von 1890 bis 1912, vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 638; Fairbairn, Democracy, 179-83. For challenges to the Center's stability, see ibid., 193-95. On anti-Semitism and Catholicism, see Olaf Blaschke, Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im deutschen Kaiserreich (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Rupprecht, 1997); idem., "Wie wird aus einem guten Katholiken ein gutter Judenfeind?" in Katholischer Antisemitismus im 19. Jahrhundert: Ursachen und Traditionen im internationalen Vergleich, eds., Blaschke and Aram Mattioli, 77-109 (Zürich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 2000); David Blackbourn, "Catholics, the Centre, Party and Anti-Semitism," in Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 168-87. On the Center and the SPD, see Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol. 1, 583-84; Gerhard A. Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialen zur Statistik des Kaiserreiches 1871-1918 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1980), 74.

[16] Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. On the absence of "political Catholicism" before 1871, see Anderson, Practicing, 75-76; idem., "Kulturkampf," 83-87.

[17] Smith, Nationalism, 19-49; Blackbourn, "Progress and Piety: Liberals, Catholics and the State in Bismarck's Germany," in Populists and Patricians, 149-51; Eley, "German Politics," 205-206; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters: Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 94.

larger community participating in a collective activity of protest and affirmation, a connection that was lacking in the 1871 elections.[18]

In Upper Silesia, the Catholic – particularly Polish Catholic – support generated by the Kulturkampf and the Center's mobilization of voters was crucial to the party's dramatic electoral victories in the region after 1871.[19] In the first Reichstag elections, when the national issue of the newly "unified" empire as well as local concerns still largely determined the results, the Center ran candidates in just six of the twelve constituencies and won only the district of Pleß-Rybnik. Despite Father Müller's victory, the party received only 23.8 percent of the votes in a region where Catholics made up almost 90 percent of the electorate. However, amidst anti-Catholic legislation and behind campaigns focused on slogans such as "Christianity in Germany [is] to be or not to be," in 1874 the Center won 55 percent of the Upper Silesian vote and eight constituencies, six of which with over 60 percent of the electorate. The Center's support grew thereafter, peaking in 1881 with 81.7 percent of the region's vote and falling only slightly to 80.2 percent in 1884. By 1890, this electoral support translated into Center control of every Upper Silesian district except Kreuzburg-Rosenberg, a district with a 43 percent German Protestant minority won by conservatives throughout the imperial period. That this dominance lasted until 1903 speaks to the effect of the Kulturkampf in consolidating a "Catholic" political identity in a linguistically mixed region.[20]

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[18] Blackbourn, "Catholics and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Centre and Its Constituency," in Populists and Patricians, 193, 200, 205-206; idem., "Progress and Piety, 152-54; Smith, Nationalism, 43-44, 46-47; Anderson, Practicing, 96, 107-16; idem., "Voter," 1467; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 75-76.

[19] Not all districts in which the Center had success had a Polish majority. See n. 7 above.

[20] Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch, 74. These results matched or exceeded the Center's successes elsewhere. See William Claggett, et al., "Political Leadership and the Development of Political Cleavages: Imperial Germany, 1871-1912," American Journal of Political Science 26, no. 4 (Nov. 1982): 657; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 92-93, 169-70, 182, 187-89. In 1874, the districts won by the Center were Oppeln,

The Center recorded these successes in Upper Silesia despite the fact that its emphasis on the common anti-Catholic threat posed by the government and its liberal supporters subsumed the distinctly anti-Polish aspects of the Kulturkampf within a purely confessional understanding of the conflict. Beyond the anti-Catholic bias of legislation of the 1870s and the response that this bias inspired among German Catholics, Kulturkampf measures had a special resonance in Polish-speaking areas of the Prussian East. In these regions policies of Protestantization combined with those of Germanization in the effort to create a unified Reich. Images of reactionary Catholic influence combined with fears of a "Polonized" population – German-speakers gradually assimilating into local Polish-speaking society through the use of the Polish language – to allow Prussian officials and politicians to associate the two in their defense of endangered Germans in the Prussian East.[21] Primarily through efforts to drastically limit the use of the Polish language in schools and in the state administration, the Kulturkampf in the Prussian East mandated both the religious and linguistic assimilation of the largely Polish-speaking Catholic populations.[22] It involved an explicit effort, in Bismarck's words, to "make the Poles first Prussian and then German, but they must become Prussian and German."[23] In this sense, Poles in the Prussian East suffered from the double burden of religious and national outsider status.

Upper Silesian Poles responded to these campaigns differently than their co-nationals in the East. Whereas resistance to the Kulturkampf increasingly led Poles in

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Beuthen-Tarnowitz, Kattowitz-Zabrze, Pleß-Rybnik, Leobschütz, Neustadt, Falkenberg-Grottkau, and Neiße. Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch, 45; Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol. 2, maps 2-7.

[21] For example, in April 1871 Bismarck attacked Polish deputies in the Reichstag on the grounds that "they were elected in order to represent the interests of the Catholic Church!" Quoted in Erich Schmidt-Volkmar, Der Kulturkampf in Deutschland 1871-1890 (Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1962), 43.

[22] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 20, 22-23, 24; Hagen, Germans, 129-30; Eley, "German Policy," 207. Jews also were targeted. Neubach, "Schlesische," 267.

[23] Quoted in Blanke, Prussian Poland, 25. Emphasis in original.

Poznań and West Prussia to support Polish nationalists who represented not "Prussian, not German, but only Polish interests," in Upper Silesia Polish-speaking voters turned toward the Center.[24] This development can be attributed to a number of factors. First, Koło Polskie, the Polish nationalist party of Poznań and West Prussia, was dominated by conservative Polish nobles who defined the Polish nation geographically according to the old kingdom of Poland rather than ethnically. As a result, most Koło Polskie leaders maintained a general disdain for Silesian Poles as a separate people lacking any "historical tradition."[25]

This attitude as well as the need to cooperate with the Center led Koło Polskie to abstain from aiding any embryonic nationalist movements in Upper Silesia and also facilitated local electoral agreements between the Center and Koło Polskie. Recognizing each other's respective strengths in Upper Silesia and in Poznań and West Prussia, the two parties did not run competing candidates in any districts, and even actively campaigned for each other to defeat their common political enemies.[26]

Yet Upper Silesian Poles were hardly passive subjects to be traded from one side to another. They actively chose to support the Center, as illustrated by the political campaigning of Silesian Polish-language papers like the popular Katolik.[27] This and other influential nationalist newspapers supported the Center during the Kulturkampf, not only because of the close connections with German Catholics experiencing similar forms of persecution and engaging in similar forms of resistance, but also because the Center

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[24] Ibid., 29, 25-28; Hagen, Germans, 145. On resistance in Prussian Poland, see Hagen, Germans, 145; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 25-26; Eley, "German Politics," 215-16. For a detailed discussion of how German and Polish bishops in Gniezo-Poznan dealt with the Kulturkampf, see Trzeciakowski, "Prussian State," 621-24.
[25] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 77, 165. On the transition from liberal to more socially conservative leaders among the Polish nationalists as a result of the Kulturkampf, see ibid., 25-27; Hagen, Germans, 145.
[26] Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 188, 92-93, 94-95; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 28, 36 n. 80.
[27] Anderson, Practicing, 369-70; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 76.

served their interests. As fellow pariahs in the midst of an anti-Catholic crusade, the Catholic party vigorously supported Polish cultural rights in the Reichstag and in the Prussian Landtag. Indeed, the local Center leadership encouraged Silesian Poles to identify with the Center by running several Poles as candidates of the Catholic party.[28]

The Center's successes among Upper Silesian Catholics – both Polish and German – illustrate that by 1884, members of the church hierarchy or of the Center party could no longer argue with any credibility, as Father Franz Josef Hergenröther had in 1863, that "[t]oday there is no actual Catholic politics; on the contrary, there is only a politics of individual Catholics."[29] During the Kulturkampf – in Upper Silesia as elsewhere in the Kaiserreich – "political Catholicism" had become a political force that provided Catholics a common sense of identity in terms of national elections and politics.[30] This Catholic sensibility uniting German and Polish Catholics in Upper Silesia was based on the existence of a common threat, even if the threat affected the parties in different ways.

As a result of the Kulturkampf's apparent failure to unite all Germans behind a liberal Protestant vision of the nation-state and in order to court conservative parties that had opposed the campaign from the beginning, Bismarck slowly began to scale back measures against German Catholics while shifting the persecution to Poles specifically. This policy shift in the mid- to late-1880s and the Center's response constitute a turning point in Polish-Center relations. Although direct Polish challenges to the Silesian Center leadership would not come until the mid-1890s, the seeds of those challenges were sown

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[28] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 28, 76.
[29] Quoted in Anderson, Practicing, 75.
[30] Blackbourn makes this point for Germany as a whole in "Progress and Piety," 155.

in state policies and party actions that increasingly defined the Center as a party representing the interests of German over Polish Catholics.

Bismarck had begun to chart this new course as early as 1878, when Center support for a number of his tax and tariff measures led to the temporary suspension of the harshest of the Kulturkampf measures and to open negotiations with the Vatican to resolve the conflict.[31] While this by no means ended the government rhetoric against the Center party, it did signal the beginning of a new official attitude towards German Catholics. Increasingly German Catholics became accepted into and in turn accepted the notion – as propounded by radical nationalists and the administration – of an exclusive German nation with a mission to Germanize the Prussian East. This can be seen through state policies that increasingly persecuted Poles on the basis of their Polishness rather than their confession, through the Center's response to these anti-Polish campaigns, and through the actions of individual German Catholics vis-à-vis their Polish neighbors. Gradually this reification of national boundaries would diminish the Center's legitimate claim to represent "all Catholic people" in Upper Silesia.

Bismarck signaled the policy shift in a December 1884 speech to the Reichstag in which he suggested that the Kulturkampf had not begun as an effort to combat Catholic influence in general but rather "this whole polonising activity of the priesthood" that had led the grandchildren of true Germans in Upper Silesia and West Prussia to consider themselves Polish.[32] With the full support of the National Liberals in the Prussian

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[31] Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 179-80.
[32] Otto von Bismarck, "From Bismarck's Speech to the Reichstag, 3 December 1884," in The Second Reich: Germany, 1871-1918, ed. William Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33.

Landtag in particular,[33] the emphasis of the official campaigns changed from the confessional struggle that had marginalized a large proportion of the German population to a national struggle focused on non-Germans in the East. Soon after this speech, as specifically anti-Catholic measures were being suspended or mitigated, a renewed anti-Polish campaign began with the 1885 expulsions of non-German Poles from frontier regions like Upper Silesia and Poznań.[34]

The most direct official measures aimed explicitly at Poles in the East were the efforts at "inner colonization" begun with the establishment of the Royal Colonization Commission in 1886. This commission sought to encourage the settlement of German peasants on land purchased by the government from Polish landowners. In this way they hoped to combat German out-migration and further the Germanization of the Polish populations.[35] The commission's efforts were accompanied by a number of administrative and legislative policies designed to further Germanize the east, particularly through efforts to remove Polish influences from the region's schools.[36] Although these measures were less than successful in countering demographic trends and converting Polish- to German-speakers in Upper Silesia, they did succeed in officially defining Upper Silesian Poles – along with Poles in Poznań and West Prussia who suffered under more repressive measures – as outside the German nation and the Prussian state.

As Blanke notes, Bismarck had a long history of both hostile and paternalistic attitudes towards the Poles. Blanke, Prussian Poland, 7-12, 18-19.

[33] Unlike the Reichstag, the Landtag's restrictive three-class voting system gave a disproportionate influence to National Liberals and Conservatives, who supported a harder line against the Poles. Hagen, Germans, 131.

[34] Stanley Suval, Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany (Chapel Hill, N.c.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 112; Hagen, Germans, 134.

[35] Eley, "German Politics," 211; Hagen, Germans, 135. For a detailed overview of the construction of the commission, see Blanke, Prussian Poland, 60-73.

[36] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 73-83.

Despite the explicitly anti-Polish aims of these measures, the Center still maintained that these policies revolved around confession in order to court both Poles and Germans in Upper Silesia.[37] On these grounds, and also in order to cooperate with the Polish parties, the Center carried out a spirited criticism of the Polish policy in the Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag. This manifested itself most spectacularly in support for the Reichstag motion censuring Bismarck for his role in the expulsion campaigns.[38]

As a result of these efforts, the Center won the support of its Upper Silesian Polish constituents again in the 1887 Reichstag elections. This support was crucial for the Center because much of the party's German constituency in the region turned to conservative parties amidst the heightened nationalist rhetoric surrounding General Boulanger's revanchism and the defeat of Bismarck's 1886 Army Bill in the Reichstag.[39] Using nationalist rhetoric to good effect, the opposition encouraged former Center supporters to denounce the party as having "with the passage of time gone ever more in the direction of serving un-German goals, in alliance with the Guelfs and the Poles."[40]

Center parliamentary leader Ludwig Windthorst countered these challenges to the Center's "Germanness" by defending the patriotism of German Catholics in the face of "premeditated measures against the advance of Catholicism." By defining Bismarck's Polenpolitik as "less about the colonization of these provinces than about their Protestantization,"[41] the Center leader could counter nationalist challenges to the Center's German constituency while maintaining the opposition to anti-Polish measures essential

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[37] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 50.
[38] Ibid., 50-51; Hagen, Germans, 134.
[39] The Reichstag had been controlled by opposition majorities since 1881, and in 1886 the left liberals and the minority parties led the effort to oppose the Army Bill. Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 193-96.
[40] Quoted in ibid., 196.
[41] "Kampf gegen die Diskriminierung der Polen," in Ludwig Windthorst 1812-1891, ed. Hans-Georg Aschoff (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1991), 103. Emphasis in original.

for retaining the indispensable support of Upper Silesian Poles. Whereas this campaign succeeded in maintaining Center control of eleven of the twelve Upper Silesian seats, it could not entirely counter the rhetoric mobilizing German nationalist voters to support the Conservatives and Free Conservatives.[42]

Cooperation between the Center and Koło Polskie throughout the Prussian East continued in 1887, but the electoral decline frustrated both and led to mutual recriminations. Each party argued in its respective press that the other had placed national interests before the confessional ones that had provided their common ground.[43] These strains in 1887 prefigured the strains that would arise in the following decade between Upper Silesian Poles and Germans in the Center Party. Bismarck could note in 1886 that "Upper Silesian hostility against the Prussian state was not as well developed as the leaders of the [Polish] agitation would wish."[44] However, this relative amity came under increasing strain thereafter as the Center sought to facilitate cooperation with the government by defining itself as a party that did not represent "un-German" interests. The tension inherent in cooperating with a government that persecuted a significant portion of its Upper Silesian constituency became unmanageable as the contradictions between Center rhetoric and German Catholic action became more apparent.

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[42] The Center saw its vote totals in Upper Silesia decline from 80.2 percent in 1884 to 68.1 percent in 1887. The Conservatives jumped from 8.4 percent to 18.4 percent, while the Free Conservatives registered a milder increase from 8.6 percent to 13.2 percent. Incidentally, the left liberals also lost their support, falling from 2.5 percent to only .1 percent of the vote totals. Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch, 74; Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 83-92.

[43] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 98, 57.

[44] Bismarck, "Bismarck and the 'Polish Question': Speech to the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament, January 28, 1886," available from H-German: G-Text Primary Source Archives (Internet: http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~german/gtext/kaiserreich/speech.htm), accessed 2 Apr 2002.

In the 1890s and 1900s, one general development explains the Center's ultimate inability to hold the support of Polish-speaking voters in Upper Silesia: namely, the Poles' increasing identification of themselves as having interests distinct from those of German Catholics in the region. This development, however, was spurred by a number of different factors: the renewed Prussian anti-Polish campaign, the growth and vitriol of German nationalist extra-parliamentary organizations, and the attention paid to Upper Silesia by Polish nationalists who themselves were becoming increasingly aggressive in their campaigning and increasingly popular in Poznań and West Prussia. These factors contributed to a growing sense of common cause among Upper Silesian Poles to which neither the local nor national Center leaderships sufficiently adapted.

Although few anti-Polish policies were amended or suspended, the four-year chancellorship of Leo von Caprivi (1890-1894) represented a brief interlude in the government's official hostility toward its Polish citizens. However, his efforts at conciliation and cooperation with the Center and the conservative leadership of the Polish party resulted in a backlash among German nationalists.[45] Their strident opposition to compromise with the Poles promised political dividends to parties opposing such measures. Indeed, the national parties forced Caprivi to resign as Prussian Minister-President after only two years, and in 1894 Wilhelm II replaced him as chancellor with Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1894-1900).

Given the growing strength and discontent of the Polish nationalist movement as well as its value as a rallying point for both Protestant and Catholic German nationalists, Hohenlohe decided to abandon Caprivi's more benevolent Polish policy, setting a trend

[45] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 121-41. The leadership of the Polish party embarked on a policy of "loyalism," cooperating with Caprivi's government in order to win concessions through loyal service, by providing crucial support for the Army (1890) and Navy (1892) bills for example.

that would last until the Great War.[46] Between 1897 and 1899 in particular, Hohenlohe's administration infused more capital into the Colonization Commission, subsidized efforts to spread German culture and fund public works projects in German-speaking areas, and encouraged a general harassment of Polish-speakers. Under Hohenlohe's successor, Bernhard von Bülow (1900-1909), the campaign intensified with extensions to the Settlement Law in 1901 and 1904, even more funding for the Colonization Commission, and the 1908 Association Law restricting the use of Polish in public assemblies. The capstone to Bülow's Polenpolitik was his school language policy, introduced in 1900, which effectively completed the Germanization of schools in the Prussian East, albeit with dramatic Polish resistance.[47]

All of these policies were focused on countering Polish nationalists in Poznań in particular, but in their nationalist implications and in their implementation they directly affected Poles in Upper Silesia as well. Particularly under Bülow, the Polish question always remained a central preoccupation of the Prussian bureaucracy; he made clear that the purpose of his Polenpolitik was to ensure that Prussia remained "what it is and always must be: a [German] national state."[48] Along with intensified efforts to Germanize Polish-speakers in the East, this sort of language further illustrated the national rather than confessional orientation of anti-Polish policies. Justifications that before had been

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[46] Ibid., 139-41, 183, 169; Smith, Nationalism, 169-70. On Hohenlohe's attitude toward the Poles, see Ted Kaminski, Polish Publicists and Prussian Politics: The Polish Press in Poznań during the Neue Kurs of Chancellor Leo von Caprivi 1890-1894 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1988), 247; L. Kaminski, Die Auseinandersetzung um die polnische Frage zur Zeit der Reichskanzlerschaft des Fürsten zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (Hamburg, 1938).

[47] Eley, "German Politics," 208-9; Fairbairn, Democracy, 91; Smith, Nationalism, 176-77. The Association Law was the only anti-Polish measure passed by the Reichstag. The best study of Bülow's school policy and the Polish response is John J. Kulczycki, School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901-1907: The Struggle Over Bilingual Education (Boulder, Col. and New York: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1981).

[48] Quoted in Hagen, Germans, 181.

couched in terms of threats to the Prussian state increasingly became infused with the language of a struggle between German and Polish nations. That language successfully isolated Poles from other opposition groups in the Kaiserreich, German Catholics in particular.[49]

These government efforts were accompanied by the development of German voluntary associations that vociferously campaigned for a variety of nationalist policies. In the Prussian East, as might be expected, the Polish Question was central to nationalist efforts to advance the cause of the German nation, most prominently through the Eastern Marches Association (also known as the H-K-T Society, or the Hakatists, after the initials of its founders). This organization, founded in 1894 in response to Caprivi's conciliatory Polish policy, dedicated itself to "the strengthening and marshaling of the German nationality in the Polonized Eastern Marches of the Empire, by encouraging and fortifying German patriotic feeling as well as by augmenting the German population and strengthening it economically."[50]

The Hakatists agitated for nationalist policies in the East on the national and state levels, particularly for policies to encourage German settlement and economic development. These efforts met with limited success, in the sense that the colonization policies did little to change demographic patterns. However, at the local level the H-K-T Society had a considerable impact in propagating the idea that Poles and Germans were different and inherently antagonistic. In particular, they staged demonstrations of German solidarity, provided tours of the East, and used the press to act as evangelists awakening Germans to the dangers in the East. One of the more pervasive methods of

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[49] Eley, "German Politics," 209, 214.
[50] Quoted in Richard W. Tims, Germanizing Prussian Poland: The H-K-T Society and the Struggle for the Eastern Marches in the German Empire, 1894-1919 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 41.

spreading their message was through novels and poems set in the Eastern Marches. The so-called "Eastern Marches novel" presented the Germanization of the East as an essential part of the German cultural mission. As in representations of the American West with its virtuous settlers and devious Indians, Polish areas were to be civilized by German peasants diligently working the land and standing watch against the "mischievous," "deceitful," or "wild" Poles who threatened the extension of German Kultur. The pervasiveness of these images amidst such electoral slogans as "Pole there! – German here!" hardened the line between Poles and Germans in the region.[51]

Although Hakatist membership only grew slowly – despite prominent members such as Bismarck – and although the organization had little success in encouraging Germans to colonize the Prussian East, the Eastern Marches Association and other similar groups succeeded in making national identification an issue for both Germans and Poles in Upper Silesia.[52] That this was true in Upper Silesia can be illustrated by the involvement of Silesian German Catholics in Germanization efforts. It was not empty nationalist rhetoric that led Robert Höniger of the H-K-T Society to assert that "the Catholic church has done much for the Germanization of the east."[53] Despite sharp criticism from the Center that the Eastern Marches Association was part of a conspiracy to extend Protestantism – arguing that H-K-T actually stood for Haut die Katholiken Tot! (Strike the Catholics Dead!) – in Upper Silesia the Hakatist membership was at least 50

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[51] Ibid., esp. 11-49, 133-215; Roger Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914 (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 138; Geoff Eley, Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 58-68. On the Eastern Marches novel, see Tims, Germanizing, 237-61; Smith, Nationalism, 173-76. On nationalist pressure on German residents, see Fairbairn, Democracy, 91.

[52] Suval, Electoral Politics, 200. On Bismarck and his influence on future members of the H-K-T Society as well as his response to Caprivi's New Course, particularly with regard to Poles, see Ted Kaminski, "Bismarck and the Polish Question: The 'Huldigungsfahrten' to Verzin in 1894," Canadian Journal of History 22 (Aug. 1988): 235-50.

[53] Quoted in Smith, Nationalism, 184.

percent Catholic, including by one estimate 60-70 percent of the region's German Catholic population.[54] Although the Pan-German League – another nationalist organization widely associated with Protestantization as well as Germanization – had only three active chapters east of Berlin, one of them was in Ratibor: an Upper Silesian constituency with a majority German Catholic population and the most secure Center seat in the region throughout the imperial era.[55] Not coincidentally, neither of these openly anti-Polish organizations had any significant membership among Catholics in the Kaiserreich except in Upper Silesia.

Such evidence of nationalist and anti-Polish feeling among Upper Silesian German Catholics corresponded to the participation of prominent Catholics in Germanization policies. Perhaps the most prominent example in Silesia was George von Kopp, the prince-bishop of Breslau dedicated to actively Germanizing his Polish parishioners. Demonized by the Polish press as "the worst of all Germanizers" and "in the ranks of the most dogged Hakatists," Kopp monitored and censured clergy members "suspected of secretly or openly resisting Germanization efforts" in order that Germanization would proceed most efficiently.[56] He rebuked those who used the Polish catechisms and advised his bishops to discourage Poles from making pilgrimages to Cracow because it was a center of the Polish nationalist movement. Kopp also interceded in political affairs against the Poles, campaigning in 1903 against Polish Reichstag candidates who, he argued, falsely appropriated Catholicism in the interests of Warsaw

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[54] Tims, Germanizing, 252, 253 n. 45; Smith, Nationalism, 204; August Hermann Leugers-Scherzberg, Felix Porsch, 1853-1930: Politik für katholische Interessen in Kaiserreich und Republik (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1990), 133.

[55] Neubach, "Reichstagswahlen;" Chickering, We Men, 138. The other two were in Breslau (in Lower Silesia) and Danzig.

[56] Smith, Nationalism, 188, 186; Leonhard Müller, Nationalpolnische Presse, Katholizismus und katholischer Klerus (Breslau: Müller & Seifert, 1931), 204.

agitators. His most famous political act took place in 1906, when he personally helped to convince the Pope to remain neutral toward the Polish school strikes resisting Bülow's school policies.[57]

Kopp's activities as well as participation in anti-Polish associations in Upper Silesia were matched by the actions of German clergy throughout the Prussian East as well as those of voluntary Catholic associations that participated in Germanization efforts.[58] This sort of German Catholic participation in anti-Polish measures challenged the proposition that Germanization was equivalent to Protestantization and that German and Polish Catholics in Upper Silesia shared a common burden vis-à-vis the state, providing another incentive for Upper Silesian Poles to identify with each other in opposition to German-speaking Catholics.

In addition to efforts by Germans on both local and state levels to distinguish Upper Silesian Poles from their German neighbors on the basis of their language and culture, a new generation of urban, middle class Polish nationalists based in Poznań and in Russian Poland began to take an increased interest in cultivating support among Silesian Poles. Under the banner of Roman Szymanski's National People's Party, also known as the Populists, these activists built a solid base of support in the towns of Poznań. They drew on growing public dissatisfaction with Koło Polskie's cooperation with the state ("loyalism") and the Polish party's consistent privileging of the interests of

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[57] Müller, Presse, 189-211; Smith, Nationalism, 186-88; Rudolf Morsey, "Die deutschen Katholiken under der Nationalstaat zwischen Kulturkampf und erstem Weltkrieg," in Deutsche Parteien vor 1918, ed. Gerhard A. Ritter (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1973), 279-81.

[58] On the Union of German Catholics in Poznań, see Smith, Nationalism, 200-203, Tims, Germanizing, 253. On Catholic bishops and Germanization, see Trzeciakowski, "Prussian State,"628-34; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 80. On Catholic participation in colonization of the East, see Blanke, Prussian Poland, 98.

rural Poles over the growing number of urban Poles.[59] Through an aggressive press campaign associating the Koło Polskie leadership with German elites, Szymanski's Populists forced the Koło Polskie to abandon its policy of loyalism in 1894 and established the foundation for an aggressive, rival vision of Polish politics and of the Polish nation.[60]

Adopting an ethnic rather than a geographical definition of nationality, the new generation of Polish nationalists directed their campaigns at all Poles throughout the Kaiserreich. They did so regardless of alliances with the Center, arguing that "[v]oting for a German candidate, be it Centrist or a representative of another party, puts the Polish people in a position of dependence on German parties, loosens its ties to Polish society."[61] This antagonistic strategy – also illustrated by the Populists' cooperation and eventual merger with Roman Dmowski's separatist National Democrats – drew the ire of a Center press that feared the challenge posed by Polish nationalism to the Catholic consensus in Upper Silesia.[62] Indeed, the Populists' appropriation of Catholicism in the service of Polish nationalism contributed to the Center's concerns; as the Polish-Catholic People's Union proclaimed, "[o]ur weapons are the Polish prayerbook, the pious song, the rosary, the Polish newspaper, the book from the lending library, the national anthem."[63] Yet nationalists not only joined confession with nation; they also condemned

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[59] Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 100; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 93-104, 110-15; Eley, "German Politics," 217. On loyalist support for protectionist policies, see Suval, Electoral Politics, 113, Blanke, Prussian Poland, 97. See also n. 45 above. On Polish demographic changes, see Hagen, Germans, 136-40, 160-61.
[60] Blanke, Prussian Poland, 154, 158, 160, 169. For a survey of the Polish press and its role in aiding this transition from loyalism to populism, see Ted Kaminski, Polish Publicists.
[61] Suval, Electoral Politics, 118; Fairbairn, Democracy, 200; Anderson, Practicing, 141. Helmut Smith notes that some Polish extremists went so far as to advocate converting to the Armenian rites to elude the power of German bishops. Smith, Nationalism, 191.
[62] Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 100-101; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 165, 217, 162, 101. On the merger, see Hagen, Germans, 232-34.
[63] Quoted in Suval, Electoral Politics, 113.

confessional alliances with Catholic Germans, arguing that "[e]very German is a hidden Lutheran."[64]

Nevertheless, as even Szymanski was forced to acknowledge in 1898, at the time support for the Populists and the National Democrats was largely limited to urban areas of Poznań.[65] It was the campaign against Prussian school language policies, culminating in the mass school strikes of 1906/7, that gave the Populists and the National Democrats widespread popular legitimacy both inside and outside Poznań.[66] Before 1900, though, this support did not extend to Upper Silesia. Although the atmosphere in the Prussian East may have heightened a sense of Polish consciousness among Upper Silesian Poles, it did not eliminate the possibility of achieving their interests through the Center party, as illustrated by the Catholic party's continued electoral successes in the 1890s.

The loss of the Center's Polish constituency was not inevitable. Unlike in Poznań or West Prussia, where separatist, specifically "Polish" parties claimed to speak for Polish concerns, in Upper Silesia German and Polish moderates within the Center tried to accommodate the increasingly Polish-conscious population of the region. However, the local Center leadership's anti-Polish attitudes and their fear of losing German votes to national parties or the SPD led them to encourage national identifications, exacerbating ethnic tensions to such an extent that it defeated the possibility of accommodation between Polish and German Catholics. The Silesian Center leadership's increasingly equivocal opposition to anti-Polish measures, their increasingly nationalist rhetoric, and

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[64] Quoted in Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 101.
[65] The membership of the National Democrats in 1909 was roughly 40 percent artisan and 20 percent intelligentsia. The rest were mostly farmers and workers. Blanke, Prussian Poland, 214, 228.
[66] See n. 47 above. See also, Eley, "German Politics," 218-22.

their increasing hostility toward Polish demands for representation may have helped the Center retain some of its German voters, but, more significantly, it drove Upper Silesian Polish Catholics into the waiting arms of Polish nationalists.[67]

Beginning in the mid-1890s and particularly after 1898, the national Center leadership under Ernst Lieber (and after 1902 Julius Bachem) embarked upon a policy of engagement with – rather than strict opposition to – the government, supporting such measures as the 1898 Navy bill in order to illustrate their loyalty to the state.[68] However, at the same time that it was cooperating with a government that explicitly targeted Poles with discriminatory measures, the Center attempted to maintain the support of Polish voters, as it did during the Kulturkampf, by emphasizing the common interests shared by Polish and German Catholics.[69] The Center continued to rely on a defensive rhetoric embodied in the image of the Zentrumsturm (Center Tower), from which Center activists railed against "the Kulturkämpfer and Catholic-haters" that besieged all Catholics.[70] Decrying the actions of the Hakatists and other Germanizers as "forceful Protestantization," the Center leadership tried to de-emphasize the national issues that threatened to split the Center in Upper Silesia by emphasizing their "special concern" for "confessional peace."[71]

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[67] These factors as well as the Center's protectionist policies also drove some urban Poles and Germans in Upper Silesia to the SPD. See n. 15 above.
[68] Morsey, "Deutschen Katholiken," 281-91, 270-71; Fairbairn, Democracy, 180, 201-208, 190-91; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 96; Wilfried Loth, Katholiken im Kaiserreich: Der politische Katholizismus in der Krise des Wilhelminischen Deutschlands (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1984), 38-80, 382-86; Blackbourn, "Catholics and Politics," 231-32; John Zeender, "The German Center Party 1890-1906," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 66, no. 1 (May 1976): 1-125; Herbert Gottwald, "Der Umfall des Zentrums. Die Stellung der Zentrumspartei zur Flottenvorlage von 1897," in Studien zum deutschen Imperialismus vor 1914, ed. Fritz Klein (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1976), 181-224.
[69] Fairbairn, Democracy, 180, 201-208; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 73, 96.
[70] Quoted in Suval, Electoral Politics, 19, 67.
[71] Fairbairn, Democracy, 184; Tims, Germanizing, 233-34; "18. Mai 1898 (Berlin): Wahlaufruf der Zentrumsfraktion des Preußischen Abgeordnetenhauses," in Volk, Kirche und Vaterland: Wahlaufrufe,

In Upper Silesia, the effort to argue that measures affecting Poles were directed at their confession rather than their nationality was hardly convincing, particularly given the participation of German Catholics in Germanization efforts. Likewise, the efforts to challenge the anti-Polish measures by the Upper Silesian Center leadership under Felix Porsch and Count Franz von Ballestrem were discouraging at best for Silesian Poles. Porsch and other Center leaders criticized Prussia's Polenpolitik not on principle, but on the grounds that they were ineffective, unconstitutional, and likely to lead to increased Polish unrest; it was not the goal of Germanization that they opposed but rather the manner in which it was being carried out.[72]

The opinions of these men, particularly Porsch, were crucial to the developing crisis in Upper Silesia. Even though the Center was a party that relied heavily on mobilizing masses of voters in support of its political programs, its local policies were determined by committees of local notables like Porsch and Ballestrem, who were chosen by the delegates to the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, itself a body elected via the three-class voting system.[73] The resistance to change that this structural rigidity could create can be seen in the challenges to the German Center leadership brought by Polish candidates for three Upper Silesian Reichstag seats in 1893 and 1895.

The conflict began when the local election committee in Beuthen-Tarnowitz – a heavily industrial, predominantly Polish-speaking mining district – refused to nominate for re-election the incumbent deputy Julius Szmula, who had won the district handily for the Center in 1887 and 1890. The committee objected that Szmula had refused to speak

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Aufrufe, Satzungen und Statuten des Zentrums 1870-1933, ed. Herbert Lepper (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998), 322.

[72] Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 76-77.

[73] Ibid., 79-80, Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 98.

out publicly against Polish agitation in Upper Silesia. In his place they nominated the German pastor Leopold Nerlich, a man who could not be accused of Polenfreundlichkeit and who also had not adamantly opposed government policies as had Szmula. Szmula ran nonetheless. Calling on "Polish voters who love their faith and the Catholic church, who treasure their mother tongue, who hold dear the forgotten and oppressed Upper Silesian people, and who value the honor of their nation," Szmula more than doubled Nerling's share of the total vote, gathering 64 percent of the vote.[74]

Individual Polish candidates also challenged Center seats in Pleß-Rybnik and Ratibor.[75] The results of the 1895 by-election in Pleß-Rybnik caused considerable consternation among the Center leadership, as the Polish lawyer Paul Radwanski soundly defeated none other than Freiherr von Huene, one of the leaders of the national Center party since Windthorst's death in 1891. Radwanski won in grand fashion with 73.3 percent of the vote, almost tripling Huene's total.[76] In the Ratibor campaign, which was also distinctive in that the "Polish" candidate Filip Robota represented the SPD, the elections of 1893 were the closest challenge the Center ever faced in this stronghold under the Kaiserreich. Wilhelm Frank, a priest and self-proclaimed "representative of the Germans," won by a margin of 3,833 votes on the strength of support from German Catholics and conservatives.[77]

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[74] Quoted in Neubach, "Schlesische, 268; Smith, Nationalism, 191. Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 87; Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 77 n. 22; Neubach, "Schlesische," 268-69, 276. The committee also tried to prevent Szmula from running for the Prussian Landtag, but, recognizing his popularity, they compromised and ran him in Oppeln, where he easily won his seat.

[75] A Polish candidate, Franz Strzoda, also won in Neustadt after the Center deputy Joseph Cytronowski stepped down, but the Center did not oppose his candidacy. Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 90-91; Neubach, "Schlesische," 254.

[76] Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 88; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 165, 222; Anderson, "Kulturkampf," 100; Smith, Nationalism, 191.

[77] Robota won about one-third of the total vote. Drawing on Polish and German Catholic support, in the 1880s Center candidates regularly polled over 98 percent of the vote in Ratibor. Specht and Schwabe,

The Polish campaigns were aided by active support from the Polish-language press of Upper Silesia. Katolik in particular wielded tremendous influence. With a circulation of over 80,000 by the 1890s, it had developed into the largest Polish-speaking publishing house in the world behind the motto "For Faith and Mother Tongue."[78] Yet even strongly nationalist Polish publishers in Upper Silesia had different aspirations from those espoused in Poznań and West Prussia. While drawing inspiration from their co-nationals, Upper Silesian Polish nationalists in the 1890s tended to be more moderate. The mere fact that the candidates, excepting Robota, ran as Center candidates and not as candidates of a Polish party suggests that they wanted to work within the Center party to accomplish their goals. They sought recognition and opportunities for participation as Polish Catholics within the existing system.

Nevertheless, these victories deeply troubled Porsch, who in private correspondence with Cardinal Kopp had made no secret of his opposition to Szmula's candidacy in particular. He saw Szmula as a Polonizer, a social revolutionary – in that he opposed agrarian interests in favor of the interests of Polish miners – and a threat to the Catholic religion.[79] Viewing the Polish deputies as a political threat and fearing that a more pro-Polish attitude would lose the very nationally-minded German Catholics of Upper Silesia to the National Liberals or Conservatives following the 1893 elections, the Silesian leadership of the Center Party embarked on an aggressive campaign against the

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Reichstags-Wahlen, 89; Neubach, "Reichstagswahlen," 117-20; idem., "Schlesische," 268-69; Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 78, 79; Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol. 1, 586. The Center also faced an internal Polish challenge in Allenstein-Rössel in East Prussia. Smith, Nationalism, 191-92.

[78] Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 78; Neubach, "Schlesische," 269.

[79] Leugers-Scherzburg, Porsch, 78-79. On the industrial development of Upper Silesia, a development that had much to do with Porsch's fears of SPD influence, see Volker Hentschel, "Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung, soziale Mobilität und nationale Bewegung in Oberschlesien 1871-1914," in Modernesierung und nationale Gesellschaft im ausgehenden 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, eds. Werner Conze, Gottfried Schramm, and Klaus Zernack, 231-73 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1979); Lawrence Schofer, The Formation of a Modern Labor Force: Upper Silesia, 1865-1914 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975).

Polish challengers. Labeling the Polish candidates explicitly as "Poles" and – playing on fears of Social Democracy – as social revolutionaries and anti-clericalists, Porsch proclaimed that the position of the Center in Upper Silesia was "endangered." As Huene's defeat had shown, the Center was engaged in a power struggle with an "anti-Center current" whose "special danger lies in that in Upper Silesian…the linguistic opposition or, as one now says, national opposition covers itself with the opposition of possessing and not possessing."[80] By contrast, Porsch offered his vision of a united Center party at an 1895 party meeting in Breslau:

> We in the Center have not, up to this point, recognized a distinction between Germans and Poles, no distinction of language, of class, of occupation. The instant that you introduce such distinctions, in that instant the foundation on which the Center stands and on which alone the Center can be great collapses.[81]

Porsch did not recognize national principles where Polish demands were concerned; however, to maintain support among German Catholics he actively sought to counter the claims of opponents in the national parties that "by standing up for the native languages [we] are standing up for the nationalities." Like Windthorst a decade earlier, Porsch emphasized the confessional nature of this support.[82] But Porsch went well beyond Windthorst's judicious support for German nationalist goals. Indeed, Porsch made special efforts to illustrate that, although he opposed the anti-Polish measures, he was not blind to the danger that Polish nationalists posed to Deutschtum. Commenting on the issue of colonization in an 1898 article in the Schlesische Volkszeitung he noted that the Center did not disapprove of Germans' self-defense "against the advances of Polentum," nor did they deny "that Polish encroachments and outrages be turned back."

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[80] Quoted in Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 78, 79.
[81] Quoted in Neubach, "Schlesische," 269.
[82] Quoted in Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 77.

Rather, he wrote, "we disapprove of the means by which one proceeds against the Poles," and thus the "national conviction" of German Catholics should not be questioned.[83] Porsch's disdain for Polish nationalists and the Polish interests within the Center, as well as the rhetorical tightrope he walked by denying the legitimacy of Polish national feeling but defending that of German Catholics, did little to bridge the growing gap between Polish and German interests in Upper Silesia.

Following the Polish challenges more moderate Center members tried to effect a reconciliation. In May 1897, the Silesian Reichstag deputies, three German editors, and three Polish editors published a declaration calling for the German Center to compromise with the Polish side. In the interests of rapprochement, it proposed that in the 1898 Reichstag elections predominantly Polish areas would run Polish Center candidates with the support of German Catholics. Moderates also criticized divisive rhetoric from Poles – such as Katolik's claims that supporting the German Center meant supporting Germanization – with declarations signed by the majority of Polish and German clergy denying the truth of such accusations.[84]

These efforts largely succeeded in papering over the Center's divisions for the 1898 elections. Only in Oppeln, where Szmula narrowly defeated the German cleric Joseph Wolny, did Polish and German Center candidates oppose each other.[85] Elsewhere there was much more cooperation. In particular, arrangements were made to run Polish

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[83] Quoted in Brigitte Balzer, Die preußische Polenpolitik 1894-1908 und die Haltung der deutschen konservativen und liberalen Parteien (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 115.
[84] Neubach, "Schlesische," 269-70.
[85] In the primary, Szmula received 6,440 votes, and Wolny received 6,229 of 13,215 overall. In the run-off, Szmula won 8,696 against Wolny's 7,008 out of 15,704 votes. Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 85.

candidates in Neustadt – the incumbent Strzoda – and in Großstrehlitz-Kosel – Joseph Glowatzki – both of whom won their seats.[86]

This cooperation helped the Center to win every Upper Silesian district save Kreuzburg-Rosenberg in 1898 and offered optimists hope for a full reconciliation in the future. However, circumstances were to work against further rapprochement. In particular, Bülow's school language policies, the state's immoderate response to the dramatic Polish protests, and the resultant strengthening of the National Democrats throughout the Prussian East led the Upper Silesian and national Center leaderships to eschew further accommodation for a more hostile stance vis-à-vis all Polish nationalist leaders regardless of their attitude toward cooperation. This official stance and the Center's ineffective and equivocal resistance to Bülow's Polenpolitik resulted in dramatic electoral defeats for the Center in Upper Silesia after 1900.

The decisive moment in the collapse of Center-Polish cooperation was the school language crisis.[87] In 1900, Bülow's elimination of the last Polish religious instruction in the elementary grades generated a series of spontaneous, local school strikes that began the following year. As the government remained intransigent and civil disobedience grew, the National Democrats and the Populists actively began to support the resistance, and the campaign spread. By the fall of 1906 the protests had escalated into a general school strike, directly involving over 93,000 children and attracting the attention and support of Poles throughout the Prussian East. The Prussian government's refusal to

[86] Glowatzki won handily, earning 97.9 percent of the vote, while Strzoda faced a stronger challenge from the Conservative candidate Deloch. Trailing Deloch by 477 votes in the primary, he won the run-off with 73.4 percent of the vote. Ibid., 85, 90-91.
[87] Smith, Nationalism, 192.

compromise and its harsh suppression of the protests in the summer of 1907 further exacerbated the general Polish dissatisfaction with the Prussian state.

The widespread, militant response despite the patent illegality of the strike suggests that this campaign struck a deep chord among Prussian Poles, serving, in the words of John Kulczycki, as a "hothouse for the growth of Polish nationalism."[88] And because the Polish church hierarchy vociferously supported and participated in the strikes, Bülow's policies served to further cement the alliance of Polish nationalism and Polish Catholicism throughout the Prussian East.[89] Much more ambivalent in their support for the Poles, the Center and the German Catholic hierarchy opposed the language policy but simultaneously condemned the strikes as unlawful.

Center leaders were divided as to how to respond, particularly when faced with the dramatic rise of the National Democrats – a party more concerned with the national consciousness of Polish society than with parliamentary politics – as a direct and immediate result of the school strikes. However, after 1900 these leaders all made their defense of Polish rights dependent on Poles' duty to serve, in the words of the Polish Center deputy Glowatzki, as "good Christians, upright subjects of the [Prussian] state."[90] To combat the influence of the National Democrats while convincing the government that it stood on the side of "state interests," the Center turned again to calls for confessional unity and de-emphasized the national aspects of the anti-Polish measures.[91] The increasingly equivocal support that derived from this policy did little to counter the

[88] Kulczycki, School Strikes, xvi. On the roots of the protests, see Suval, Electoral Politics, 112, 115.
[89] Kulczyzki, School Strikes, ix-xvi, 208, 213-14; Suval, Electoral Politics, 112; Tims, Germanizing, 103.
[90] Smith, Nationalism, 193-94. Quoted in Balzer, Polenpolitik, 203.
[91] Smith, Nationalism, 192-95.

influence of the National Democrats in Upper Silesia, as illustrated by the controversial 1903 and 1907 Reichstag elections.

In 1903, candidates from Upper Silesian Polish parties challenged the Center for the first time.[92] Unlike the Polish Center candidates who had challenged the Center in 1893, these Polish nationalists were uninterested in working with the "Catholic" party. Fuelled by Catholic Germanization efforts and the rhetoric of Upper Silesian leaders, their campaigns focused on defining the Center as a German party whose interests diverged fundamentally from those of Poles.

Polish nationalists were frustrated that the leadership of the Center party had not been able – and seemed not to have made a significant effort – to mitigate the effects of anti-Polish measures, that it had denigrated resistance against those measures, and that it even denied that Poles in Upper Silesia had common interests or a common identity that deserved attention. As a result, they settled on a complete break with the Catholic party that no longer seemed to represent Polish Catholics. "Away from the Center" was the slogan that drew crowds to public meetings, where audiences heard calls that "it is finally time" for Poles to take the responsibility for their own future. Breaking down the exclusive association of Catholicism with the Center, candidates such as Albert Korfanty railed against "Center priests" for eliminating Polish hymns from churches, Germanizing Polish children, cooperating with the Hakatists, and denying Polish workers the services of a pastor. To further challenge the idea that devout Catholicism was the exclusive domain of the Center party, the National Democrats ran as many clerical candidates as

[92] These candidates were associated with, but not directed by, the Polish nationalist parties of Poznań.

they could.[93] This collection of issues surrounding the rights to a national culture at once both Polish and Catholic was encompassed in the electoral program issued by the Polish electoral association of Upper Silesia.

> We are Poles! These words encompass our entire political program. The community of blood and faith, the equality of the beloved Polish mother language, the equal customs and practices of all Poles from Putzig to Myslowitz that make up the bond that unites all Poles into an indivisible whole.[94]

Within the context of the continuing school strikes in Poznań and the Center's equivocal support for the strikers, the aggressive tone of the Polish nationalists struck a chord among Upper Silesian Poles, as Center seats faced significant challenges from Polish nationalists in three districts, with a profound impact on the local and national Center leadership.

The most notable result occurred in Kattowitz-Zabrze, where Albert Korfanty, the leader of the National Democrats in Upper Silesia, successfully challenged the long-time Center incumbent Paul Letocha. Although Letocha gathered 8,322 more votes in the primary election, Korfanty was able to draw on the support of urban Poles who had voted for the SPD in the primary to win the seat with 50.7 percent of the run-off vote.[95] Like Müller's victory in 1871, Korfanty's victory spawned a massive campaign to annul the

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[93] Fairbairn, Democracy, 200; Smith, Nationalism, 195; Anderson, Practicing, 142; Neubach, "Schlesische."

[94] Quoted in Jürgen Kuczynski, 1903: Ein normales Jahr im imperisalistischen Deutschland (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988), 48; Fairbairn, Democracy, 199.

[95] Specht and Schwabe, Reichstags-Wahlen, 86, 89, 88; Blanke, Prussian Poland, 221; Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol. 2, map 5. There were two other challenges, in Lublinitz-Tost-Gleiwitz and Pleß-Rybnik. In the former, Ballestrem faced down the Polish candidate Siemianowski on the first ballot, but the Pole won a not insignificant 33 percent of the vote. In the latter, the Polish candidate Kowalcznk won a plurality with 47 percent of the vote but lost to Joseph Eugen Faltin by 1,276 votes in the run-off. Josef Rostek ran as a National Democrat in Ratibor as well, but he did not have much success against Wilhelm Frank, winning only 12 percent of the vote. Three Polish Center candidates also won seats in 1903. Szmula retained his seat in Oppeln, Strzoda kept his seat in Neustadt, and Theophil Krolik won in Beuthen-Tarnowitz.

election on the grounds of clerical influence.[96] While this effort exacerbated the bad relations between Poles and Germans, the punitive measures taken by German priests against their Polish parishioners created a conflict of international proportions. With the explicit approval of Cardinal Kopp, a number of priests went on strike against those who had supported the National Democrats. Most spectacularly, this campaign led to the refusal to marry the 28-year old Korfanty in Germany.[97]

After a long struggle, the heightened national tensions in Upper Silesia following the 1903 elections finally led the national Center party under Julius Bachem to endorse Porsch's aggressive course towards Polish politicians. Although he personally found Porsch's "Hakatismus moderatus" offensive, Bachem believed that the "Upper Silesian Poles are lost to us, and we must now at least do what we can so that we do not completely split apart from the German Catholics in Upper Silesia."[98] The Center maintained its principled stand against anti-Polish measures, although always on confessional rather than national grounds, but thereafter resolved to adopt a "cool, reserved posture" towards Polish politicians.[99]

This final disavowal of Polish national interests by the national Center party set the stage for the dramatic Polish nationalist electoral victories in 1907. Moderates again tried, as they had in 1897/8, to reintegrate Polish interests into the Center and thereby defuse support for radical Polish nationalists. However, their efforts failed to effect a reconciliation largely because Porsch and other Silesian leaders sabotaged them.

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[96] The investigations eventually turned up so much evidence of German clerical influence that the Center leadership closed the case to save further embarrassment.
[97] After negotiations allowed him to be wedded in Cracow, his press condemned the Silesian clergy for their role in the scandal, and Cardinal Kopp responded with a libel suit against Korfanty on their behalf.. Anderson, Practicing, 136-37.
[98] Quoted in Smith, Nationalism, 197. In the face of growing SPD support, this was a legitimate concern.
[99] Ibid.; Hagen, Germans, 187, 195; Tims, Germanizing, 129, 148.

Moderate clergy and members of election committees – most prominently one Count Oppersdorf – attempted to foster a rapprochement by offering compromise candidates in 1905 by-elections, successfully running pastor Abramski for the Landtag seat in Oppeln without consulting the leadership. However, further conciliation was confounded by an official declaration that condemned all "so-called greater Polish strivings" while affirming the need to advance Deutschtum through the unity of the clergy behind the Silesian Center. When the Polish Center deputies Abramski, Szmula, and Krolik refused to sign the declaration, they aided Porsch's effort to define all enemies of an uncompromising policy as "Poles," and their careers suffered for it.[100] This was part of a bid to appeal to German Catholic voters in the region through nationalist rhetoric. In the process the Silesian leadership furthered the developing national polarization between Germans and Poles.

It was no coincidence that these conflicts came on the eve of the 1907 Reichstag elections, a period already fraught with German-Polish tension over the recently suppressed school strikes in Poznań. Given this tense atmosphere, it is not surprising that Polish nationalist candidates did very well among Polish voters. Indeed, 1907 marked the high point of the Polish parties in the Kaiserreich era as well as the ultimate separation of the Center from its Polish constituency in Upper Silesia.

This separation resulted in a precipitous decline in Center vote totals in Upper Silesia.[101] In 1903 the Center had polled 60.1 percent of the total vote in Upper Silesia, while the Polish parties had gathered only 17.7 percent. However, in 1907 Polish

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[100] Porsch unsuccessfully called for disciplinary action against Szmula but successfully forced Krolik to resign his seat in March 1906. Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 121-23.
[101] The Center lost voters throughout the Kaiserreich in this election but nowhere this dramatically. Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol. 1, 220, 224-26, 228; Sperber, Kaiser's Voters, 100, 242-44, 247.

candidates won an astounding 39.5 percent of the vote, while Center support fell to 31.7 percent, its lowest total since 1871.[102] As a result of this dramatic turnaround, the Polish party earned the most votes in six districts, winning five of them away from the Center.[103] While some of these elections were close, others were dramatic victories for Polish candidates, such as Alexander Skowronski's 16,000 vote margin of victory over the Center's Viktor Loß in Pleß-Rybnik.[104]

In many ways Porsch's worst fears had come true. Polish national feeling in Upper Silesia was at its height. The "greater Polish" press claimed a circulation of over 100,000 and a readership of over 340,000 by 1914, while the only Polish-language Center paper sold a mere 1,200 to 1,400 copies per year.[105] Rather than retaining the support of moderate, devoutly religious Poles for the Center, antagonistic Center strategies had driven most Poles "away from the Center" and into the arms of well-organized "national" political parties.

In addition to reducing their support among Poles, the atmosphere of polarized national identifications in Upper Silesia eroded the Center's German Catholic base. Many Germans who previously had voted for the Catholic party defected to the more stridently nationalist parties, making such national parties the second strongest party in many predominantly Polish districts. In Upper Silesia the high number of Catholic Hakatists or of Catholics who had converted to Protestantism also attested to the Center's

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[102] Ritter, Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch, 74.
[103] The Poles won Oppeln, Pleß-Rybnik, Beuthen-Tarnowitz and Kattowitz-Zabrze outright. Lublinitz-Tost-Gleiwitz was won in a run-off, while the Center took Großstrehlitz-Kosel in the run-off after the Poles won a plurality in the primary. Schmädeke, Wählerbewegung, vol.2, map 6.
[104] In the close election in Lublinitz-Tost-Gleiwitz, Theodor Jankowski defeated the Center candidate Johannes Chrzaszcz by only 1,946 votes. Neubach, "Schlesische," 272, 274.
[105] Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 133; Anderson, Practicing, 370.

inability to hold voters strictly on the basis of a nationalist message.[106] As Porsch had feared, the Center was losing its nationally-minded middle-class constituency.

Concern over these results and criticism of Porsch from all quarters led to renewed efforts to reach a compromise with the Poles. Although the Bülow bloc and renewed attacks on both Poles and Catholics encouraged a limited degree of cooperation, a true rapprochement would not come before the war. The structure of the Silesian Center was such that moderates like Count Oppersdorf could do little to change the direction of the party without the support of Porsch and Ballestrem. Porsch and his supporters would not endorse the direction proposed by "Opperdorfsky" on the grounds that it would be "impossible for the Center party as such and the national Polish party as such to enter into a compromise."[107] Given their central role in a party structure that silenced its moderates on the issue of Polenpolitik, they were correct.

The direction of the Silesian Center party after 1907 was indicated in a disagreement between two Polish Center deputies and the Silesian party leadership. The deputies challenged the credibility of identifying Catholicism with the Center party in Upper Silesia, given the strength of the Polish parties. The "official Center" responded by protesting against "being a confessional party and emphasized that it would only be a German national party."[108] After 1907 national Center leaders – Bachem in particular – tried to rebuild the confessional connections between Polish and German Catholics,[109] but

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[106] Between 1880 and 1897, one-third of all converts in the Kaiserreich had come from Silesia. Smith, Nationalism, 199 n. 135. Local Center leaders especially feared this given the concurrent rise of the SPD.
[107] Quoted in Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 135, 133.
[108] Quoted in ibid., 121.
[109] See for example "7. April 1908 (Berlin): Wahlaufruf der Zentrumsfraktion de Preußischen Abgeordnetenhauses," in Volk, Lepper, 351; Leugers-Scherzberg, Porsch, 136.

the Silesian party leadership under Porsch had eschewed such a policy, finally embracing its local constituency without contradiction.

Although there were some successful efforts to reconcile its differences with the Polish parties after 1907, this could not change the fact that the Silesian Center party had by that point effectively defined itself as a national party first and as a confessional party second. In an atmosphere in which the state and its citizens made Polish-speaking voters increasingly aware of their status as "Poles" within a "German" empire, the Center could not legitimately claim to represent all Catholics while denouncing Polish efforts to assert their common interests as Poles. In doing so the Center leadership placed itself on the side of German Catholic interests and marginalized those voices calling for accommodation with their significant Polish constituency. The calls for all German and Polish Catholics in Upper Silesia to fight for "God and Fatherland" failed to inspire unified political action as it became increasingly apparent that Poles were fighting different battles than their German neighbors, battles that often found them at odds with their co-religionists.[110] It was this process that, in the end, drove Polish voters "away from the Center" and into their own separate parties associated with – but not equivalent to – the more separatist Polish parties of Poznań and West Prussia.

Yet the rising tide of nationalist politics did not have to lead to a breach between the Center and their Polish voters in Upper Silesia. The Center did not experience a similar loss of a constituency anywhere else in the Kaiserreich, and the actions of German and Polish moderates offered hope for a rapprochement. When this failed, though, a certain degree of flexibility within the Wilhelmine political system allowed

[110] "Aufruf des Vereins," 176-77.

Upper Silesian Polish nationalists to turn to integralist political organization rather than to separatism or political violence. Poles in Upper Silesia certainly experienced the most unpleasant aspects of Wilhelmine society, but in the end they found a satisfactory outlet within the system for expressing both political dissent and a non-German, nationalist identity. Unlike their co-nationals in Poznań or West Prussia, Upper Silesian Poles did not challenge the legitimacy of the German state; rather they sought to carve out their own legitimate space within the Kaiserreich by supporting previously existing political parties or by constructing parties that could represent their particular interests.[111]

Father Eduard Müller and the Center party had served as the outlet for Polish Catholic indignation in Pleß-Rybnik in the 1870s, for two decades winning overwhelming support in this role. Margaret Anderson has argued suggestively that Father Müller won the seat in Pleß-Rybnik because the Catholic idiom could serve as an effective vehicle to deliver a message of social emancipation to Polish-speaking voters anxious to challenge the authority of the Prince of Pleß and the system of elite deference that he represented.[112] If this indeed was the case, then the dramatic victory of the Center priest in 1871 has a parallel in the 1907 and 1912 elections of Polish nationalist candidates to the Reichstag seat from Pleß-Rybnik. As in the 1870s, the voters of Pleß-Rybnik found that the German political system treated them unfairly, so they sought political representatives through whom they could register their dissent and affirm their marginalized identity, first as Catholics and later as Polish Catholics. That Paul Pospiech – like Müller a pastor – could win the Pleß-Rybnik seat in 1912 by 11,664 votes speaks to the potential of a nationalist idiom for expressing the particular identities and interests of

[111] Neubach, "Schlesische," 270.
[112] Anderson, "Kulturkampf," 103; idem., "Voter," 1466.

the Polish-speaking population of Upper Silesia, a potential that the Center party had forfeited through its leaders' decision to court only certain loyal sons of the Church and Fatherland.[113]

[113] Pospiech received 17,717 votes. The Reichspartei candidate won 6,053, followed by the Center priest Paul Boidol (5,570) and the SPD candidate (1,882). Neubach, "Schlesische," 273.

Abstract:

By examining the German Center party's changing relationship with its Polish-speaking constituency in Upper Silesia between 1871 and 1907, this article explores the development of the Center party from a party representing the interests of Catholics in Germany to a party representing the interests of German Catholics. In Upper Silesia the Center built a unique constituency of German and Polish Catholics during the Kulturkampf of the 1870s and 1880s. By the 1890s, however, German Catholics no longer faced the type of overt harassment that Poles continued to deal with. Amidst heightened nationalist tensions in the region, the national Center assumed a more conciliatory posture toward the government, and local party leaders became increasingly ambivalent towards the demands of their Polish-speaking constituency. As a result of the intransigence of local leaders hoping to capitalize on intensified German nationalism in Silesia, Polish voters turned toward locally organized Polish parties that routed the Center by 1907. This shift suggests a certain degree of flexibility within the Wilhelmine political system. Underlying this discussion of political culture is an attempt, following the work of James Retallack and Alon Confino, to tease out the ways that local contexts shape understandings of the nation and vice versa.