Home Away From Heimat:

Protecting Eastern German Diasporas

by

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Abstract

As a consequence of the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (Federal Expellees Act), the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe gave millions of ethnic Germans living outside of both West and East Germany the opportunity to move to Germany with almost no strings attached, opening new questions as to what factors, both within Germany and without, most influenced this remigration. By focusing on diaspora migration, we can isolate the efforts of one kin state rather than relying on traditional humanitarian efforts involving dozens of entities. This study is therefore a uniquely accurate way to analyze international aid, diasporas, and the diverse societies they live in. Thus, by comparing economic and democratic success across the former East we will establish a pattern of expected migration, moving then analyze variables such as nations' political cultures, minority policies, and relationship with Germany in order to explain both normalities and outliers. Focusing on key German diasporas in Kazakhstan, Russia and Poland, we will find institutional support (or lack thereof) and conflicting nationalisms among "home" states, "host" states, and diaspora communities to be critical influences in the decision to emigrate.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

If immigration is anything in Germany, it is controversial and politicized. The country, while slowly changing today, is wary of multiculturalism and prefers migrant integration[1]. For a time, Germany favored the resettlement of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe to Germany, of which over 2 million lived in the former Soviet Union alone[2], in order to supplement its ailing workforce[3]. Thus, through economic need and a nationalistic desire for ethnic reunification, the German government initially supported generous immigration rules for ethnic Germans abroad under the 1953 *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (Federal Expellees Act)[4]. By adhering to a liberal interpretation of the law, ethnic Germans in the former Soviet Union were assumed to have suffered discrimination[5], offering millions of Germans a straightforward path to citizenship.

This unique dynamic, that of a powerful "home" or "kin" state, Germany in this case, influencing the behavior of its diaspora in their "host" states, such as the USSR or Poland, sets the focus of this study apart from most immigration studies and makes this case especially important. Whereas most studies track several communities or actors, this study focuses on a single diaspora (ethnic Germans), the actions of the home state (Germany), and the host state (post-communist nations). As a result, this study is specially focused in its conclusions, for we can analyze the successes and failures of German foreign policy in a specific facet of migration policy, addressing the interactions among home states, host states, and the local diasporas.

[1] Queen's University
[2] USSR 1992
[3] Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs 2002
[4] Bundesministerium Der Justiz 1953
[5] Hensen

Contrary to expectations, the primary goal of the German government when dealing with the former Communist world was to keep ethnic Germans abroad and serve as a "diplomatic bridge"[6] between itself and the post-Communist world. It was hoped that by providing for the diaspora's economic well-being in host countries, most would choose to remain. Many Germans, both in Germany and the diaspora, feared that the mass influx of Russian Germans would cause cultural frictions in Germany and destroy the unique Russian German culture[7]. Beyond cultural reasons, Germany was not in an economic position to take in millions of German refugees, especially given their lower average levels of education and limited German-speaking ability[8]. Instead, Germany sought to protect the diaspora's culture and languages in host-states, and by protecting these linguistic and cultural institutions, Germany hoped to preserve what remained of Volga German culture while slowing mass migration through economic assistance.

Beyond government policy, each German diaspora's decision to leave the host country is strongly influenced by a web of interacting nationalisms held by each of the above three actors. Within host states, even those with generous citizenship laws, local Germans often face significant discrimination from the titular nationalism of the host state on such grounds as religion, language, and minority status[9]. These host-nationalism pressures pose some of the primary drivers of migration, even with concessions from the host countries. On the other hand, Germany lacked the political will to implement a decisive foreign policy towards the host countries and has been reluctant to accept mass immigration from German diasporas. By prioritizing economic ties over minority rights, Germany has failed to create sustainable and effective support for its diaspora, preventing the diasporas' from acting as a diplomatic "bridge"

[6] Sanders 2016; Reichardt 2022
[7] Warkentin 1992
[8] Worbs 2013
[9] OHCHR

between states[10]. By falling back on a narrower version of German nationalism, drawing a line between West and East Germans and excluding parts of its diaspora, the German government has enabled the assimilation of its diaspora within the host countries. These diaspora communities have thus become divided between a "myth of return" to Germany and the sacredness of one's historical homeland (a *Heimat*[11]). These beliefs have become core values of the diaspora whose beliefs have been influenced by the actions of both the home and host state. In this way, diasporic nationalism and its roots have become the most important influences in the diasporas' decisions for cultural revitalization within their *Heimat* or exodus to another state.

Keeping these factors in mind, we conclude with our research question. This study is a migration study asking what decisions best explain the migration of diaspora communities, with a particular emphasis on the actions of the German home state. The outcome is measured by the proportion of the diaspora remaining in the host country and continuing to identify as ethnically German. In this respect, while political and economic factors tell part of the story, they ignore critical social influences, and thus fail to explain all German emigration. Instead, we find that the institutionalization of minority rights by the host country and the beliefs of prevailing home country, host country, and diasporic nationalism to be the principal remaining motivations for German migration: whether to remain, to flee to Germany, or to move to a third state.

[10] Sanders 2016; Reichardt 2022
[11] Wolff 2002

Moving from this brief introduction, Chapter 1 lays the structural foundations of the study, including literature review and methodology, and Chapter 2 follows by presenting and analyzing the study's compiled dataset. Moving into qualitative data, Chapter 3 first explains the problem's historical context. Afterwards, Chapter 4 analyses qualitative factors within three case studies and Chapter 5 compares the previous findings to draw overall conclusions. Finally, Chapter 6 presents these findings and summarizes the study.

Literature Review

This study focuses on the policies of two principal actors: the German home state and 17 post-communist host states. Some research has been done in this field, touching on the home state's unique commitment to its diaspora, though diaspora research in particular is very limited. A significant amount of academic literature instead focuses on generalized migration studies and humanitarian policy identifying "push" and "pull" factors key to migration: political, economic, and environmental factors are the primary "push" factors in host countries while higher wages, employment opportunities, a higher standard of living, and educational prospects in the home country are the most important pull factors[12]. My study affirms these findings and accounts for them through initial quantitative analysis, building off of them with qualitative research. In this study, environmental factors will be highlighted if individually relevant, though political and economic variables remain key in all cases. Pull factors are largely excluded from my analysis unless they target only a few nations, as their effects do not differentiate cases from each other. This variation thus becomes the focus of the study and its findings.

[12] European Parliament 2020

Home Country Motivations

Current studies of other diasporas show the potential tension between broad nationalist support for return of the diaspora and realist concerns for security and the economy in making home-country policy. In Gherghina, Soare, and Tap's study analyzing modern Romanian diaspora policy, support for Romanian co-ethnics abroad has been universal, even if their rhetoric changes slightly based on party and nation of origin[13]. Well-supported realist, liberal, and identity-based explanations exist for Romanian politicians' unanimous support for their kin abroad. Importantly, none of these explanations are unique to Romania and all are easily applicable to Germany, suggesting that Germany would be willing to incur notable damage to protect its foreign diaspora. This existing literature suggests that both Romanians and Germans fear that the diaspora faces the looming threat of assimilation and a comparatively harder life in transitioning regimes[14], with both home governments having a consistent rhetorical claim to protect their kin in host states. This has been true regardless of which party is in power.

On the other hand, despite the popular normative importance of and rhetorical commitments to ethnic protections, entrenched security and business interests often take precedence over any human rights concerns. For instance, according to studies of both Japanese foreign policy[15] and American cooperation with China[16] national security and vital economic interests were valued above the promotion of human rights abroad. Human rights, such as the right of co-ethnics abroad, are only at the forefront if the host-country no longer serves a significant security or economic interest. Germany is guilty of this practice with its diaspora, sidelined Volga German activists out of fear of damaging Russo-German relations[17]. These

[13] Gherghina, Soare and Tap 2022
[14] Gherghina, Soare and Tap 2022
[15] Silverberg 2022
[16] Qi 2005
[17] Schmaltz 1998

studies highlight that despite valid human rights concerns, even in the case of endangered ethnic kin, necessary government action may be constrained by economic or diplomatic needs, in which Germany instead supports comparatively moderate reforms friendly to the host state.

NGOs additionally allow home countries to gain greater influence over the human rights policies of host countries. The broad consensus, as documented in Wiseberg, is that foreign governments can have significant influence over the success of NGOs abroad. This theory is exemplified by Luis Perez Aguirre, a Uruguayan priest and activist, who was saved entirely by the actions of the Canadian government working through local NGOs[18]. NGOs are further significantly helped or hampered by foreign investments, media, and the relationship with the host country[19]. This research solidifies the important mediating role played by NGOs in encouraging and enforcing human rights policies favored by the home country and its local diasporas. NGOs such as *Landsmannschaften* and German Houses form an important part of German diaspora policy[20], serving as cultural hubs and influencing the patterns of host state migration as Germany chooses to either embrace or reject diaspora-led NGO assistance.

Host Country Motivations

Current research suggests that host countries' motivations to reduce push factors that lead to greater emigration are little influenced by home country policies. For example, Turchyn et al. explores the relationship between Western human rights policy and the motivations of authoritarian states to accept, reject, or modify their own policies. In this study, while the European Union takes significant effort to support democratization along its Eastern periphery, its policies are unable to create effective reform, instead being designed to complement existing

[18] Wiseberg 1991
[19] Marcinkute 2011
[20] Wolff 2002

political will in host-countries, making the fruits of EU efforts limited at best[21]. This variable will have significant bearing on German policy, in part because it utilizes many of the same EU methods, and will cause significant variations in the success of home state policy between compliant, reformist host states and those who reject German pressure for diaspora protections.

Castellino has further found that international law alone is inconsequential when protecting minority rights: the responsibility of which has firmly fallen into the hands of states[22]. In the same paper, Castellino finds that postcolonial states, such as Kazakhstan, often have incentives to discriminate against minorities, as the "promotion of minority identities could undermine the national identity building project", making home country efforts to promote substantial minority rights, especially geographic autonomy, in host-countries almost impossible.

Research Design

In line with the research question, this study aims to estimate the relationship between independent variables, such as government policy and the diaspora's socioeconomic standing, and the dependent variable of ethnic German emigration from their host states. As such, the study's hypothesis is that variation in emigration between host countries unexplainable by political and economic factors alone is the result of both interacting nationalisms, such as between home and host countries and German diasporas, and institutional support from home and host states. In order to test this, we analyze a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, parsing which portion of emigration is a result of predictable and easily quantifiable political and economic push factors and which is due to qualitative factors such as nationalism within the home state, host states, and the local diasporas. The quantitative method consists of a

[21] Turchyn et al. 2023
[22] Castellino 2024

cross-section-time-series regression analysis to test the impact of political and economic conditions on German emigration, wherein the qualitative study then analyzes three case studies of host states and their diasporas that deviate from or fall on the expected trend.

The quantitative analysis first establishes a statistical foundation for the impact of economics and political push factors on the migration decisions of the German diasporas specifically. Examining the residuals from this test identifies outliers and a constant case that do not meet expected patterns due to political and economic factors alone.

Beyond quantitative analysis, qualitative data is used to explain inconsistencies in quantitative findings and tell the other half of the story. This analysis uses news reports, ethnographic studies, surveys, and secondary sources on modern history to compare qualitative motivators, with a particular emphasis being placed on social factors, government policy (from both home state and host states), and the local nationalisms of German diasporas.

Chapter 2: Dataset Analysis

Due to established research, we expect key push variables in emigration to be economic conditions and repressive governance. Based on these two expected variables, we will run a cross-section time series regression analysis (Stata: xtreg) to estimate their impact on emigration. Emigration, the dependent variable, is calculated through a combination of population data from national censuses, such as the 1989 Soviet census[23] and 1992 Romanian census[24], and immigration data from the Federal Ministry of Migration and Refugees[25]. Using these same sources, the diaspora population by country in 1992 is used as a control variable. The other independent variables are as follows: GDP per capita at purchasing power parity in 2021 international dollars as reported by the World Bank[26] is used as a proxy for general economic health and opportunity[27]. Additionally, Freedom House civil and political liberties index scores[28] (both scores averaged together and coded as "oppression") are used as a proxy to measure government oppression, democracy, and violent conflicts. Data from these sources show changes by year starting with the democratization of Poland and Romania in 1990 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992, compromising 17 different post-communist countries across 16 years (From 1990-2005), giving us a dataset of 240 cases. Additional data is used from a few years prior to provide necessary context. While these metrics alone are not perfect, prompting us to later dive deeper into policy and nationalism, they give us a good sense of which countries do and do not roughly follow an expected pattern. In this way, by using quantitative evidence we

[23] USSR 1992
[24] Varga 2019
[25] Worbs 2013
[26] World Bank Open Data
[27] Callen 2019
[28] Freedom House

identify what an "average" result looks like in terms of economics and oppression, enabling nationalism and policy to explain outliers' deviation from the norm.

Table 1: Regression Analysis

	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
1992 Local German Population	0.0797205	0.007478	10.66	0.000***	0.0650638	0.0943771
Oppression	-1491.429	876.0484	-1.7	0.089	-3208.452	225.5944
Change in Oppression	1375.033	1742.726	0.79	0.430	-2040.647	4790.714
GDP per capita, PPP	-0.9412656	0.2413993	-3.9	0.000***	-1.4144	-0.4681316
Change in GDP per capita, PPP	-17490.71	6615.943	-2.64	0.008**	-30457.72	-4523.703
_cons	13191.04	5370.308	2.46	0.014	2665.434	23716.65

n=240
r-sq:
Within = 0.1239
Between = 0.8608
Overall = 0.6780

These results emphasize the impact of the economy over political freedoms. Firstly, oppression seems to have a limited relationship, but it is statistically significant at the 0.10 level. On the contrary, annual change of oppression is not statistically significant. GDP per capita is highly correlated and annual change in GDP is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The control for the diaspora of population in each country as of 1992 is, of course, significant.

The R-squared shows that oppression and economic outcome, including the population control variable, account for roughly 68% of the variance in nations' emigration. Comparing "within" and "between" R-squared values, the equations have significant explanatory power (R^2=0.86) regarding differences between countries, yet do little to explain differences across time

within the same countries (R^2=0.12). Taken together, while economics seems to be the primary driving force behind emigration, other factors missing from this analysis are necessary to explain the remaining variance, especially when dealing with changes over time in one country.

Moving from the results to select case studies, I examined residuals. Most nations, such as Kazakhstan, fell within the expected range. However, a handful of countries stand either above or below. For instance, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Ukraine generally experienced above-average emigration to Germany while Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Poland experienced mostly below-average emigration. The case studies are one case a piece from countries on the line, above the line, and below the line. Because Kazakhstan, Russia, and Poland had the largest German populations, they were subject to the most international attention and documented research, giving us the most evidence and policy possible to explain statistical outliers. However, other nations, such as Romania and Kyrgyzstan, will be referenced to supplement trends in these states.

Chapter 3: Historical Background

Before the calamity of WWII, German settlements extended far beyond their modern boundaries, reaching as far as the Ural Mountains in Russia. These towns formed sizable minorities across almost all of Eastern Europe, including Poland, the Baltics, Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Russia[29], making German the lingua franca in many regions. This minority was diverse in both its origin and role, as in cases such as Russia they were seen as a modernizing force[30], whereas in Czechia they were an oppressive nobility[31]. Despite these differences, the average German immigrant was engaged in subsistence farming in rural areas, especially in Poland, Romania, and along the Volga in Russia. This long and diverse history is crucial to the analysis of each case.

Middle Ages Into the Modern Era

The first German migrations eastwards began before and during the Crusades around 1100, beginning primarily around Cologne and the North Rhine. This could only happen due to developing agricultural methods and the subsequent population boom in Germany, encouraging German farmers to move East into previously untouched lands. Not only did the Teutonic Knights settle many of these lands, most notably Poland, but Germans often migrated at the behest of Eastern European rulers. They came first in 1141 and 1161 at the request of Hungarian King Geza II, resulting in German colonization of parts of modern Hungary, Slovakia and Transylvania[32]. Even later in 1763, Catherine the Great of Russia invited German settlers further

[29] Gardiner
[30] NDSU
[31] Gardiner
[32] Gardiner

East to settle along the Volga River, where they were seen as a "modernizing force" by the Tsar. Tsar Alexander I invited further settlers in 1804 and 1812, which led to German settlements along Southern Ukraine and Bessarabia. These Germans enjoyed great privileges, including autonomy and free farmland across Russia from the time they moved until 1861-1864, when Russian state reforms abolished German privileges and began Russification and mandatory military service. The abolition of these privileges soon led to widespread emigration of these Germans from Russia towards the New World, especially Argentina, Brazil, the US, and Canada[33].

World War II

Until World War II, German settlements in the East did not change dramatically, constituting a small, but notable minority across the region. The racial policies of Nazi Germany as well as the war's destruction put German diasporas in the sights of both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Multiple agreements from 1939 through 1941 between Germany and the USSR gave many ethnic Germans in the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Moldova "contract resettler" status, resettling them to Germany and granting them citizenship[34], leading to almost the entirety of the German population in these regions leaving. While these initial agreements altered the ethnic map of Eastern Europe, the war itself would do far more.

As Operation Barbarossa commenced and Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin made the decision not only to disband the Volga German Autonomous Republic, a Soviet attempt at Russian-German self-determination, but to deport all ethnic Germans living west of the Urals east into Siberia and Central Asia. These Germans found themselves isolated in desolate lands

[33] NDSU
[34] Universität Oldenburg

without significant resources, with the move itself being described as "genocidal" in nature[35]. Further details of these deportations will be discussed later in relevant cases, as this disaster left extensive scars on the Volga German community.

The end of World War II did not see the end of this calamity, as German minorities faced harsh reprisals for anyone unlucky enough to live East of the Oder-Niesse line. In Poland alone, around 4.5 million people fled West during the closing days of the war, while an unknown number were later expelled to either Germany itself or Siberia. "Organized and random acts of brutality, and mass pauperisation" additionally played a role in public flight from Poland. Likewise in Romania, as the German army fled the country, half of the nation's minority fled with them; many of those remaining were similarly deported to Soviet labor camps[36]. These kinds of expulsions happened all across Central and Eastern Europe, resulting in the widespread emigration and depopulation of the German minorities of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the USSR, and others. By 1950, while significant populations remained in Poland, the vast majority of Germans either fled West or labored under intense Russification pressures in Siberia.

The Cold War

Unlike the widespread depravity and devastation of WWII, the treatment of ethnic Germans in the Communist World depended largely on the regime in power in each country. In Poland, for instance, the German minority was not recognized officially until after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, leading to widespread discrimination and Polonization for decades[37]. Romania, on the other hand, literally sold their ethnic Germans to the Federal Republic of Germany, charging the FRG for each person they allowed to leave the country. However, unlike Poland, Romania

[35] Diener 2004
[36] Wolff 2002
[37] Wolff 2002

did legally recognize their German minority, even if they by no means adequately protected it [38]. The Soviet Union took a stance somewhere in the middle, recognizing their German populations yet enacting harsh policies against them. Not only was social and physical isolation extensive, German language and culture were banned in large swathes of the USSR. Despite this unambiguous repression, Germany was far from helpless regarding their ethnic kin, as *Ostpolitik* and the accompanying German-Soviet rapprochement in the 1970s are credited with the liberalization of Soviet and Polish minority policies, allowing hundreds of thousands of Germans to leave for Germany[39]. While the track record of minority rights in Eastern Europe is undoubtedly poor, its variability prevents us from drawing any single conclusion for the entire Soviet bloc and will instead be tackled case by case.

[38] Wolff 2002, pgs. 136-137
[39] Diener 2004; Wolff 2002

Chapter 4: Case Studies

Kazakhstan: A Control Case

A product of Russian colonialism, post-communist Kazakhstan takes a comparatively liberal, Soviet-era attitude towards its minority policy. The nation seeks to both uplift the historically weak Kazakh culture and language, crafting a Kazakh nation-state in the process, whilst creating a much more inclusive "Kazakh" identity and accommodating its large minority populations through language and citizenship laws[40]. This two-sided ethnic policy, combined with a significant post-independence economic downturn, would lead to a statistically expected amount of German emigration, letting Kazakhstan serve as a control case for later qualitative comparisons with the cases of Russia and Poland. With that being said, multiple factors make themselves immediately clear in Kazakhstan as key determinants of German emigration. While Kazakh policy encouraged the display of minority cultures in public[41], governmental resistance to autonomy and popular, economic-driven nativism[42] prevented any meaningful institutional support for the German diaspora and propagated interethnic tension. Economic decline resulting from the exodus of skilled Russians and Germans only made this nativism worse, resulting in further emigration[43]. These socioeconomic pressures, combined with increasing investments from the German home state, display home and host governments' influence over diasporic nationalism, fostering initial, widespread belief in the myth of return until German language laws would destroy the myth, leaving the door open to Russification instead.

[40] Diener 2004
[41] Sanders 2016
[42] Diener 2004
[43] Szporluk 2015

Kazakh Nationalism as Host State Policy

Soviet statecraft and ethnic policy, while attempting to grant minorities a form of "self-determination"[44], were a disaster for host state minorities and diasporas, including the Germans. Soviet policies attempted to isolate minorities through their placement into "areas of compact settlement"[45] whilst maintaining its control over each Republic through the creation of a strong, Russian minority and state-wide Russification. This was so effective in Kazakhstan that not only was the nation's independence was largely involuntary[46], but Russians compromised a similar demographic proportion to ethnic Kazakhs within Kazakhstan (40% each)[47]. This weak demographic position of the Kazakhs made the native Kazakh language and culture weak compared to Russian, forcing the country's authoritarian leader, Nursultan Nazarbaev, to tread a fine line between minority and nationalist priorities[48]. While Nazarbayev often paid lip service to pro-minority policies, such as the official adoption of the Russian language, he has consistently put ethnic Kazakh priorities before the Russian and German diasporas, encouraging emigration through unofficial discrimination.

The most critical of Nazarbaev's policies elevating the Kazakh language came in the construction of the nation's constitution. In January 1993, the country passed its constitution into law and elevated Kazakh to the sole state language while officially recognizing Russian as a "social language between peoples", using it as an ethnically-neutral language[49]. While the elevation of Kazakh makes sense from a Kazakh nationalist's perspective, it disadvantaged Kazakhstan's German diaspora in the economy and when dealing with government, as they

[44] Schmaltz 1998
[45] Diener 2004
[46] Szporluk 2015
[47] USSR 1992
[48] Smith 1996
[49] Smith 1996

overwhelmingly spoke Russian rather than Kazakh[50]. With that being said, this exercise of Kazakh nationalism was notably restrained; though it advantaged ethnic Kazakhs and Kazakh speakers, the institutional maintaining of the Russian language can by no means be considered advantageous to Kazakh nationalists. This language law thus forms the first way that Nazarbayev accommodated Kazakhstan's Russophone German diaspora, though this protection alone did not end German emigration.

While the placement of the Kazakh language was a critical first step in consolidating ethnic Kazakh dominance, it did not solve the initial demographic weakness of Kazakhs upon independence. While, as of 1989, 97% of Kazakhs spoke Kazakh as their first language, 60% were bilingual, with the vast majority being Russian speakers[51]. Importantly, this bilingualism was most common among Kazakhstan's skilled workforce and educated elite[52], resulting in an incredibly dominant Russian language in academia and governance. To combat this, affirmative action programs were instituted in public schools and universities, ensuring that a large quota of Kazakhs were met and educated, through which a skilled Kazakh-speaking workforce and elite would slowly be created. Part of this effort to exclude the German diaspora from academia included incredibly rigorous history exams about the Kazakh people[53], disadvantaging minorities less familiar with Kazakh history and further solidifying ethnic Kazakhs' normative importance above the nation's minorities. These regulations, while not explicitly hostile to the Russophone German diaspora, continued to elevate ethnic Kazakhs and work towards the creation of a Kazakh nation-state, making Germans feel increasingly less welcome in the unfamiliar nation[54]. In this way, while Germans were given preferential treatment by institutionalizing the Russian

[50] Diener 2004
[51] Smith 1996
[52] Szporluk 2015
[53] Diener 2004
[54] Sanders 2016

language, ethnic Kazakhs and their language were consistently prioritized to the detriment of the German diaspora, hurting their educational and economic opportunities in the process.

Aside from Kazakhstan's language policies which demoted the ethnically neutral Russian below Kazakh, ethnic Kazakhs were elevated in other subtle, yet authoritarian ways. Since before independence[55], Nazarbayev ruled Kazakhstan as a dictator[56], holding onto power after independence and for decades after. This institutional power allowed Nazarbayev to forcefully create a Kazakh nation-state through methods not available to democratic cases such as Poland[57]. For instance, he gerrymandered every oblast to ensure a local Kazakh majority[58] and replaced all pro-autonomy, Russian governors with loyalist ethnic Kazakhs[59]. Contrary to what happened within the politically decentralized Russia and politically powerful Polish German diaspora, these authoritarian policies destroyed any attempts at German political power or autonomy, leaving them completely at the whims of an anti-autonomy Kazakh majority in local politics and vulnerable to subsequent Kazakhization. This anti-autonomy conviction was by no means subtle either, as unlike the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan legally forbade the creation of any ethnically defined autonomous districts[60]. Together, these centralizing policies made almost any elevation of the German language to protect it impossible, offering no institutional protections for the German diaspora beyond the Russian language, conclusively destroying any hopes for German representation and furthering feelings of systemic discrimination.

[55] Smith 1996
[56] Freedom House Index
[57] Freedom House Index
[58] Diener 2004
[59] Sanders 2016
[60] Diener 2004

The Two-sided Nature of Kazakh Nationalism

While the gradual creation of a Kazakh nation-state was politically simple, a Kazakh national identity to accompany it still needed to be formed. In this endeavor, Nazarbayev was moderate, refusing to cooperate with both the Russophillic socialists and Kazakh nationalists[61]. Instead, he rhetorically encouraged civic nationalism and an inclusive Kazakh identity[62]. In practice however, this identity is multifaceted. By "nationalizing" social space, Nazarbayev attempted to consolidate social and political control around ethnic Kazakhs and their culture; on the other hand, Kazakhstan was simultaneously elevated as the national homeland of all peoples, emphasizing the various ethnic communities that live within[63]. This dichotomy is clearest when using hyphens, as the former emphasizes belonging to a Kazakh nation, being strongest among elite and urban Kazakhs (German-Kazakh), the latter emphasizes ethnic identity and is much more common amongst Kazakhstan's rural minorities (Kazakh-German). Kazakhstan's dual nationalism is therefore crucial when analyzing migratory pressures, as though Kazakh nationalism appears relatively accommodating coming from the government, rural Kazakhs' interpretation of the same nationalism was different in practice, alienating Germans further.

To elaborate upon these differing interpretations, the government attempted to subtly assimilate the host state's minorities into an inclusive "Kazakh" identity, placing the nation as an ethnic homeland for all. These efforts, though they advantaged ethnic Kazakhs and isolated ethnic Germans, made significant room for the German diaspora through the Russian language, encouraging emigration via disenfranchisement but mitigating the worst of the effects. On the other hand, Kazakh nationalism among the populace rather than the governing elite emphasized ethnic differences, separating the German diaspora from the ethnic Kazakh core. Because of this

[61] Smith 1996
[62] Diener 2004
[63] Diener 2004but

tendency, the discriminatory and emigration-inducing effects of Kazakh nationalism were much more "popular"[64], resulting in individual-level discrimination by bureaucrats and the German diaspora being blamed by Kazakh nationalists for economic woes[65]. Together, while the Kazakh state takes some of the blame for the German diaspora's disenfranchisement, popular nativism and Kazakh nationalism drove anti-German discrimination and the resulting emigration far more.

Kazakh nationalism's two-sided nature is largely based on Soviet concepts of nationality. These concepts encourage ethnic diversity and identification, as only by preserving the "unity of peoples" can the "friendship of peoples" be assured[66]; in plain terms, the public display of minority culture fosters mutual recognition and interethnic harmony. In practice, festivities and cultural celebrations take place on Kazakh holidays, "lifting up" minorities and protecting their cultures whilst simultaneously diminishing the importance of ethnic identity, effectively transforming minority NGOs from potential political groups into cultural outlets[67]. This practice effectively seeks to elevate Kazakhs by propagating Kazakh elite nationalism (German-Kazakh rather than Kazakh-German) as the nation's primary identity, allowing Germans to be part of a Kazakh nation so long as they accept a secondary role.

While ethnic Germans were welcome as a second-class ethnicity in Kazakhstan, Soviet nationalism is critically centered around ethnicity and language, wherein one's "homeland" is not a state, but rather a locality based on "territorialization" within a location[68], echoing the German diaspora's belief in *Heimat* over loyalty to a home or host state. This same nationalism structure limits any commitments of the German diaspora to Kazakhstan above cultural connections such as ethnicity, language, and locality, raising diasporic nationalism and the interpretation of such

[64] Szporluk 2015
[65] Diener 2004
[66] Sanders 2016
[67] Sanders 2016
[68] Diener 2004

cultural factors as key explainers of emigration, driving us to explore popular belief in a local *Heimat* within Kazakhstan or myth of return back to Germany. In this way, if ethnic Germans do not perceive any local *Heimat* within Kazakhstan, then ethnic stratification within Kazakhstan combined with popular discrimination and Soviet nationalism within the host state would foster identification amongst the German diaspora with one's German ethnicity and language, driving emigration to Germany. However, the centrality of ethnicity and language amongst the ethnically mixed and Russophone German diaspora in Kazakhstan[69] poses further questions about the minority's continued Russification, as Russian parentage and/or Russian language proficiency could drive emigration to and identification with Russia rather than Germany.

The last facet of host state nationalism and national identity comes from religion, in which religion was not a key motivator for German emigration. As a product of Kazakhstan's modernization, urbanization, and globalization, religious indifference is largely prevalent[70]. While the circumcision of boys, Muslim funeral customs, and social identification as Muslims are still widely practiced, observance of the Quran is historically low and gender relations are conspicuously equal. Nazarbaev's creation of the Spiritual Directorate of Kazakhstan in 1990 put Islam further under the control of the state, as seen in secular Turkey, allowing Nazarbayev to better enact a policy of religious freedom[71]. Furthermore, Kazakhstan makes no mention of Islam in its constitution, nor does it legally recognize any Muslim holidays or religious political parties[72]. These practices mean that not only is religious fundamentalism and violence a nonfactor in Kazakhstan, but religious discrimination against Christian Germans, at least on an official level, is very unlikely to be a factor for emigration.

[69] Sanders 2016
[70] Smith 1996
[71] Smith 1996
[72] Szporluk 2015

The Economy in Diplomacy and Popular Nationalism

Though the nation's poor and agricultural economy motivated emigration, with over half of Kazakhstan's population living below the poverty line in 1992[73], Nazarbayev's diversification of the nation's markets away from Russia helped keep ethnic Germans in the host state. Kazakhstan's oil is extracted solely by Russian firms and their only pipelines lead to Russia[74], giving Russia massive leverage over the nation. In response, Kazakhstan sought substantial foreign investments in Kazakh industry, even to the extent that he was criticized for ignoring domestic issues[75]. This foreign policy catered to the audience of Kazakh diplomacy, wherein German investments, totalling around 92.5 million marks into medium-sized German businesses[76], have yielded significant influence in the host state by encouraging secular laws and political parties in exchange for further investments[77]. This influence is notably only possible due to existing secular and reformist political will in Kazakhstan, but still marks a victory for German influence and minority protections. This victory is however tainted, as the amount of investments in Kazakhstan was much lower than Nazarbayev hoped[78], suggesting that Kazakhstan was willing to reform further if Germany continued to invest: an opportunity to increase minority protections that Germany did not take.

While German investments secured limited minority protections, they accidentally spurred counterproductive interethnic conflict. They raised fears by the German diaspora that they would be targeted due to their preferential treatment by Germany[79]. This fear was further amplified by economic recession in Kazakhstan, as anti-foreigner nativism amongst the host

[73] Smith 1996
[74] Szporluk 2015
[75] Smith 1996
[76] Diener 2004
[77] Szporluk 2015
[78] Szporluk 2015
[79] Diener 2004

state's population became increasingly widespread, blaming foreign diasporas, including Germans, for the decline[80] and dramatically increasing emigration rates among these minorities[81]. The relationship between nativism and emigration is further clarified by a 1991 survey, finding that when comparing Central Asian states, states whose populations believed economic-motivated interethnic conflict would soon intensify were significantly more likely to believe that minority exodus would follow[82]. This hostile trend had two possible reactions by the German diaspora: either nationalist members of the diaspora become more inclined to emigrate to the home state (Germany) or entrenched members, motivated by a local *Heimat*, become more likely to call for autonomy to protect themselves[83]. Because Kazakh law opposes any form of ethnic autonomy[84], as economic pressures rose in the early 1990s, host state nationalist pressures rose in turn, escalating at times to violence and motivating further emigration with no recourse for German autonomy. These economic and social pressures must thus be understood as a pair, wherein economic downturn and diaspora emigration influence each other, resulting in popular host state nationalism and nativism, repeating the process further.

The German Diaspora in Kazakhstan

The German diaspora in Kazakhstan is principally defined by two things: deportation and Russification. Following the deportation of Germans to Siberia and Kazakhstan in the 1940s, the German diasporas were meant to be isolated and unable to resist Rissification, a move that Germans largely accepted with little resistance. The tiny limit of 200kg of luggage per deported German family further points to the genocidal nature of this act, causing the German diaspora in

[80] Diener 2004
[81] Szporluk 2015
[82] Szporluk 2015
[83] Szporluk 2015
[84] Diener 2004

Kazakhstan to feel perpetually like a "punished people" and preventing their integration into Kazakh society[85]. It is this historical trauma, combined with nativist pressures, that make the public exercise of the German language effectively impossible[86]. As a result, the ethnically mixed, Russophone German diaspora often publicly identify as Russians first, only dropping this facade when realizing they are in the presence of another German. This practice raises critical questions about how Russified the German diaspora in Kazakhstan is, opening the possibility of increasing identification with Russia rather than Germany due to host state nationalism.

Kazakh society saw Europeans and Central Asians deeply segregated, between Russian speakers and Kazakh speakers[87], with the two groups interacting relatively rarely. As a result, "mixed" ethnic marriages only compromised ~7.5% of all marriages, and of these marriages, the vast majority were between different Turkic peoples rather than between Europeans and Turkics[88]. This social distance means that very few Germans experience the same level of ethnic fluidity with Kazakhs that the diaspora does with Russians, firmly separating "Kazakh" and "European" identities. On the other hand, ethnic Germans marry other Germans at a rate roughly equal to Russians[89], resulting in a massive proportion of ethnic Germans being of mixed parentage. While Kazakh family would be a significant incentive for ethnic Germans to remain in Kazakhstan[90], the lack of these mixed relationships further isolates the German diaspora from wider Kazakh society, making identification with and emigration to either Germany or Russia in accordance with familial connections much more likely[91] than remaining in the host state.

[85] Diener 2004
[86] Diener 2004
[87] Sanders 2016
[88] Smith 1996
[89] Sanders 2016
[90] Sanders 2016
[91] Sanders 2016

Addressing the German diaspora's greatest motivators of emigration, according to initial surveys, 89% of surveyed Germans expect interethnic relations to worsen, blaming nationalists, spiteful bureaucrats, and language/citizenship laws for discrimination[92]. Another survey found that while 75% of ethnic Germans noticed an increase in cultural awareness since independence, 73% believed that the economic situation had worsened and 69% believed that discrimination had increased[93]. A different study from 1994 surveyed ethnic Germans who emigrated from Kazakhstan and found similar results, with the largest group, 49% of respondents, stating that they would have stayed if the economic situation had improved. This survey was similarly sympathetic to political motivations: 27% said they would stay if discrimination ended, 23% responded that they required legal permittance of dual citizenship to stay, 18% of respondents said that the move away from the Russian language and towards Kazakh caused them to leave, and only 3% of respondents would have left no matter what[94]. These surveys collectively highlight that a combination of economic downturn, hostile host state nationalism, and limited minority rights protections drove ethnic German emigration, with almost none being inevitable.

In line with Kazakhstan's Soviet emphasis on locality[95], Kazakh Germans first fought to protect their culture by institutionalizing a local *Heimat* as an autonomous republic. In 1997, the Council of Germans of Kazakhstan suggested consolidating Kazakhstan's Germans into a small area, which would then be given autonomy, independence, or to Germany itself in order to aid German policies counteracting emigration[96]. Owing to the geographic dispersal of the minority, the push for autonomy within Kazakhstan was conspicuously weak, crippling German aid efforts by dispersing them across a large area and preventing German consolidation in the host state.

[92] Diener 2004
[93] Diener 2004
[94] Diener 2004
[95] Sanders 2016
[96] Diener 2004

Home State Policy in Kazakhstan

Alongside the aforementioned economic aid, German support was primarily cultural in nature, sponsoring cultural institutions across host states. The home state sponsored "German Houses" and *Landsmannschaften* (Local Societies) across each host state, which acted as a social network for participating Germans and offered free language courses in addition to affordable language camps[97]. These houses focussed on educating children and encouraging cultural activities, including holiday celebrations, while serving as an important distribution source for German aid; humanitarian aid was primarily given to the elderly based on German ancestry, language proficiency, discrimination suffered resulting from nationality, and cultural way of living. This aid was occasionally open to other ethnic groups, but an existing relationship with the house was needed in all cases[98], locking aid from Germany behind an association with the home state. These NGOs were one of the German Organization for Technical Cooperation's (GTZ) main channels to conduct official policy, prioritizing communal gathering places, the education of children, and humanitarian assistance to reduce emigration[99]. The Kazakh government cooperated with these German objectives, establishing a German-Kazakh conference in 1992, which had decreased emigration by 1997[100], increasing broadcasting time for German television programs in Almaty, German language education in public schools, and authorizing German as an official language in "areas of compact settlement"[101]. These policies demonstrate that the German and Kazakh governments both sought to reduce German emigration, though the states' focus on language education was potentially counterproductive without political change.

[97] Sanders 2016
[98] Sanders 2016
[99] Sanders 2016
[100] Wolff 2002
[101] Schreiner 1994

While linguistic preservation is critical to cultural revival, Germany's emphasis on it above economic wellbeing and political reform encouraged more diaspora emigration than retention in the home state. In order for German diasporas to claim citizenship as a *Spätaussiedler* (Late Resettler), emigrants had prove "Germanness" through ancestry records and day-to-day culture while providing a person willing to vouch for your claim[102]. Though this process was initially incredibly easy for migrants to gain entry, it was later restricted in 1996, as Germany added an additional German language test[103]. While this language test was a useful mechanism for Germany to support migrant integration, its effect on the use of German in Kazakhstan and emigration of the German diaspora there were counterproductive. Without better addressing minority rights deficiencies in the host state, such as language and citizenship laws, or the diaspora's economic conditions, critical push factors driving emigration remained; yet by sealing Germanness behind linguistic ability rather than ancestral ties, the German language became a performative function to leave the host state rather than a step towards cultural revival. Had host state push factors been better addressed, ethnic Germans would have been less likely to leave even with German proficiency, maintaining the language as a cultural, rather than legal, element. German aid policies and the following language regulations backfired so badly that even the head of the GTZ for Central Asia admitted German policy encouraged Kazakh Germans to emigrate rather than remain in the host state[104].

Beyond the linguistic consequences of German regulations, language laws further hampered much of the diaspora's identification with the German home state, encouraging the diaspora to look elsewhere for identity. While previous aid from the German state and familial connections in Germany had "re-territorialized" the diaspora in Kazakhstan towards Germany

[102] Sanders 2016
[103] Universität Oldenburg
[104] Sanders 2016

and away from Kazakhstan[105], the 1996 language law destroyed much of this progress. The Kazakh German diaspora saw language entirely differently than the homestate; while language was an integral part of German identity in the home state, Germanness was inherited by Kazakh Germans rather than taught, causing Kazakh Germans to feel no less German for failing the law's language test[106]. Though it didn't challenge Kazakh Germans' identity as Germans, it did make the diaspora call the home state's position as a German homeland and arbiter of German identity into question, severing the home state from its diaspora in Kazakhstan. This process effectively killed the myth of return to Germany in Kazakhstan, forcefully reducing emigration to Germany while encouraging another avenue of emigration for the diaspora: to Russia[107].

Conclusions

Though Kazakhstan was an "expected" case, multiple factors informed the diaspora's emigration patterns. First and foremost, while host state nationalism was accommodating to Germans through language laws, its interpretation by the ethnic Kazakh majority was different[108], leading to a positive cycle between economic decline and anti-German nativism. Secondly, the failure of the Kazakh host state to properly accommodate their German diaspora, especially through an autonomous republic, prevented the development of a new *Heimat* and territorialization within Kazakhstan[109]. Lastly, while German investments were lower than expected[110], forgoing potential economic advancements and minority protections within Kazakhstan, they nonetheless fostered "re-territorialization" and identification with the German

[105] Sanders 2016
[106] Sanders 2016
[107] Sanders 2016
[108] Szporluk 2015
[109] Diener 2004
[110] Szporluk 2015

home state[111]. These cultural connections, without substantive improvements in the diaspora's socio-economic situation, worked against Germany's aims, only encouraging the myth of return and emigration to the home state. When Germany narrowed their definition of "German" by language, tightening home state nationalism, the 1996 language laws only served to distance Germany from its Kazakh diaspora, ultimately resulting in Kazakh German emigration to Russia rather than remaining within their host state. While political and economic factors clearly tell part of the story, the interactions between home and host state policies influence not only if ethnic Germans emigrate, but also where they choose to go and which cultural beliefs justify it.

[111] Sanders 2016

Russia: A Positive Outlier

Compared to Kazakhstan, Russia saw a statistically above average rate of emigration. In this case, the predominant explanatory event for disproportionate German emigration stems from the *Wiedergeburt* (Rebirth) movement, an NGO dedicated to the advancement of German rights and geographic autonomy, and its efforts to reestablish the Volga German Republic in Russia. Surrounding this event, host nation and diaspora nationalisms, as well as host nation and home nations political pressures, all influenced the success of *Wiedergeburt*, ultimately causing the exodus of Russia's German diaspora. During *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, Mikhail Gorbachev initially promised "rehabilitate" the repressed peoples of Stalin and reestablish the Volga German Republic: a promise later affirmed by Boris Yeltsin[112]. Yet despite this initial windfall, diplomacy from the German home state would fail and the Russian host state would never follow through on their promises to German autonomy. This betrayal of institutional support for the German diaspora led to a rapid feeling of abandonment spreading throughout the German community and caused major German NGOs to change their strategies, opting for the exodus of the German diaspora in Russia back to Germany[113]. This policy failure in the host state was a product of not only ineffective diplomacy on the part of Germany, but political chaos in Russia during the Constitutional Crisis of the early 1990s and Yeltstin's grab for power, where Germans acted as a pawn in a larger game between Russia and its territories[114] abandoning the German diaspora when they were no longer politically useful. Given these factors, we begin by detailing the *Wiedergeburt* movement and its rise to prominence, moving then to analyze each facet of conflicting nationalism and political motivations present amongst the host state, home state, and German diaspora and how these factors influenced *Wiedergeburt* and German emigration.

[112] Schmemann 1989
[113] Warkentin 1992; Schmaltz 1998; Schmemann 1989)
[114] Szporluk 2015

A Volga German State?

Contrary to the brutal repression facing Soviet Germans throughout the Cold War, *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* gave Germans good cause to be hopeful. As part of Gorbachev's promise to "avenge the victims of Stalinism", he committed to restoring the Volga German Republic: a relic of the 1920s designed to grant Soviet-German autonomy[115] This policy platform was later supported by Boris Yeltsin[116]. This step was part of a wider push not only from the Russian German diaspora and German government, but from almost all ethnic groups in Russia in an effort to "take as much autonomy as you can swallow"[117]. However, while Autonomous Republics were able to negotiate new Federal Treaties to gain additional autonomy, Germans were never given such autonomy, despite having cultural links to a historic *Heimat* on the Volga.

The push for a Volga Republic was a product of more than just political realism to protect the German diaspora and its language and culture, but was rather a moral demand to regain a land of near mythical cultural importance to Soviet Germans; thus, in order for Gorbachev to truly avenge Stalinism, he must avenge its principal victims: the Germans[118]. The *Wiedergeburt* movement was the largest German minority organization in the USSR, numbering 200,000+ members in 1993. This movement was however incredibly fragmented in direction, especially without a common territory or government to organize, leaving it torn between pursuing autonomy, exodus, or accommodation[119]. The Russian government was hesitant towards the movement from the beginning, severely stunting its potential due to lack of political will for reform in Russia, yet the group did see some surface level support from Moscow. Not only did the Supreme Soviet "recommend" the Volga Republic in October 1989, but a conference was

[115] Wolff 2002; Schreiner 1994
[116] Schreiner 1994
[117] Szporluk 2015, p. 30
[118] Warkentin 1992
[119] Schmaltz 1998

planned for 1990 between *Wiedergeburt* and the federal government to reach a sustainable compromise[120]. Leading up to the conference, it was delayed until March 1991 and eventually suspended indefinitely by the anti-autonomy Soviet official leading negotiations, buying more time to diminish German leverage through ongoing mass German emigration. After sufficient Germans had fled Russia, from this advantageous positions, the Soviet government only offered limited, extraterritorial "associations" that did not satisfy German leaders, causing *Wiedergeburt* and the Federal Government to suspend cooperation with each other.

In response to a breakdown of relations between the radical faction of *Wiedergeburt* and Moscow, the moderate and radical factions of *Wiedergeburt* split, weakening the German position significantly. Moderates pursued cooperation with Russia and Kazakhstan in May 1991, while the radicals petitioned Yeltsin and Germany for support. Seeing an opportunity for political support, Yeltsin reaffirmed Gorbachev's commitment to the Volga Republic in November 1991, which was further cemented on July 10, 1992, when Germany and Russia signed a mutual agreement to economically and culturally support the German diaspora in Russia and establish an Autonomous Volga Republic around Saratov[121]. While this solution was preferred by both Germany and Yeltsin, allowing Germany to institutionalize German rights in Russia and Yeltsin to gain diaspora support for his reforms, local Russian resistance in the German allocated territories against the Volga Republic was significant. Local Russians, who made up a large majority in the proposed Autonomous Republic, protested en masse. Fearing further backlash and loss of popular support, Yeltsin responded by offering only poor, polluted land to the German diaspora[122], indefinitely stalling the recreation of the Volga Republic and ruining hopes among both the German government and diaspora about the Autonomous Republic's future.

[120] Schmaltz 1998
[121] Schmaltz 1998; Schreiner 1994
[122] Schmaltz 1998

While German leaders pleaded for alternative settlements in other German *Heimats*, such as autonomy in modern Kaliningrad[123], these efforts were ultimately doomed to fail due to weak political motivations for Yeltsin to establish German autonomy, opting instead to court existing minority leaders, and strong popular resistance via Russian nationalism. As a result, radical leader Heinrich Groth retired in 1993, much to Germany's relief, and the push for German autonomy in Russia officially died, causing *Wiedergeburt* to officially pursue exodus instead[124]. This policy shift caused a comparatively larger call for emigration in Russia than in other states, as while autonomy was seldom considered in Kazakhstan, making German factions united in their limited goals, *Wiedergeburt*'s numerical strength, cultural importance of the Volga *Heimat* to Russian Germans, and feeling of abandonment by the Russian government all played crucial roles in driving German emigration, driving a wedge between Russia and its German diaspora.

Russkii and Rossiiskii: Host State Nationalism

The independence of Russia led to a massive demographic shift, in which only 82% of Russia were ethnically Russian and the remaining 18% of Russia comprised over 180 different nationalities[125], with only around 0.5% being ethnic Germans[126]. Thus, while Russia is far from homogenous, ethnic Russians hold a much more dominant position over their many, weaker minorities, giving the host state much less incentives than in Kazakhstan to enact substantive, pro-minority reforms such as cultural support, co-official language laws, or political autonomy.

Furthermore, the creation of the Russian Federation in 1992 founded a titular Russian state: a state that was unambiguously Russian. Before this point, the USSR attempted, at least in

[123] Warkentin 1992
[124] Schmaltz 1998
[125] Smith 1996
[126] USSR 1992

name, to be ethnically neutral, denoting a second type of Russian nationalism distinct from the titular Russian Federation. These two forms of nationalism exemplified by modern Russia and the USSR are best known in Russian as *russkii* and *rossiiskii*; wherein the former denotes ethnic Russians, the latter refers more so to citizens of Russia, broadening the definition of "Russian" significantly[127]. With this context, the founding of the Russian Federation represents a shift towards *russkii* nationalism, emphasizing ethnic Russians as the core of the state, rather than the traditional *rossiiskii* nationalism of the Soviet Union and later Kazakhstan. However, the shift towards *russkii* nationalism was neither immediate nor complete, as while Yeltsin invoked nationalism for political gain, he was careful to emphasize *rossiiskii* nationalism whenever possible[128]. In practice then, this two-sided civic and ethnic nationalism makes Russian nationalism similar to Kazakh nationalism, in which ethnic Russians citizens are prioritized, yet the state takes caution to expand the definition of "Russian" whenever possible so as not to exclude minorities. Despite this caution, while Germans are by no means oppressed under this system, ethnic states like Russia still have strong incentives to consolidate society around ethnic Russians and their culture[129], threatening the culture of the far weaker Russian German diaspora.

While Russification was a powerful tool against Russophone Germans, the propagation of Russian Orthodox Christianity, by far the most influential religion in Russia, must be analyzed relating to the Lutheran and Mennonite Germans[130]. Today, 63% of Russians identify as Orthodox Christian, while 26% are nonreligious and 7% Muslim[131]. While this frequency suggests that Orthodoxy is key to Russian culture, the growth of other religions suggests otherwise. In 1985, there were only 3 Orthodox churches registered in the USSR due to Soviet

[127] Smith 1996
[128] Smith 1996
[129] Diener 2004
[130] Refworld 2018
[131] U.S. Department of State

repression, and this number rose to 2,185 in 1989[132]. Roughly proportional to this number by population, the number of Mosques rose to 340 in 1989[133], suggesting that Russian Orthodoxy is not uniquely important to ethnic Russians over other cultures. With that being said, Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are recognized as the traditional faiths of Russia, being afforded special privileges whilst all other religions, including other Christians like Lutherans and Mennonites, are subject to harsher restrictions[134]. Taken together, though the German diaspora faces religious restrictions in Russia that ethnic Russians and other minorities are not subject to, religion is seldom a political weapon or used to discriminate against Germans, forming a possible, but weak explanation of German emigration.

Relative to religiosity, Russian political culture shifted dramatically post-independence between "Westernizer" and "Slavophile" factions. Both factions agree that there is a "uniquely Russian way" in the world; even the Westernizing Yeltsin never positioned Russia as a part of the West, instead encouraging Russia to learn from it[135]. Similarly, nationalist Slavophiles distrusted the West and focussed on the perceived threat of Western NGOs. Having influenced Yeltsin's foreign policy in the early 90s[136], nationalists proved their ability to damage German NGO and home state interests. Culturally, a Russians agree that the "land" of Russia has near-religious significance, similar to the German *Heimat*, where Russians desire to "touch one's land with one's own hands"[137]. These two elements, that of a Russian "way" and soil, act as key host state nationalist motivators for the public to reject the creation of a Volga German state. Russian distrust of the West made it uniquely resilient to German pressure, and in the same vein, the cultural sanctity of Russian soil to the Russian people incited protest and an exercise of Russian

[132] Smith 1996
[133] Goble 2022
[134] Evason 2017
[135] Szporluk 2015
[136] Szporluk 2015
[137] Szporluk 2015, p. 81

nationalism against Yeltstin. In the end, while the emphasis on *rossiiskii* nationalism makes Russia similar to Kazakhstan, its distrust in the West and cultural emphasis on its land makes it stand out as especially resistant to the German diaspora and government's push for autonomy, denying the German diaspora its geographic autonomy and *Heimat*.

Russification and Constitutional Crisis: Host State Policy

Just as in Kazakhstan, the independence of a titular Russian state led to increased assimilation and an effort to "nationalize" social space for ethnic Russian. However unlike Kazakhstan, Russification was far stronger due to Russians' comparative advantage as a dominant majority, wherein no minority nor collection of peoples were powerful enough to challenge host state power. As a result, even in officially bilingual (Russian/German) *rayons* (districts), local ethnic German newspapers only offered printings in Russian, suggesting that German was almost entirely dead as a home language, even amongst the diaspora living in German-dominated settlements[138]. In practice however, this assimilating host state nationalism does not significantly distinguish Russia from Kazakhstan. In both Russia and Kazakhstan, the German minority were Russophones, and though Kazakh assimilation was weaker due to a stronger Russian minority, this process only resulted in further privileges being given to Russophones[139]. As a result, both the powerful Russification in Russia and the Russophone concessions in Kazakhstan enticed Germans to lean into Russian or Russo-German identities, offering no privileges to the German language or culture nor protections from this assimilation.

Speaking on policy, Russia could have slowed this assimilation through one of its over a dozen ethnic autonomous zones. Russia is host to 21 Autonomous Republics which attempt to

[138] Warkentin 1992
[139] Smith 1996

recreate an ethnic homeland for their titular nationalities. These republics comprise 28.6% of Russia's land and 15.2% of its population, primarily across rural Siberia, while maintaining many of the key features of a nation, including a flag, anthem and constitution[140]. Only in 5 of the 21 republics did the titular minority make up a majority of the population, allowing ethnic Russians to hinder the Republic's efforts to protect their titular nationality's culture[141]. Ethnic Germans, while possessing a traditional *Heimat* along the Volga[142], were left out of this surface-level autonomy, with even the proposed Volga Republic containing only 5% of Russian Germans[143], offering them no institutional protections against Russification.

Russian politics, for their tremendous instability, become vital to contextualize Yeltsin's decisions and their resulting German emigration. Throughout the 90s, decentralization towards Autonomous Republics became a pawn in the Russian Constitutional Crisis between Yeltstin and the former Soviet parliament[144], granting Germans an opportunity to gain geographic autonomy. In April 1990, the Union Law on the Delimitation of Powers Between the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation implied that all Autonomous Republics had a right to leave the USSR: a law that Yeltsin supported to win support from Republic leaders. Almost all Republics subsequently declared sovereignty, placing their law above Russian law and causing a Constitutional Crisis[145]. Due to unclear delineation of federal and local powers, Yeltstin tried several times to compose a new constitution, with concessions being given to most Republics by March 1992 in exchange for support, just four months before the Russo-German declaration in favor of the Volga Republic. This environment explains why Russia would initially promise to

[140] Szporluk 2015
[141] Szporluk 2015
[142] Schreiner 1994
[143] Schmaltz 1998
[144] Szporluk 2015
[145] Szporluk 2015

recreate a Volga Republic, as Yeltsin wanted the German diaspora to support his constitution, yet as the crisis resolved, Germans held increasingly little political relevance.

The crisis escalated quickly in late 1993, as negotiations between the parliament and Republic leaders stalled. While Yeltsin had aggressively courted local leaders, with all drafts of his constitution being incredibly kind to their autonomy, he was completely unable to circumvent the hostile parliament, and as a result, the Republics gave Yeltsin their tacit support to dissolve parliament in September 1993[146]. This radical action significantly affected public opinion among voters and the German diaspora. For instance, a survey taken just before the December 12, 1993 elections found that 7% of respondents feared dictatorship, 14% believed democracy would flourish, 17% thought the status quo would endure, 20% could not tell, and 42% predicted the loss of order and further anarchy[147]. The 42% consensus on anarchy has the biggest impact on ethnic Germans, as it mirrors the situation in Kazakhstan, in which perceived future anarchy was highly correlated with ethnic Germans fleeing[148]. This fear of anarchy further explains why German emigration increased through 1993 going into 1995[149], as 1992 German immigration quotas delayed emigration flows[150] resulting from the crisis and abandonment of the Volga Republic across the following years until the 1996 language laws. In the end, the Constitutional Crisis in Russia, while serving as an opportunity to gain German autonomy, resulted in disproportionate German emigration, as the diaspora became a political pawn of Yeltsin and were scared into emigration by political instability.

[146] Szporluk 2015
[147] Smith 1996
[148] Smith 1996
[149] Worbs 2013
[150] Sanders 2016

Home State Nationalism

Due to the chronology of the *Wiedergeburt* movement, being especially prominent in the early 1990s until 1993, restrictive German nationalism, exemplified by the 1996 migration language law, is largely not relevant in this case. While this same law affected Russian German diasporas in much the same way they did Russophone Kazakh Germans, encouraging further identification with Russia in host states, German policy in Russia was much more the product of *Realpolitik* than it was an effort to broaden or restrict "Germanness" from its diaspora in Russia.

Aid and Abandonment: Home State Policy

Germany preferred the establishment of a Volga Republic in Russia to stymie diaspora emigration[151], yet they balked when Russia resisted. An initial bilateral treaty was signed in November 1990, pledging greater mutual support and German language learning opportunities for the German diaspora in Russia[152]. Following this warming of relations was a string of additional declarations with Germany in July of 1992, committing Russia to reestablishing German autonomy along the Volga. Despite this promise to the German diaspora, Russia would backtrack, telling ethnic Russians living in the would-be Republic that there would never be a Volga German Republic in Saratov[153]. Despite German preferences, the home state would acquiesce to the policy shift, allowing Russia to abandon its German diaspora and their *Heimat*. This was due to the close economic and energy ties between Germany and Russia[154], as Berlin wanted to maintain close commercial ties with Russia and was unwilling to support potentially hostile actions that would inhibit Russian state sovereignty (i.e. reestablishing the Volga

[151] Szporluk 2015
[152]Centre Du Droit de l'art 1990
[153] Schmaltz 1998
[154] Lontay 2024

Republic). Additionally, the Germany was optimistic about their economic and cultural programs sponsored in Russia, believing that extra-territorial autonomy would be sufficient to protect its diaspora[155]. This entirely different goal to *Wiedergeburt* evidences Germany and Russia's preference to determine host state minority policy on a bilateral, governmental level[156], sidelining an incredibly powerful German NGO in the process. This diplomatic mistake, while maintaining close Russo-German ties, would forgo geographic autonomy for the German diaspora and distance home state interests from that of the diaspora in Russia.

Russia, while not willing to create German autonomy, was surprisingly forthcoming in its economic support for its German diaspora. The host state allocated greater land along to Volga to Germans, budgeted funds to establish new German settlements, coordinated Russo-German governmental support for Russian Germans, broadcasted German-language radio in Saratov, and created residential areas for Russian Germans in cities like Novosibirsk[157]. Yeltstin further signed a Russian-German Cultural Agreement with Germany, supporting German language education, and created a national fund for "Germans in Russia" in December 1992[158]. While these efforts were not insignificant, they are hampered by the significant geographic dispersal of the diaspora in Russia, only targeting small centers like Saratov and Novosibirsk; for reference, Saratov, the historic center of Russian Germans, only contained around 5% of Soviet Germans[159] and Novosibirsk far less, minimizing the effects of host state Russian policy.

Though Germany offered only limited support to the Volga Republic, it sponsored relatively extensive cultural and economic assistance programs targeting German diasporas throughout Russia. Germany subsidized the construction of housing and farms and supported

[155] Schmaltz 1998
[156] Schmaltz 1998
[157] Schreiner 1994
[158] Schreiner 1994
[159] Schmaltz 1998

small businesses, education, and co-operative agricultural associations in German-dominated areas. Furthermore, they provided significant medical, subsistence, and hospital supplies to meet the diaspora's basic needs while establishing social and academic facilities to assist in organizational efforts and act as both cultural and linguistic workshops. All of these efforts were funded by over 500 million Deutschmarks since 1990 (as of 1994)[160]. Though this support appears extensive, it does not significantly differentiate Russia nor address any unique causes of diaspora emigration. While Russian and German government aid were beneficial to the diaspora and discouraged German emigration, it was a temporary solution to German emigration while the host state addressed deeper, structural problems. This strategy became counterintuitive however once Germany and Russia reneged on the Volga German Republic, forgoing institutional reforms in the Russian host state while encouraging diaspora identification with Germany[161]. Thus, home and host state aid served much the same purpose in Russia as it did in Kazakhstan: to provide for the diaspora's basic needs while German language laws separated Russified ethnic Germans to stay in the host state from culturally similar Germans for the home state.

From Heimat to Exodus: Diasporic Nationalism

Unlike in Kazakhstan, a local *Heimat* existed in Russia of near mythical importance to the German diaspora: that of the Volga[162]. As a result, the German diaspora, previously deported from their *Heimat*, initially fixated on recreating this Autonomous Republic, which would both secure institutional protections, such as government cultural and linguistic support, but also reconnect the Russian German diaspora to its ethnic homeland. The refusal of the Russian government to support such a policy however discredited Russia as a legitimate protector of

[160] Schreiner 1994
[161] Sanders 2016
[162] Schmaltz 1998

Germans' interests[163], with the act of breaking such a promise making this emigration pressure even more intense. As a consequence, host state policy did not dilute diasporic nationalism, rather it changed nationalist NGOs' message away from autonomy and *Heimat* and towards exodus. This process exemplifies the critical role of host state policy in shaping diasporic nationalism, as well as the role of this latter nationalism in driving the decision to remain or emigrate, suggesting that though remaining in host states' *Heimats* is preferable to German diasporas, the myth of return is a powerful response to hostile host state policy.

Conclusions

While many of the same Russification pressures affected the German diaspora in Russia as in Kazakhstan, being caused this time by the relative demographic strength of Russians rather than the demographic weakness of Kazakhs, Russia stands out from other cases in its political weaponization, and later abandonment, of German diasporic nationalism. By tying the reestablishment of a German *Heimat* and geographic autonomy to Yeltsin's political objectives, the German diaspora became easy to discard once it no longer served a political purpose. Furthermore, Germany's acquiescence to its diaspora's abandonment, due in large part to the importance of Russo-German diplomatic ties, and its undermining of *Wiedergeburt* only enabled the Russian host state to move against its German diaspora. Taken together, the refusal of both the home and host state to support German NGOs prevented any attempts at institutional reforms within Russia to protect Volga German language, culture, and *Heimat*. These policies thus changed the predominant nationalist narrative amongst the German diaspora away from a return to its *Heimat* along the Volga, urging Germans to remain in Russia, and towards large-scale migration to Germany, best explaining the disproportionate emigration of Germans from Russia.

[163] Diener 2004

Poland: A Negative Outlier

While Poland has been an unparalleled success story from the post-Communist world, the country's economic and political success alone does not explain its disproportionately low levels of German emigration. To explain this variation, two primary factors separate Poland from other cases. First of all, the geographic concentration of the diaspora in its local *Heimats* of Opole established powerful links between Germans and their homes in Poland not seen in any other test cases[164], proving the importance of diasporic nationalism and discouraging German emigration significantly. Secondly, German diplomatic closeness to Poland via the EU[165] gave the home state unparalleled leverage over Polish minority policy, emphasizing the importance of home and host state policies. Though Poland is host to strong cultural tensions between Poles and its comparatively small German diaspora[166], weak, if not contradictory, host nation nationalism dampened the impacts of Polish nativism on German emigration. Furthermore, the geographic concentration of Poland's Germans sets Poland apart from Kazakhstan and Russia, as their predominance within Opole allowed the German diaspora to project political power and institutionalize protections themselves independent of the home state.

A Polish Heimat: Host State Policy and Diasporic Nationalism

The Polish German diaspora, stemming from its geographic concentration in Opole, was afforded far more autonomy than in any other host state, constituting a decisive reason for low Polish German emigration. The first facet of this autonomy is political, resulting from the unique political power of the German diaspora. Starting in the 1991 parliamentary elections, a German minority organization, KWMN (the German Minority Electoral Committee) led by Henryk Kroll,

[164] Wolff 2002
[165] Wolff 2002
[166] Nelson 2009; Central Intelligence Agency

won seven seats of 460 in the Polish Sejm[167]. Despite this initial victory, rapidly dwindling enthusiasm for German NGOs depressed voter turnout among ethnic Germans, causing KWMN to lose five of their seven seats in the Sejm by 1997. This apathy was a product of host state failures to enact a Law on National Minorities[168], which would create official frameworks for the host state to regulate and protect minority groups, without which ethnic Germans continued to feel unsafe and unsupported. These feelings, while weakening the diaspora's political influence, did not destroy German political power in its entirety, as it persisted on the local level.

In the 1998 Polish local elections, a bill was introduced to merge the small Opole Voivodeship into the larger Upper Silesian Voivodeship. In effect, due to the concentration of Germans within Opole and dominance of Poles in Upper Silesia, this policy would remove almost all German influence over state-level politics. The Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland (VdG) emerged as the chief opponent to the bill, earning 29% seats in Opole's parliament and allowing the organization to enter government to defeat the bill[169]. Because of the salient nature of the bill, which directly affected the political representation of ethnic Germans, voter turnout was conspicuously high, offering the best clue as to the true geographic and demographic makeup of the Polish German diaspora. Based on the VdG's vote count, the German diaspora in Poland numbers around 400,000 as of 1998: a number more than double what the German government[170] suggests. Through these elections, we see that while political deficiencies in the host state damage German voter turnout, diaspora political participation and influence over salient issues is incredibly high, giving Polish Germans a unique resistance to hostile state policies and their associated emigration pressures.

[167] Wolff 2002
[168] Wolff 2002
[169] Wolff 2002
[170] Łodziński 1999; Wolff 2002; Worbs 2013

Other than the political dimension, where Polish Germans wielded considerable influence in Opole, an important cultural element influenced German emigration, turning Opole from a political stronghold to a cultural *Heimat*. Legal recognition of ethnic Germans in 1990[171] supplemented this process, in that as soon as legal barriers were removed, German NGOs emerged immediately, even in cities like Radom and Gdansk with tiny remaining German diasporas. Unlike *Wiedergeburt* in Russia, these German NGOs were incredibly organized, being led by a ten person national council, chaired by Friedrich Retrach, while being focussed on the preservation of the German language rather than dedicated German autonomy[172]. Not only did these comparatively limited goals make it easier to mobilize home and host state support, but the diaspora's geographic concentration primarily within Opole enabled policies to focus on maintaining only one German-dominated region. To this end, the German government and German NGOs sponsored German language press, television, and church services throughout German-dominated regions[173], making the day-to-day use of the German language easier and creating a large, distinctly German homeland in Poland not seen in dispersed German diasporas.

By sponsoring German cultural projects in historically German lands, Germany was able to reaffirm diasporic attachments to homelands such as Opole, supporting the belief in an immutable local *Heimat* in Poland. This notion of *Heimat* is deeply valued amongst the Polish German diaspora[174], being one of the most important factors determining whether German diasporas identified with their ethnic home, remaining in the host state, or felt their rightful home was elsewhere, returning to the home state. As such, while German policies encouraged identification with the home state and resulted in emigration in other cases, the prevalence of

[171] Wolff 2002
[172] Wolff 2002
[173] Wolff 2002
[174] Wolff 2002

German political power and reform in Poland addressed underlying migratory pressures, spawning a greater attachment to the diaspora's *Heimat* rather than a myth of return.

EU Accession as a Motivator: Home State Policy

Historically, Germany had encouraged the emigration of its diaspora in Poland due to cultural similarities and host state oppression[175], yet the fall of Communism in Poland granted Germany a key opportunity to revitalize its diaspora in Poland. Despite historically poor relations, German-Polish tensions continued to thaw with the German-Polish Treaty of November 14, 1990 and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly and Friendly Cooperation of June 17, 1991. These bilateral treaties offered German recognition of the Polish-German border, a historically contentious topic and key driver of interethnic tension[176], and reduced support for radical German NGOs advocating for a right of return to Poland and economic compensation for expulsion. In exchange, Poland recognized German unification, despite a plurality of Polish society opposing it[177], and officially recognized Poland's German diaspora[178], offering the German community minority protections and legalizing German NGOs and political parties. Beyond these stipulations, crucially, Germany agreed to become Poland's *de facto* ambassador to the EU[179], advocating for its accession: a prime foreign policy goal of Poland at the time[180].

This Polish foreign policy gave Germany much more influence over Polish minority policy than in any other host state. Germany held a veto towards Polish accession to the Union[181], letting it extract concessions from the host state in exchange for membership. This kind

[175] Wolff 2002
[176] Rydel 2022
[177] Reichardt 2022
[178] Wolff 2002
[179] Wolff 2002
[180] Rydel 2022
[181] Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood

of demand would not be unprecedented, as according to the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria detailing conditions for EU membership, respect for minority rights is clearly laid out as a condition for accession[182]. Compared to Russia, where Germany had a similar opportunity to sponsor reforms friendly to its diaspora, German economic reliance on Polish trade was far less[183], offering less risk for Germany to sponsor more expansive, comparatively difficult solutions in the host state.

As evidence of this leverage, German-Polish diplomacy throughout the 1990s resulted in notably more institutional protections for its German diaspora than in other host states. While German-Polish tensions persisted, struggling over differing interpretations of German diaspora expulsion and right of return[184], Germans became an increasingly protected class under Polish law. Beginning with the 1997 Polish constitution, the Polish nation and nationalism was officially redefined into civic terms, offering Germans an equal place in the nation. It further guaranteed the rights of national and ethnic minorities and forbid both racial discrimination and political organizations inciting racial hatred[185]. The phrasing of this definition marks a substantial improvement from the original, 1952 Communist Constitutions, as it makes a positive commitment to actively improve minority rights, the exercise of diaspora cultures, while forbidding policies aimed at minority assimilation[186]. Beyond this language, while Article 27 makes Polish the national language, it explicitly makes an exception for minority languages protected by international agreements[187]. Under such circumstances, large parts of Opole gradually established German as a co-official language to be used in local government[188]. As seen through the liberal 1997 Constitution, by utilizing Polish political will to join the EU, in

[182] EUR-Lex
[183] Reichardt 2022
[184] Reichardt 2022
[185] Kamusella
[186] Łodziński 1999
[187] Łodziński 1999
[188] Wendt 2017

which minority rights were a key condition for acceptance, Germany wielded more influence than seen in any other host state, resulting in far more legal protections for the German diaspora and allowing Germany to best address underlying political emigration pressures.

Failed Polonization: Host State Nationalism

Though Polish-German relations were far from friendly, the beginning of the Cold War was a fundamental turning point in the two nations' relationship, gradually turning German colonialist tendencies and rhetoric towards cooperation and coexistence. This thawing of relations is still ongoing today, as WWII caused a "freezing of stereotypes"[189]. For example, the West German government found it politically convenient to use historical myths, such as a "Velvet Curtain of cultural differences"[190], to separate the "civilized" West from the "barbaric" East, painting Poland as a national threat in order to separate German culture from it. While Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* of the 70s opened the door to cultural reconciliation, German societal fixations on avoiding responsibility for WWII prevented meaningful change. In line with this resistance, a 1990 survey found that the average German believed Poland to be "culturally inferior" to Germany, though these German biases do not have any basis in reality, causing Poland to suffer from a persistent "Polish economy"[191]. Through these sentiments, Poland is perceived as backwards regardless of its factual successes, causing a notable "political-rational agreement", in which Germans hold deep prejudices against Poland justified by rational political and economic logic rather than culture. Taken together, though relations between the Polish and German states have improved via political rapprochement, ethnic tensions and cultural arrogance persist. Importantly, while this arrogance was unique to Germany, the feeling of distrust and

[189] Nelson 2009
[190] Nelson 2009, p. 177
[191] Nelson 2009

animosity was mutual[192], making the German diaspora less welcome in Poland than in either Russia or Kazakhstan where such explicit tensions were comparatively muted.

Within the Polish host state, Polish-German tensions were reflected by significant legal barriers that existed against minorities, especially against the German diaspora. Until 1990, Poland refused to recognize their German minority in any official capacity, forbidding all institutional support for the minority and engaging upon a strict Polonization campaign among German diasporas[193]. This host state policy put the ethnically mixed communities of Polish Germans in Opole into focus. Given that the vast majority of Polish Germans fled after WWII and over the Cold War[194], significantly higher numbers of ethnic Germans appeared in Polish censuses than expected as the Polish state liberalized. The question then remains: where did these diasporas come from?

Throughout the Cold War, in an attempt to craft a homogenous Polish state free from its German diaspora, Poland tried to tie ethnically mixed communities in former German territories to itself[195]. To this end, the Polish government, in spite of historical Germanization in these regions, conducted a "verification procedure" to reclassify these mixed diasporas as Polish rather than German. This verification procedure studied border communities for their "Polishness", seeking to either reintegrate diasporas into Polish society as ethnic Poles or deport the German diaspora from the host state[196]. However, this policy backfired due to the ethnic fluidity present amongst German diasporas. For instance, communities in Opole often identified with Poland or Germany subjectively, with many more identifying with Czechia or their locality first. Language made this identity even more complicated, as though the German diaspora largely remained

[192] Rydel 2022
[193] Wolff 2002
[194] Worbs 2013
[195] Wolff 2002; Universität Oldenburg
[196] Wolff 2002

Germanophones, unlike in Russia and Kazakhstan, many only spoke a local creole rather than standard German[197], encouraging identification with their *Heimat* above Germany or Poland.

As a result of this complicated identity amongst German diasporas, proper verification became truly impossible and the host state policy ended with around 850,000 people being "rehabilitated", often without their knowledge[198]. This failed Polonization effort by the host state, combined with increasingly active German NGOs, such as the *Landsmannschaften* (National Associations) and *Vertriebenenverbände* (Displaced Peoples' Associations) post-1990, prompted the German diaspora to abandon identification with Poland or its locality, instead favoring identification as "German" today[199]. However, *Heimat* remains crucial to remaining in Poland.

Conclusions

Despite democratization and swift economic recovery, Germany's ability to both foster belief in a Polish *Heimat* in the concentrated settlements of Opole, rather than a myth of return, underscores Poland's disproportionately low emigration. Whereas in other states Germany was unable or unwilling to support substantive protections for its diaspora, favoring extraterritorial solutions instead[200], Germany's ability to influence Polish minority policy through binding bilateral treaties and EU accession addressed underlying political push factors through reform. Additionally, the diaspora's geographic concentration within Opole enabled Germans to project significant political power at a state level. Together, home and host state policies, spearheaded by Poland's German diaspora, turned what would have been a myth of return-inducing nationalism towards remaining in the *Heimat*, lowering emigration as a result.

[197] Wolff 2002
[198] Wolff 2002
[199] Wolff 2002
[200] Schmaltz 1998

Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis

Across cases, in addition to the usual story about economic opportunities, a few common variables arise as principal influences on German emigration. The influence of host country nationalism, while certainly relevant, is notably less substantial than that of German and diaspora nationalisms. Though discrimination is often cited as motivating for emigration, no state's culture was outwardly welcoming to Germans; even in Kazakhstan, a nation with one of the most pro-German policies in balancing Russian domination[201]. In this light, host country nationalism becomes a weak explanatory factor for varying emigration, as all host states would experience some level of inevitable individual discrimination. On the other hand, differences in national mythology among German diasporas, between that of a myth of return and *Heimat*, stood out as a key motivation to stay or leave, with home and host states policies directly influencing the preponderance of either belief. Lastly, the lack of sufficient institutional support from both Germany and host countries, especially in providing geographic autonomy and substantial political reform, differentiated Poland from cases of large-scale German emigration. In the end, restrictive immigration policies and identification with Russia positioned Russia as the best destination for many emigrating members of the German diaspora, creating a second *de facto* "Russian-German" homeland distinct from Germany itself.

The Nationalism Debate

Given the statistical importance of authoritarianism and oppression, host country nationalism at first appeared to be a very possible impetus for emigration, but this force turns out

[201] Sanders 2016

to be not as influential as it first appeared. While each nations' nationalism, and the Germans' role therein, take different names, their effects on German emigration are not significantly varied. In all three nations, Germans feel as though they are an "unwanted" minority due to historical grievances and expulsions, creating a form of "popular" nativism[202] in the societies of host countries, yet all three post-communist governments took steps to protect their German minorities[203]. Each nation's nationalism structure roughly reflects this, evidenced by Kazakh civic nationalism and Russian rossiiskii nationalism, offering ethnic Germans a roughly equal place within the nation, provided that they commit themselves to the host state under a wider national identity[204]. While all host states privileged their own titular ethnicities, widespread adoption of the Russian language in the Post-Soviet world further accommodated the Russophone German community[205], increasing German social mobility while encouraging identification with Russia rather than Germany.

Contrary to expectations, given the relatively low emigration of its German diaspora, Polish nationalism, as a result of ethnic homogeneity and historical rivalry, was likely the least friendly to ethnic Germans[206]. This hostility, while resulting in the expulsion of millions throughout Communism, left only ethnically mixed and previously considered Polonized German diasporas remaining. These diasporas then identified themselves as German in response to oppressive host nation nationalism[207], proving that host nation nationalism can have a rallying effect on the German diaspora rather than solely driving emigration. However, due to close diplomatic relations with Germany and the EU, Polish Germans were afforded significant

[202] Smith 1996
[203] Szporluk 2025; Schmaltz 1998; Wolff 2002
[204] Szporluk 2015
[205] Smith 1996
[206] Nelson 2009
[207] Wolff 2002

institutional protections through the 1997 Constitution[208]. In addition to these protections, liberal democracies and even autocracies generally adhere to the idea of "reciprocity", in which states protect minority rights in the hope that the host nation's ethnic kin will be treated equally well abroad[209]. In this sense, it is unlikely that host nation nationalism and explicitly hostile host nation policy played significant roles in driving German emigration, often having the opposite effect on Germans, with reciprocity mitigating the worst effects of nativism and nationalism.

Standing apart from the comparatively less influential titular nationalism, the "myth of return" as part of diasporic nationalism, in which many nationalists see the ultimate fate of their community as rejoining the homeland, played an especially powerful role. This myth was widespread across diaspora communities even before the end of Communism, but increasing interaction between citizens of both home and host countries as well as economic investments from the home state strengthened popular belief in the myth[210]. Diasporic nationalism initially fixated on German autonomy and statecraft within host countries[211] rather than emigration to Germany itself, but this process saw mixed results. In Kazakhstan, the drive for autonomy was quashed almost immediately[212], it was met with a much more favorable reception in Russia. Here, while the *Wiedergeburt* movement was powerful in the late 80s and early 90s, it died in the early 90s as a result of uncompromising Russian nationalism and limited support from Germany, prompting the powerful radical faction of the organization to openly advocate for exodus by citing the myth of return[213]. This unprecedented stance made Russia not only host to the most powerful German NGO, but also the only one to advocate for exodus rather than autonomy or integration, serving as a uniquely powerful driver of emigration from Russia. In this case, not

[208] Łodziński 1999
[209] Wolff 2002; Diener 2004
[210] Diener 2004; Sander 2016
[211] Schreiner 1994; Schmaltz 1998
[212] Diener 2004; Sanders 2016
[213] Schmaltz 1998

only was the diaspora's myth of return initially weak, prioritizing staying in the home state over exodus, but hostile host state policy was the deciding factor fueling the shift amongst the Russian German diaspora towards the myth of return over coexistence.

Though host state nationalism and positive home state policies can encourage German diasporas to leave, German nationalism in the home state caused the opposite effect, hindering the diasporas' emigration to Germany. In the case of Kazakhstan, rising cultural saliency, widespread economic decline, and increasing attention from the German kin state fostered the myth of return across much of Kazakhstan. Though the myth of return was initially popular, 1996 German language laws pitted legal "Germanness", defined in part by language proficiency, against the Kazakh German diaspora's idea of cultural belonging, which instead highlighted ancestral ties above day-to-day practices[214]. These regulations, through a disconnect between the Kazakh German idea of Germanness, in which German-speaking ability held no role, discredited Germany as a legitimate arbiter of "Germanness" and made the Russophone German diaspora feel rejected by the home state. This law thus caused widespread disillusionment, delayed the diaspora's entry into Germany through excessive testing wait times, and destroyed the myth of return in Kazakhstan[215], inviting an alternative German exodus to Russia.

Unlike in the Soviet Union, little is said in Poland about the diaspora's belief in the myth of return. Polish perspectives on emigration have been conspicuously different, being driven by state oppression, with diaspora consolidating itself around its historical *Heimat* in Opole following such oppression[216]. This story, alongside German-Polish diplomacy to recognize and support the Polish-German diaspora[217], further explains why German emigration declined so

[214] Sanders 2016
[215] Sanders 2016
[216] Wolff 2002
[217] Wolff 2002

quickly in the early 90s. Moreover, due to Polish Germans' strong connection to their sense of local *Heimat*, defined by belief in a collective origin amongst their communities, attachment to their birthplace, and local cultural customs[218], Polish Germans felt a deeper connection to their local home than that of Russian and Kazakh Germans. This tendency is explained by the fact that many German centers in Poland, like those Opole, were predominantly German speaking only 50 years prior[219], with many of the elderly from those times remaining. On the contrary, Soviet Germans lived in areas allocated through deportations and genocide[220]: lands with little historical or cultural attachments. Though the concept of local *Heimat* was present in the Soviet Union, it was tied to the Volga Republic rather than where the German diasporas lived post-deportation[221]; when Russia refused to reestablish the Volga German Republic, the myth of return triumphed. Kazakhstan further supports the centrality of *Heimat*, as though Kazakh Germans did not have a *Heimat* within Kazakhstan, they were never promised the creation of an autonomous homeland as Russian Germans were. It is precisely this perceived betrayal of Russian Germans by Russia that discredited the host state as an earnest protector of the German diaspora and encouraged disproportionate emigration. As a result, the varying applications of German *Heimat* between states, whether an intact homeland in Poland, no homeland in Kazakhstan, or a denied homeland in Russia, was a decisive factor in the variation between test states' emigration trends.

Geographic Concentration vs Dispersal

Considering that ethnic policy reciprocity between host countries and their neighbors prevented outright oppression in all of our test states, we should instead turn to the effect on

[218] Wolff 2002
[219] Universität Oldenburg
[220] Panagiotidis 2018
[221] Warkentin 1992

emigration from less coercive methods of titular assimilation, such as the common mechanisms of ethnic autonomy and geographic distribution. Firstly, no post-communist state, including all three of our test states, allowed outright German territorial autonomy, such as the suggested Volga Republic or Kaliningrad autonomy. Nonetheless each state's ethnic dispersal and geographic distribution played an important role in protecting their privileges. In Kazakhstan, the German diaspora was split between an urban core in the capital of Astana and Karaganda and a rural population spread out in dispersed, isolated villages alongside the Russian border[222]. This dispersal, alongside Kazakh law forbidding ethnic-based autonomy[223], made it difficult to establish a single area of German autonomy without relocating massive portions of the diaspora to it. As a result, Kazakh Germans remained isolated in rural, tiny villages or vulnerable to assimilation pressures in Russified cities. Russian Germans were in a similar geographic position, being divided into tiny, dispersed rural communities, with all officially proposed autonomous regions containing less than 5% of all Russian Germans[224]. This geographic dispersal, irregardless of host government support, weakened home state aid economic efforts and an autonomous republic, as well as the accompanying institutional support, impossible.

The danger of this distributive pattern is proven in Cold War Romania, a country not previously touched upon. Like in Poland, the German diaspora of Romania was far more geographically concentrated within German-dominated settlements while holding *Heimat* as a key cultural belief, connecting historic land to ethnic identification. The tendency of the population to rely on remittances from Western Europe and return home once a sufficient living is made[225] proves that despite a wealthier and freer living abroad, German diasporas in Romania

[222] Diener 2004
[223] Diener 2004
[224] Schmaltz 1998
[225] Wolff 2002

valued *Heimat* above political and economic conditions, acting as a strong motivation for German diasporas to remain in the host state. This cultural belief transcended geographic autonomy, as Romania had no such Autonomous Republics[226], ruling out any institutional differences between it and other cases. Despite this continuity with other test cases, the decline of this diaspora came not through economy-motivated emigration, but rather through deportations and the sale of ethnic Germans to Germany, dispersing the diaspora across Romania and forcing Germans to leave their *Heimat* in Banat and Transylvania[227]. It is precisely this forced dispersal and disconnect from ethnic homelands, similar to that seen in Soviet successor states, that hindered German home state aid and drove mass emigration, supporting the idea that connection to the diaspora's local *Heimats* is one of the most important factors deciding emigration.

Influence of German Language Laws

Though German economic aid seems to have had a limited effect on mitigating push variables and the associated emigration, German language regulations were far more effective at keeping diaspora communities abroad. As addressed in the Kazakhstan case study, the importance of the German language was viewed entirely different among diasporas, in which Germany viewed its language as central to its identity, while the diasporas did not feel any less German for not knowing the language[228]. Given this disagreement, it is not surprising that the primary mechanism by which Germany regulated its immigration was through language requirements, first imposed in 1996 and becoming stricter in 2005. The first immigration regulation began in 1992 with the implementation of a quota system, capping the influx of ethnic

[226] Minority Rights Group 2024
[227] Wolff 2002
[228] Sanders 2016

German migrants at 200,000[229]. While this quota would be surpassed by around 7.5% per year[230], regulations targeting language proficiency in the next set of laws would be far more effective. A 1996 reform phased in a language test for applicants, attempting to halve immigration to 100,000 per year[231]: a goal that was reached by the end of 1998. This law, passed through a narrowing of German nationalism, was therefore not only effective, but targeted in those it affected. These regulations did not target Germanophone diasporas nearby in Poland and Romania, but instead they intentionally restricted Russophone post-Soviet migration from Russia, Kazakhstan, and other post-Soviet states. Due to the linguistic and cultural barriers between Germans in the home state and Russified diasporas in post-Soviet host states, backlash against open immigration policies grew over the 90s[232]; this public home state nativism narrowed German nationalism away from its post-Soviet diasporas and restricted their entry, becoming a decisive variable in these states, yet leaving German nationalism as a weak explanation for emigration from Poland.

German home state nationalism was further narrowed in 2005, as the passing of the *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (Immigration Act) further enshrined the importance of the German language and heavily restricted German diaspora immigration[233]. The law required prospective immigrants' family members to be proficient in the German language, being especially important a disproportionate amount of emigrants were middle aged and came with their family[234]. This caused German diaspora emigration from all tested host states to decline immediately and significantly. However, this law's targets were conspicuously varied: whereas Poland and Romania were largely unaffected, post-Soviet Republics saw declines well above 75% on

[229] Universität Oldenburg; Borkert and Bosswick 2007
[230] Worbs 2013
[231] Universität Oldenburg.
[232] Universität Oldenburg.
[233] Universität Oldenburg; BMI 2004
[234] Worbs 2013

average[235]. While these two immigration reforms have had clearly dramatic impacts on German resettlement, marking likely the biggest influence on the diaspora's decision to emigrate, their propensity to disproportionately target diasporas in Russified diasporas opens a new problem: while Germany wanted to keep Germans abroad, they accidentally moved them to Russia.

Russia as an Alternative Homeland

Rather than staying in their host states or moving to Germany, the 1996 and 2005 German language laws likely caused the German diaspora to move to Russia instead. This is supported statistically by the disparities between recorded diaspora emigration to Germany[236] and the number of Germans recorded in Russia, as the 2002 All-Russian Census recorded significantly more ethnic Germans than the 1989 Soviet Census and German immigration data together would suggest. Subtracting the numbers of German emigrants from Russia from the total number of Germans recorded in the 1989 Soviet census leads us to expect roughly 100,000 Germans remaining in Russia as of late 2002 when the next census was conducted, yet the census instead recorded about 600,000[237]. To explain this, either Russia would have to have a disproportionately high rise in the rate of German minority identification, which is distinctly possible due to widespread intermarriage between Russians and Germans[238], or Russia saw substantial German immigration from other Post-Soviet host states. Below, we will analyze both of these hypotheses, finding ultimately that Russian nationalism and Russification best explain this discrepancy.

Beginning first with ethnic identification, interethnic relationships and marriages in host states best illuminate this tendency. Compared to Kazakhstan, where German-Kazakh

[235] Worbs 2013
[236] Worbs 2013
[237] Russian Federal State Statistics Service 2019
[238] Warkentin 1992

intermarriage and socialization was almost nonexistent[239], 69% of Russian Germans were in a mixed relationship or had ethnically mixed parentage themselves. A similar proportion of Russians and Germans intermarried within Kazakhstan, making Russian German culture much more fluid than expected and changing between German and Russian depending on context[240]. However, this point ultimately does not distinguish ethnic identification amongst German diasporas in Russia from those in Poland or Kazakhstan, as all German diasporas, including those in Poland[241], were ethnically mixed within either Russian or Polish communities. As such, German identification among the diaspora in Russia was likely not significantly higher than among those in other tested states, failing to explain data variation alone. However, ethnically mixed heritage played a crucial role in where German diasporas chose to migrate when political and economic factors drove them to do so.

Crucially, most German diasporas, especially those in the former Soviet Union, were Russophones[242]. Because of this, when German language laws were passed in 1996 and 2005, resulting in a steep fall of post-Soviet emigration to Germany, Germans did not opt to stay within their host states. Instead, because German policy did not effectively alleviate push factors within host states, these German diasporas opted to go to Russia instead, using their Russian proficiency and their nations' economic ties to Russia to gain entry. When looking deeper, several surveys and statistics reflect this trend. According to the Council of Germans of Kazakhstan in 1997, 95% of Central Asian Germans planned to move to either Russia or Germany[243], identifying Russia as the only alternative to Germany in diaspora emigration and emphasizing the large number of Central Asian Germans seeking to leave. Additionally, of all Kazakh Germans who

[239] Sanders 2016
[240] Sanders 2016
[241] Wolff 2002
[242] Smith 1996
[243] Diener 2004

had a relative in either Germany or Russia, roughly 67% had one in Germany and 33% in Russia[244]. Due to the importance of having foreign relatives in deciding where diasporas emigrate[245], this data provides a rough proportion of how many chose to go to either country. Seen as a whole, this evidence leads to the conclusion that immigration to Russia from other post-Soviet states was the primary factor causing a higher number of Germans to live in Russia than predicted. This pattern further highlights that German humanitarian policy could not stop German emigration by closing the doors into Germany; rather, if Berlin wanted to keep Germans within host states, they needed to address core political and economic issues within these states. While Germany only has so much influence in this regard, closing the doors to Berlin has only opened the door to Moscow for hundreds of thousands of Germans.

Though Russia is now a host state for many more ethnic Germans than expected, this diaspora is uniquely disconnected from Germany. The exodus of ethnic Germans from Russia to Germany in the early 1990s was justified using the diaspora's myth of return, catalyzed by a refusal of the Russian government to reestablish a Russian German *Heimat* along the Volga river[246]. This controversy separated the most nationalist Germans, those most likely to believe in a myth of return, from moderate, more Russified Germans unwilling to emigrate for nationalist reasons. Germany aided in this division through the 1996 language laws, ensuring that only the most "German" of the diaspora could enter the nation[247]. These policies thus effectively split German ethnicity from German culture, for while many ethnic Germans moved to Russia, they did so because they lacked recognition of "Germaness" by the home state. As a result, though ethnic Germans persist in Russia, both home state and diasporic nationalism recognize the

[244] Sanders 2016
[245] Sanders 2016
[246] Schmaltz 1998
[247] Universität Oldenburg

remaining diaspora as a culturally distinct, Russian-German hybrid. These policies, while accomplishing Germany's goal of keeping its diasporas abroad as a diplomatic bridge between Germany and the post-Soviet world, were only a partial success at best, for they demonstrate Germany's inability to keep its diasporas in their Central Asian host nations while protecting their culture and especially language, enabling long-term Russification in their new home state.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

After analysis of over a dozen nations and 16 years of history for each, several factors stand out as critical in driving emigration. As in our regression, emigrant accounts consistently emphasized economic factors as key push factors[248], yet on the other hand, oppression, held in check by interstate reciprocity in ethnic policy[249] and at least rhetorically inclusive nationalism, was not a key factor in deciding German emigration. However, hostile attempts to strengthen host-nation nationalism through processes such as the "nationalization of social space"[250] did foster popular, emigration-motivating discrimination. This complex, two-sided nationalism between states and their populations makes outright oppression rare, but does little to alleviate individual-level discrimination and assimilation. Outside of expected push factors, variables such as the diasporas' distribution as well as changing nationalisms in home states, host states, and the diasporas became critical in both driving emigration and influencing its destination. The myth of return in far-flung rural communities has been incredibly effective at mobilizing emigration, while belief in and living in an ethnic *Heimat* has done the opposite; with governmental policy acting as a key determinant in the popularity of each of these particular beliefs.

With over a decade of German policymaking and NGO work seeking to keep its diaspora in their host states and protect their cultures at home, Germany's policies in the East cannot be considered a success, barely even a partial success. Their lackluster investments failed to prevent the population from leaving, relegating NGOs to entertaining the elderly as a legacy language, helping the young to leave through language trainings[251], and fostering identification with

[248] Diener 2004
[249] Wolff 2002; Diener 2004
[250] Diener 2004
[251] Wolff 2002; Sanders 2016

Germany and the myth of return[252]. Once the backwards nature of this policy became clear to Germany in the mid 1990s, reactive home state nationalism against "different" Russian-Germans[253] shifted Germany's priority to limiting migration to Germany in the first place. As a result, while German reforms worked as intended and limited the influx of migrants to Germany, they consequently encouraged emigration to Russia, further Russified the diaspora, and exacerbated social tensions between Germany and its kin to the East.

This disaster, while preventable, has significant ramifications for wider humanitarian foreign policy. While nations would obviously do well to solve root political and economic problems abroad, this is often something completely out of a kin state's control.

Working within the grounds of achievable policy, Germany made two critical mistakes: allowing Russia to renege on bilateral agreements and ignoring the diasporas' cultural differences. First of all, despite a joint declaration between President Yeltsin and Chancellor Kohl[254], Russia was able to quietly walk away from previous commitments to recreate the Volga Republic without any German backlash nor promises of additional aid. This meek foreign policy, while reflecting states' preferences for business over human rights[255], squandered Germany's best chance to gain Volga German autonomy, encouraging exodus and causing further crises. As seen in Poland, had Germany secured institutional protections, the opportunity for geographic concentration in an autonomous region or politically powerful minority, as well as the accompanying institutional support, would have been pivotal in preserving the diaspora's health inside Russia. Instead, the increased emigration resulting from Russian abandonment motivated the 1996 German language laws, which further backfired by discrediting Germany in the eyes of

[252] Sanders 2016
[253] Panagiotidis 2018; Universität Oldenburg
[254] Schreiner 1994
[255] Qi 2005

its diaspora[256] and left them to inevitable russification. These two failures of German foreign policy thus constitute the primary lessons of this study, underscoring the importance of bilateral diplomacy, the enforcement of such agreements, and cultural awareness in foreign policymaking.

Moving beyond this study, further research is necessary into qualitative factors such as minority identification in order to tie together census-reliant statistical analysis.

[256] Sanders 2016

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