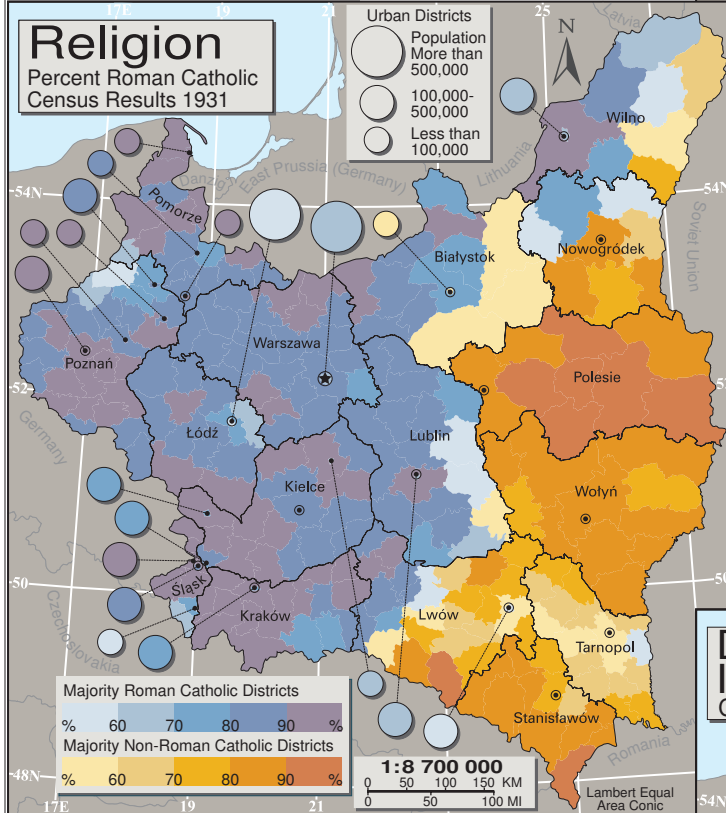# Census-Taking in the Age of Nationalism

Evaluating Interwar Polish Statistics

The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one - and only one - extremely clear place.

BENEDICT ANDERSON, *Census, Map, Museum*

The Polish census of 1931 is one of the few comprehensive statistical sources concerning the ethnic composition of the territories of the interwar Polish Republic. As a historical document, its validity has been the subject of numerous polemics categorizing the work variously as a straightforward portrait of reality to a useless expression of Polish nationalism. The census was undertaken in an atmosphere of increasing ethnic conflict in which Polish officials were anxious to bolster as much as possible the Polish element. However, it was not always clear what cultural markers defined one person as a Pole and another person as a non-Pole. The 1931 census attempted to make such a designation based upon the choice of one of twelve languages or "mother-tongues". However, the complex multi-ethnic, multi-lingual nature of the region ensured that many individuals could not be easily classified, their designation being determined largely by the situational inclinations of the individual and the attitude of the census taker. This was further complicated by officials in the southeastern palatinates outright falsifying language data. These and other factors argue for an approach to the 1931 census which deemphasizes concrete numbers in favor of utilizing several variables to present broad spatial patterns and zones of ambiguity.

Religion
Percent Roman Catholic
Census Results 1931

Urban Districts
- Population More than 500,000
- 100,000-500,000
- Less than 100,000

Majority Roman Catholic Districts

| % | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | % |

Majority Non-Roman Catholic Districts

| % | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | % |

1:8 700 000
0   50   100   150 KM
0   50   100 MI
Lambert Equal Area Conic

Language
Percent Polish-Speaking
Census Results 1931

Urban Districts
- Population More than 500,000
- 100,000-500,000
- Less than 100,000

Majority Polish-Speaking Districts

| % | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | % |

Majority Non-Polish-Speaking Districts

| % | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | % |

1:8 700 000
0   50   100   150 KM
0   50   100 MI
Lambert Equal Area Conic

The three maps presented here seek to illustrate the spatial distribution of Polish ethnicity and highlight regions of ambiguity using two variables from the 1931 census considered to be indications of Polish nationality. In general, Roman Catholics speaking Polish or a dialect of Polish as their first language were considered to be of Polish nationality. While there was no absolute rule stating that Polish nationality was limited to one language and one religion, in practice the Polish nation increasingly was defined as such. For the state in 1931 as a whole, the percent of Polish-speakers (68.91%) is closely related to the percentage of Roman Catholics (64.76%). The spatial pattern of citizens comprising this 4.15% difference is of interest. Thus the third map showing the dissimilarity index of the two variables highlights regions where the two variables were not in close congruence in 1931. The index represents the percentage difference between the percentage of Polish-speakers and the percentage of Roman Catholics. This results in a range of near zero through 7.58% for Polish-speakers and near zero through 7.17% for Roman Catholics. The map treats differences under 01% for both variables as negligible, 01%-03% in each variable as a light color combination, and figures over 03% in each variable as a dark color combination. Neither the map nor the data take into account regions where the two dissimilarities balance.

Dissimilarity Index
Census Results 1931

Urban Districts
- Population More than 500,000
- 100,000-500,000
- Less than 100,000

Dissimilarity Index of percent Polish-speakers versus percent Roman Catholic

| 03% | 01% | | 01% | 03% |

Preponderance Polish-speaking   0   Preponderance Roman Catholic

1:8 700 000
0   50   100   150 KM
0   50   100 MI
Lambert Equal Area Conic

The dissimilarity index maps a pattern of incongruous districts spread throughout the Polish state with the majority located in the eastern palatinates. The four blue districts featuring a preponderance of Roman Catholics over Polish-speakers should be interpreted as reflecting certain predominantly Roman Catholic minority groups. The two districts in Wilno palatinate are the result of the Lithuanian minority while the districts in Slask and Pomorze palatinates indicate German Roman Catholics. The orange-yellow districts having a preponderance of Polish-speakers over Roman Catholics requires a more complex series of explanations. The five isolated districts in the western half of Poland appear to reflect large Polish-speaking Protestant communities. In the east, the areas of incongruency represent the complicated relationship with the Ukrainian minority in the southeast and the Belarussian minority in the northeast. In these regions there was both more desire on the part of officials to inflate the number of Poles and more ambiguity among the population as to what ethnic groups they might claim or be ascribed allegiance. Many individuals which might have been classified as Belarussian (that is, speaking a dialect of Belarussian and belonging to the Orthodox church) either choose or had chosen for them a Polish linguistic identity in the census. For Ukrainians, in general their ethnicity was more clearly self-defined, usually through religion. The incongruous districts in the southeast outline contested ethnic territories. The districts in Lwow, Tarnopol and Stanislawow palatinates, containing large, well-organized Byzantine Catholic Ukrainian-speaking populations, correspond extremely well to the areas accused of fraud during the census. This situation contrasts with Wolyn palatinate, in which census results were reputedly more accurate and political tensions less evident among the Ukrainian-speaking Orthodox population in 1931. The situation in Wolyn likely represents a less prejudiced administration or at least one less convinced of the value or viability of maximizing as much as possible the Polish element. In turn, this may be contrasted with the line of districts in eastern Lublin palatinate which return to the state of incongruity typical for Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. Each of the regions on the dissimilarity index are products of unique circumstances. The census results verify this uniqueness and argue for further study. The Polish census of 1931, while fraught with problems of ambiguity, bias and fraud, nevertheless remains an important source document when analyzed not as a statement of numerical truth,
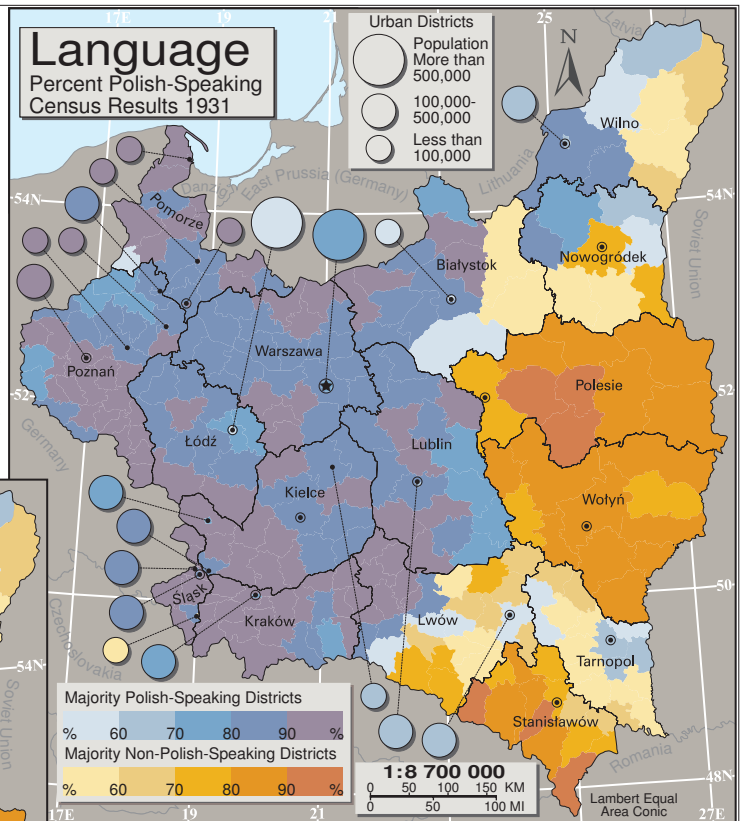
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