

# To what extent and why did german nationalism change between 1789 and 1840?

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German nationalism did change between 1789 and 1840, regarding their aims, characteristics and demographics, but only to some extent. The changes and continuation of nationalism were essentially affected by the international context and the domestic factors which both stimulated and stagnated German nationalism throughout the period. Although the nationalists may have not achieved their ultimate aim for political unity by 1840, the events during this period had indeed strengthened the 'cultural well'.

The aims of the nationalists did change, but the change and continuity depended on the domestic situation and were influenced by the international context. The initial aim of the nationalists was to have cultural unity and the idea of a 'Grossdeutschland'. They hoped to achieve a German identity through sharing the same language and taste in art, literature and music. The nationalists were inspired by the words of Hegel and his idea of the 'Volksgeist' and Fichte's principle of 'German superiority and the 'fatherland'.

The desire for cultural unity remained and continued from 1789, as shown in the Wartburg Festival in 1817 where they created the German Lützow Freikorps flag, and this was also carried out in the Hambach festival 1832. Moreover, the location of it being the refuge of Martin Luther is significant and to the nationalists, it gives a historic foundation to Germany. Although cultural unity wasn't the main aim later on, the events of the Battle of Leipzig 1813 and particularly the Rhine Crisis in 1840, did inadvertently deepen the 'cultural well'.

The fact that the French claimed that the Rhineland, which became a historical ground for the Germans after the war of liberation, was France's natural border, intensified the cultural well. The Rhine crisis attacked the nationalist culture and historic past, and thus led to the Rhine song movement. Becker's popular poem became available for everyone to read, and this widespreadness strengthened the cultural unity. Hence the international factors didn't change their aim for cultural unity, but helped enhance it.

Another fundamental aim of the German nationalists is to have political unity in the Deutsche Bund by amending the structure of the Bund system. They desire a constitution in each state, and although this exists in Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden, the main states Prussia and Austria do not adopt this system. The formation of the Deutsche Bund (German Confederation) in 1815 after the War of Liberation made the nationalists against the Bund and its system because it was reactionary.

This sparked ideas about liberalism and wanting a constitution, and this began to be expressed in the Wartburg Festival in 1817 where they burnt effigies and created manifestos. Before the creation of the Bund the nationalists didn't want political unity, and the freikorps were fighting for their nation. However, the creation of the Bund had changed their aims into wanting political unity. Nevertheless, the nationalists were restricted from achieving their aim, because they were being repressed by the Carlsbad decrees 1819 created by the Bund in result of Wartburg.

This meant that the nationalists could not openly attack the Bund, had no rights of association and were prevented from writing manifestos. They were  
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further repressed by the 6 Acts 1834 in response to Hambach, and so this repression prevented the nationalists from changing and trying to achieve their aims. Hence the political context restricted the nationalists and so there was a decade of no change. However, it wasn't until the Rhine crisis which allowed the nationalists to express themselves more since the Bund appeased them and allowed Becker's popular poem to be published in every newspaper, available to all.

This to some was seen as a turning point or a big change as the Bund was supporting the nationalists to some extent, but only because the nationalists were not against the Bund. This could suggest that although the nationalists didn't manage to make changes to the political system, they did change and improve the relationship between them and the Bund. Thus, the political context did stagnate and restrict the nationalist movement in terms of their aims, but it did help them achieve cultural unity. The characteristics of the nationalists indeed changed from 1879- 1840.

The French Revolution in 1789 inspired the nationalists into having liberal ideas, which the Bund were reactionary to. This reactionary and conservative system made the nationalists anti-establishment, since they rejected the French ideas of having constitutions, freedom of speech and press and rights to vote. This liberalism was shown in both Wartburg and Hambach where they created their manifesto of demands to reform the government, and this anti-establishment continued throughout this period. It can be said that the

Rhine Crisis proves there to be a relationship formed with the nationalists and the Bund since Metternich sympathised the nationalists, they still remained anti-establishment. Although the nationalists were inspired by <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-and-why-did-german-nationalism-change-between-1789-and-1840/>

French ideas, they were always hostile to France. This was because of the constant intervention and triumph of France, with the Treaty of Tilsit 1807 on Prussia after the Battle of Jena and Auerstedt, and in particular the War of Liberation 1815 which was fought on the Rhineland, and finally the Rhine Crisis 1840.

France has always remained a national enemy in the eyes of both the Bund and the nationalists, and this hostility intensifies particularly in 1840 when they claim the Rhineland is France's 'natural borders' and send troops there. Hence France is a key factor to why the characteristics of the nationalists have stayed the same and changed. One key change however is the behaviour and method of the nationalists. As a result of the repression from the Carlsbad decrees 1819 and the Six Acts 1834, the nationalists were very limited and restricted as they couldn't express their demands openly, as there was strict censorship.

Thus this led to romanticism, where underlying political messages were hidden in art, literature and music. France's interference in the Rhine Crisis influenced the 'Rhine song movement', as since the nationalists were under censorship, they expressed themselves romantically. Thus, the characteristics and behaviour of the nationalists did change through romanticism, but their ideas of anti-establishment and hostility to France continued, and all were affected by France and the political context.

In hindsight, the demographics of the nationalist movement may seem to grow and become widespread, but in reality it essentially stayed the same.

The nationalists primarily consisted of middle-class educated bourgeoisie students and lecturers who were referred to as the *Burschenschaft*. There <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-and-why-did-german-nationalism-change-between-1789-and-1840/>

were only 1, 000 burschenschaft out of 10, 000 students in the German Confederation, and so the initial scale of how many nationalists there were is very small compared to the general size of the population.

During the War of Liberation, only 12% of those who fought were freikorps who fought for the 'German nation', whilst the others were conscripted soldiers fighting only for their monarchy. Hence this proves that the demographics in the beginning was very small, and so nationalism was not very known or popular. The nationalists hoped to gain more supporters by having discussion circles and gymnastic societies. Nonetheless, in the Wartburg festival, merely 500 burschenschaft members attended, again showing how not many people shared the same nationalist ideas.

Perhaps this was because of the disorganisation of the Wartburg festival, as the burschenschaft did not productively state what they want to do, but rather complained about the current Bund, making it difficult for others to understand their true aims. In contrast to Hambach 1832 however, there was a big increase in attendance of 20-30, 000 people. This was seen to be the most 'popular political festival'. Conversely, a lot of the people who attended were peasants who were most likely there to sell food for their own economic reasons, not for the political side to it.

Also, although Hambach seemed to be more organised than Wartburg, only the literates could understand and read the invitations, and so again it seems that only the educated middle class burschenschaft were exposed to the political agenda, not the illiterates who made up almost most of the population. Again, it wasn't until the Rhine crisis did the demographics change a little. The fact that an average, unknown court clerk wrote the <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-and-why-did-german-nationalism-change-between-1789-and-1840/>

poem in September 1840, makes it more relatable to the public which is why it was widespread.

The Bund allowed the poem to be published in every German newspaper, which also means that more people were becoming literate and so there was more support and ideas spread faster across the regions. This could have affected the demographics, in increasing but not as much since it was still led by the middle class burschenschaft. What limits the nationalists into achieving their aims is that they have no clear leader, and so perhaps if there was one, the ideas could become more widespread, hence one step further to achieving their aims.

The demographics does in essence stay the same throughout the period, it being the very few educated middle class. In conclusion, German Nationalism did change in terms of their romantic behaviour and political and cultural aims, and the key factors to why these changes occurred was mainly the influence of France, and the political changes within the Bund. Yet, their ideas and characteristics of being hostile to France and remaining antiestablishment and the small scale of demographics continued to stay the same from 1789-1840 because of the repression in result of censorship, and again French intervening.

It seems that throughout this period, a pattern has emerged where the nationalists create a festival or event, which leads to repression and a decade of censorship. This repression led to the change in behaviour, where they expressed their ideas through romanticism building their cultural well and then France's influence leads to the cycle occurring again. However, we cannot ignore the fact that, although the nationalists may have not achieved <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-and-why-did-german-nationalism-change-between-1789-and-1840/>

their political aims, the events through this period has definitely built upon their 'cultural well', and so had achieved cultural unity to some extent, and this is a change.