

Module 6: Revolutions and Unity

Topic 4 Content: German Unification



Roots

German Unification

Roots

- The Congress of Vienna established the German Confederation of States (39 German kingdoms)
- German kingdoms were dominated by Austria and Prussia

Image: Map of German Confederation of States

Parts of Prussian (light blue) and Austrian (light yellow) empires are not part of the confederation.



The steps toward German unification started with the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The group that met there established the German Confederation of States, which was a loose grouping of 39 German kingdoms. Like Italy, the confederation was dominated by two powers, the larger empires of Austria and Prussia. Each of these empires had territory that was inside and outside of the confederation, and throughout the 1800s, they would compete for control of the German Confederation.

The Austrian Empire

German Unification



The Austrian Empire

- The traditional leader of the German territories
- Ruled some territories with non-Germanic peoples
- Economy was not as powerful or industrialized as some other European countries


Many of the leaders at the Congress of Vienna viewed Austria as the traditional leader of the German territories; however, Austria also ruled some territories with non-Germanic peoples. Also, Austria's economy was not as powerful or industrialized as some of the other European countries.

The Prussian Empire

German Unification

The Prussian Empire

- Powerful military
- Highly industrialized economy
- Population mainly German
- Strong economic ties to many of the states in the confederation

A map of Europe showing the Prussian Empire in dark blue. The empire includes Prussia, the Rhineland, and Westphalia. Other German states are shown in light yellow, and non-German territories are in light grey. A search icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the map area.

Prussia was a conservative state with a powerful military and a highly industrialized economy. Its population was mainly German and the country had strong economic ties to many of the states in the German confederation.

Otto von Bismarck

German Unification

Otto von Bismarck

- The "Iron Chancellor"
- Main goal was a strong, unified Germany led by Prussia
- Believed in *Realpolitik* - countries must make tough, calculated moves to achieve power and that morality and idealism are secondary

Image: Otto von Bismarck (German Federal Archive)

A black and white portrait of Otto von Bismarck, the German Chancellor. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark military uniform with a high collar and a white cap with a dark band. He has a prominent mustache and is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The portrait is set within a white rectangular frame that has a small magnifying glass icon in the bottom right corner.

Under Prussian King William I, Prussia's prime minister was Otto von Bismarck, known as the "Iron Chancellor." In office for 28 years, his main goal was to create a strong, unified Germany led by Prussia. He believed that a country should have both a strong economy and military.

Bismarck was a firm believer in a political theory known as *Realpolitik*. Followers of this doctrine believe that a country must make tough, calculated moves to achieve power and should sacrifice morality and idealism, if necessary.

Bismarck's Unification Plan

German Unification

Bismarck's Unification Plan

Three-phase plan for unification:

- 1864 - Prussia goes to war with Denmark
- 1866 - Reduce Austria's influence in the German Confederation in the Austro-Prussian War
- 1870 - Provokes war with France to unite the kingdoms in southern Germany




Bismarck developed a three-phase plan to unite all of the German Confederation of States under one ruler. In 1864, Bismarck led Prussia into a war with Denmark to gain more land for the empire and to gain the respect and admiration of the German states. His success inspired a sense of nationalism and loyalty from the northern German states.

In 1866, he instituted phase two – reducing Austria's influence in the German Confederation. Bismarck provoked Austria into a war with Prussia and used his powerful army and efficient railroad system to dominate the conflict. The Austro-Prussian War took only seven weeks. After Prussia won, it dominated the north German States.

The final phase of Bismarck's plan was to unite the kingdoms in southern Germany. The southern German States were mainly Catholic and somewhat reluctant to join with Protestant Prussia. Bismarck thought they would join if they were faced by a foreign threat. He decided that provoking France into a war would be the best solution. In 1870, Bismarck published an inaccurate and misleading account of a meeting between a French ambassador and the Prussian King. He made it appear that the two had insulted each other. Both the French and Prussian people were upset at the news, and France decided to invade Prussia.

Unification

German Unification



The map shows the continent of Europe with the newly unified German Empire highlighted in a dark blue color. The text 'Unified Germany' is written in white over the blue area. The rest of Europe is shown in light blue and white, with red lines indicating national borders. A small magnifying glass icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the map.

Unification

- Franco-Prussian War: Prussia wins, France pays money and gives up border territories of Alsace and Lorraine.
- Southern Germany accepted Prussian leadership under William I
- William I crowned and given the title "Kaiser"
- Otto von Bismarck became Germany's first Prime Minister
- Germany becomes one of Europe's major powers

The war between France and Prussia was known as the Franco-Prussian war, and it went very poorly for France. Prussia totally dominated France and took its emperor, Napoleon III, as a prisoner. France was forced to pay Prussia a huge sum of money and to give up the valuable border territories of Alsace and Lorraine.

Most importantly, southern Germany was so caught up with nationalistic feelings and the drive for unification that it accepted Prussian leadership under William I. William was crowned Emperor of Germany in 1871 and given the title "Kaiser." The word "Kaiser" is derived from Caesar. Otto von Bismarck became Germany's first Prime Minister.

After unification, German industries continued to grow very quickly, and soon the German economy became one of the largest in the world. The growing power of a united Germany soon made it one of Europe's major powers, which eventually created the conditions for World War I.