

The German Empire

The German Empire consisted of 27 constituent territories (most of them ruled by royal families. While the Kingdom of Prussia contained most of the population and most of the territory of the Empire the Prussian leadership became imperial German leaders and Prussia itself played a lesser role. The three large neighbors were Imperial Russia in the east, France in the west, both rivals, and Austria-Hungary in the south, an ally.

After 1850 Germany industrialized rapidly, with a foundation in coal, iron, chemicals and railways. From a population of 41 million people in 1871 it grew to 68 million in 1913. From a heavily rural nation in 1815, it was now predominantly urban. During its 47 years of existence, the German Empire operated as an industrial, technological and scientific giant, receiving more Nobel Prizes in science than Britain, France, Russia and the United States combined.

It was a great power, with the most powerful army in the world, and its navy went from negligible to being second only to the British Empire in less than a decade. After the removal of its great Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1890 following the death of Emperor William I, the young Emperor Wilhelm II engaged in increasingly reckless foreign policies that left the Empire isolated. When the great crisis of 1914 arrived it had only two weak allies (Austria and Turkey). It defeated Russia, carving out large Eastern territories in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and could hold off France and Britain, but when the United States entered the war in 1917 the high command gambled on one last offensive in spring 1918, before the American arrived in force. It failed. The Great War ruined the economy and dissolved faith in the authoritarian political system. The army could no longer hold off the Allied attacks and the Empire collapsed overnight in November 1918 Revolution, and was subsequently destroyed in the Versailles treaty.

Constituent states of the Empire

Before unification, German territory was made up of 27 constituent states. These states consisted of kingdoms, grand duchies, duchies, principalities, free Hanseatic cities and one imperial territory. The Kingdom of Prussia was the largest of the constituent states, covering some 60% of the territory of the German Empire.

Several of these states had gained sovereignty following the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Others were created as sovereign states after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Territories were not necessarily contiguous – many existed in several parts, as a result of historical acquisition, or, in several cases, divisions of the ruling family trees. The constituent Duchy of Saxe-Lauenburg, then ruled in personal union by the Prussian king, merged with Prussia in real union in 1876.



Each component of the German Empire sent representatives to the Imperial Council and the Imperial Diet. Relations between the Imperial centre and the Empire's components were somewhat fluid, and were developed on an ongoing basis. The extent to which the German Emperor could, for example, intervene on occasions of disputed or unclear succession was much debated on occasion – for example with the Lippe-Detmold inheritance crisis.

Kingdoms

Prussia

Bavaria

Saxony

Württemberg

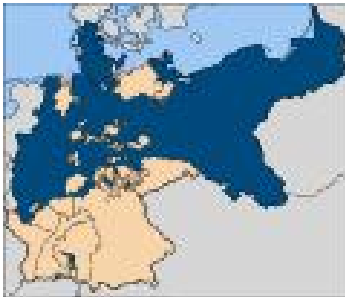
Berlin

Munich

Dresden

Stuttgart

Kingdom of Prussia



Kingdom of Saxony



Kingdom of Bavaria



Kingdom of Württemberg

