

Edexcel A-level History

GERMANY
1871–1990

UNITED, DIVIDED
AND REUNITED



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My revision planner



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1 Ruling the Second Reich, 1871–79

The Kaiserreich

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The Second German Empire (*Kaiserreich*) was proclaimed in January 1871 following Prussian–German success in the Franco–Prussian War. King William I of Prussia became the new German Emperor (Kaiser) with **Otto von Bismarck** as his Imperial Chancellor.

The Franco-Prussian War, 1870–71

In 1870 France and Prussia went to war. Prussia, allied with the southern German states, defeated France. The war was essentially a Prussian enterprise. Nevertheless, it was also a genuinely German war in which all the German states fought.

The German constitution

The *Kaiserreich*'s constitution incorporated the main provisions of the North German Confederation's constitution. Germany was to be a **federal** state. Powers and functions were divided between the central government and 25 state governments. The exact nature of Germany's political system after 1871 continues to be debated. Historians have variously described it as a military monarchy, a semi-**autocracy** or a constitutional monarchy.

The North German Confederation

This had been created in 1867, following Prussia's success against Austria in the Seven Weeks' War (1866). All the German states, except the southern states of Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and Hesse-Darmstadt, joined the Confederation.

The Kaiser

The Kaiser had the power to appoint and dismiss the Chancellor and to dissolve the *Reichstag*. He controlled foreign policy, could make treaties and alliances, commanded the army and could declare war and make peace. He also supervised the execution of all federal laws.

The Chancellor

The Chancellor, the chief minister, was responsible to the Emperor, not the *Reichstag*. He chaired sessions of the *Bundesrat* and could appoint and dismiss state secretaries responsible for the various ministries.

The Reichstag

The *Reichstag*, the national parliament, was elected by all males over 25 years of age. It could accept or reject legislation but had only limited powers to initiate new laws. State secretaries could not sit in the *Reichstag* and were not responsible to it. *Reichstag* members were elected every five years unless the *Reichstag* was dissolved by the Kaiser.

The Bundesrat

The *Bundesrat* or Federal Council, comprising 58 members, was nominated by the state assemblies. Prussia had 17 members, Bavaria six and the smaller states one each. The *Bundesrat*'s consent was required in the passing of new laws. It had the power to change the constitution. However, a vote of fourteen members constituted a **veto**.

The federal government and the Länder

The federal or national government had responsibilities for the Reich as a whole, including matters such as defence, foreign affairs, customs, railways and the postal service.

While no longer sovereign or free to **secede**, the Reich's 25 states (or *Länder*) preserved their own constitutions and administrative systems. State governments retained considerable powers over taxation, education, police, local justice and transport. The kings of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg even retained their own armies.

Kaiser William I

In many respects, the key man in the 1871 constitution was the Kaiser. William I, however, was generally content to leave the task of governing Germany (and Prussia) to Bismarck and limited himself to embodying the dignity of the new state.

Conclusion

The complex system can be seen (positively) as creating a delicate equilibrium with the key institutions keeping each other in check. It can also be seen (negatively) as creating major tensions, not least between monarchical and parliamentary claims to power.

! Complete the paragraph

a

Below are a sample exam-style question and a paragraph written in answer to this question. The paragraph contains a point and a concluding explanatory link back to the question, but lacks examples. Complete the paragraph, adding examples in the space provided.

How accurate is it to say that the constitution of the Second Reich in the years 1871–79 was mainly undemocratic?

The role of the Emperor within the constitution of the Second Reich suggests that the constitution was fundamentally undemocratic. For example,

Accordingly, the Emperor's role suggests that the Second Reich's constitution was fundamentally undemocratic because ultimately the Emperor had considerable power and was unaccountable to the German people.

! Eliminate irrelevance

a

Below are a sample exam-style question and a paragraph written in answer to this question. Read the paragraph and identify parts of the paragraph that are not directly relevant to the question. Draw a line through the information that is not irrelevant and justify your deletions in the margin.

How accurate is it to say that the constitution of the Second Reich in the years 1871–79 was mainly democratic?

The Reichstag, or Parliament, was clearly the most democratic element of the Second Reich's constitution. The constitution was devised by Bismarck following Prussia's – or perhaps Germany's – victory over France in 1870–71. It very much mirrored the North German Confederation, also drawn up by Bismarck, following Prussia's victory over Austria in 1866. The 1867 constitution had to be redrawn because four more states had now joined what had become the Second Reich. Bismarck, a Prussian landowner, did not have much sympathy with democracy. Nevertheless, he realised that it would be foolish to deny the German people a say in the way Germany was governed. The Reichstag ensured the people had a voice. It was elected by all men over the age of 25 and was thus far more representative than most parliaments, including Britain's, at this time. It had the power to reject, accept and amend any law. It should be said that there were limits to the power of the Reichstag. It could not introduce new laws. Nor could it elect – or eject – the Chancellor. Nevertheless, the Reichstag is evidence that there was a strong democratic element within the Second Reich's constitution.

Trying to reconcile unity and division

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The *Kaiserreich* was born in a mood of national euphoria. Germans were proud of their victory over France, proof of their new country's military and economic strength. Nevertheless, the new Reich was far from united.

Disunity

- Each state had its own traditions. Each also had powers over education, justice, agriculture, religious matters and local government.
- Over 60 per cent of the population were Protestant, but Catholicism was strong especially in south-west Germany and in the Rhineland.
- Ten per cent of the Reich's population were Poles, Danes or French.
- There were economic and social divisions – between rich and poor, and between the industrialising north and west and the predominantly rural south and east.

Prussian dominance?

Bismarck intended that Prussia should dominate the new Reich. To a large extent, he succeeded in his aim:

- Prussia possessed 60 per cent of Germany's population and two-thirds of its territory. Prussia returned 235 deputies out of a total of 397 in the *Reichstag*. The fact that it had 17 seats in the *Bundesrat* meant it could block any unwelcome constitutional amendments.
- As German Emperor, the Prussian king was head of the imperial executive and civil service and supreme warlord of the Reich's armed forces.
- Imperial Chancellors were almost always simultaneously Prime Minister of Prussia.
- Prussian and imperial institutions were so intertwined that they could hardly be distinguished. The Prussian minister of war was also the imperial minister of war. Imperial secretaries of state worked closely with Prussian ministers.
- Prussia's aristocracy enjoyed a dominant position in the political, military and administrative structure of the Empire.
- The Prussian state parliament, elected by a three-class system, was dominated by the aristocracy, the rich, the military and a conservative civil service. This hindered the development of parliamentary democracy in Germany as a whole.

The Prussian state government

Prussian voters were divided into three classes, according to the amount of taxes they paid. This ensured that the rich had far more electoral power than the poor and power remained in conservative hands. Most of the other state assemblies were elected by universal suffrage.

The Germanisation of Prussia

For all the complaints about a 'Prussianisation' of Germany, the identity of 'old Prussia' was significantly diluted by its integration into the Reich. Prussia could no longer be governed without consideration of the wider interests of Germany. Prussian influence was slowly undermined by the need to make concessions to the states. Non-Prussians soon held important posts in government both in the Reich as a whole and in Prussia. It was the new Reich, not Prussia, which now engaged the loyalties of most Germans.

German nationalism

A major problem after 1871 was to unite Germany in fact as well as in theory. Pre-1871 nationalism had usually been seen as a progressive force which aimed to introduce liberal and representative government. After 1871 German nationalism became more conservative. The German nation was now identified with the new Reich, any criticism of which was denounced as unpatriotic. A distinct national identity developed that transcended that of the member states.

**Spot the mistake****a**

Below are a sample exam-style question and an introductory paragraph written in answer to this question. Why does the paragraph not get into Level 5? Once you have identified the mistake, rewrite the paragraph so that it displays the qualities of Level 5. The mark scheme on page 111 will help you.

To what extent was Germany united in the years 1871–79?

To a large extent Germany was united after 1871. Most Germans were proud of their success in the war against France. Most Germans were Prussian and Prussia dominated the Kaiserreich. German nationalism was soon a major force in Europe.

**Develop the detail****a**

Below are a sample exam-style question and a paragraph written in answer to this question from the activity above. The paragraph contains a limited amount of detail. Annotate the paragraph to add additional detail to the answer.

To what extent did Prussia control Germany in the years 1871–79?

To a large extent Prussia did control Germany in the 1870s. William, the Prussian King, became German Emperor. Bismarck, the Prussian Prime Minister, became German Chancellor. Prussia, the biggest state, dominated both the Reichstag and the Bundesrat. Prussian aristocrats had considerable power over the German government, German administration and the German army.

The importance of the *Reichstag* and the parties

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Arguably Germany's political system was essentially autocratic, with power residing ultimately with the Emperor. But in some respects the system, by nineteenth-century standards, was remarkably democratic.

The *Reichstag*

Reichstag weaknesses

Bismarck wanted political power in Germany to remain in traditional hands: this meant in those of the Emperor and his army officers and ministers – and particularly in Bismarck's own. Arguably the constitution gave little opportunity for the exercise of democracy. The *Reichstag*, for example, could censure the Chancellor but not secure his dismissal. It could itself be dismissed at any time and new elections called. Bismarck was ready to work with the *Reichstag* only on condition that it accepted his proposals or some compromise acceptable to him. If agreement could not be reached, he could dissolve the *Reichstag* and call for fresh elections in which he used all the means at his disposal (especially the exploitation of international crises) to win backing for his measures.

Reichstag strengths

- The *Kaiserreich* needed a vast number of new laws. No bill could become a law until it passed the *Reichstag*. The government also needed more money, which only the *Reichstag* could provide. Bismarck, therefore, was forced to negotiate deals and grant concessions.

- The *Reichstag* was an open forum of debate whose members enjoyed parliamentary immunity. Debates were widely reported in the press. The Chancellor and the ministers of state could be questioned and embarrassed.
- No parliament in the world in the 1870s was elected on a broader **franchise**.
- What is striking is how troublesome the *Reichstag* was for Bismarck, criticising and often thwarting his plans.

Germany's main political parties

While Germany's political parties were in no position to form governments, Bismarck could not ignore them. Although under no obligation to adopt policies approved by the *Reichstag*, he did need to secure support for his own legislative proposals.

Political power

Reichstag politicians have often been criticised for failing to do more to exploit their potential power. However, the balance of power was tilted sharply in favour of the monarchy and most Germans remained deeply respectful of authority, believing that it was right and proper that the Emperor, or his Chancellor, should rule. There was no widespread conviction that power should reside with a political party which happened to have a majority of seats in the *Reichstag*.

German parties 1871–9

The National Liberals	The National Liberals, the strongest political party, drew their support from the Protestant middle class. While supporting parliamentary democracy, they also supported the creation of a strong nation-state. Until 1878 the National Liberals were Bismarck's most reliable allies.
The Centre Party	This party, which defended the interests of Catholics, became the second-largest party in the <i>Reichstag</i> in 1871.
The Social Democratic Party	In 1875 moderate and revolutionary socialists united to form the Social Democratic Party (or SPD). Its declared aim was the overthrow of the existing order. It campaigned for the nationalisation of banks, coal mines and industry and for social equality.
The German Conservative Party	This party, mainly composed of Prussian landowners, was initially sceptical about German unification.
The Free Conservatives	Drawn from a wider geographical and social base than the German Conservatives, the Free Conservatives contained not just landowners but also industrialists.
The Progressives	This was a liberal party. But unlike the National Liberals, it was opposed to Bismarck's authoritarian methods.



Simple essay style

Below is a sample exam-style question. Use your own knowledge and the information on the opposite page to produce a plan for this question. Choose four general points, and provide three pieces of specific information to support each general point. Once you have planned your essay, write the introduction and conclusion for it. The introduction should list the points to be discussed in the essay. The conclusion should summarise the key points and justify which point was the most important.

To what extent was the Second Reich a democratic state in the years 1871–79?



Introducing an argument

Below are a sample exam-style question, a list of key points to be made in the essay and a simple introduction and conclusion for the essay. Read the question, the plan and the introduction. Rewrite the introduction and conclusion in order to develop an argument.

To what extent did political parties have real power in Germany in the years 1871–79?

Key points

- The 1871 constitution
- *Reichstag* weaknesses
- *Reichstag* powers
- The political parties
- Bismarck's need for political support

Introduction

The Second Reich is often seen as an entrenched autocracy with real power in the hands of the Emperor and his Chancellor. However, the Second Reich's constitution established a German parliament, or Reichstag. This body, elected by all men over 25, was able to accept, reject or amend legislation. These were real powers.

Conclusion

Thus, there is clear evidence that political parties in Germany in the 1870s had real power. Bismarck may have had more power but he needed political party support if he was to pass measures through the Reichstag.