**Prussia**

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*This article is about the historical state of Prussia. For other uses, see* [*Prussia (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia_%28disambiguation%29)*.*

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| ***Preußen*Prussia** |
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|  | **1525–1947** |  |

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| [Flag (1892–1918)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Prussia) | [Coat of arms (1701–1918)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Prussia) |

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| [**Motto**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motto)[*Suum cuique*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suum_cuique)  ([Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin))"To each his own" |
| Prussia (blue), at its peak, the leading state of the [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire). |
| [**Capital**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_former_national_capitals) | [Königsberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%B6nigsberg), later [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) |
| **Language(s)** | [German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_language) (official) |
| [**Religion**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_religion) | [Protestantism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism), [Roman Catholicism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism) |
| [**Government**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) | [Monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy), [democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy) |
| [**Duke**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_of_Prussia) |
|  - 1525–68 | [Albert I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_I%2C_Duke_of_Prussia) (first) |
|  - 1688–1701 | [Frederick III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia) (last) |
| [**King**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_Prussia)**1** |  |
|  - 1701–13 | [Frederick I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia) (first) |
|  - 1888–1918 | [Wilhelm II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_II%2C_German_Emperor) (last) |
| [**Prime Minister**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Prussia) |
|  - 1918–20 | [Paul Hirsch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Hirsch_%28politician%29) (first) |
|  - 1933–45 | [Hermann Göring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_G%C3%B6ring) (last) |
| **Historical era** | [Early modern Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern_Europe) to [Contemporary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_history) |
|  - [Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia) | 10 April 1525 |
|  - [Union with Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia) | 27 August 1618 |
|  - [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia) | 18 January 1701 |
|  - [Free State of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_State_of_Prussia) | 9 November 1918 |
|  - Abolition ([*de facto*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto)) | 30 January 1934 |
|  - [Abolition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Control_Council) ([*de jure*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_jure)) | 25 February 1947 |
| [**Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_outlying_territories_by_area) |
|  - 1939 | 297,007 km2 (114,675 sq mi) |
| [**Population**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population) |
|  - 1939 est. | 41,915,040  |
|      [Density](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_density) | 141.1 /km2  (365.5 /sq mi) |
| **Today part of** | [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland),[Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad_Oblast), [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaip%C4%97da_Region),[Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Jutland_County), [Belgium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eupen),Republic, The |
| 1 The heads of state listed here are the first and last to hold each title over time. For more information, see individual Prussian state articles (links in above History section).2 The position of *Ministerpräsident* was introduced in 1792 when Prussia was a Kingdom; the prime ministers shown here are the heads of the Prussian republic. |

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**Prussia** ([German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_language): [*Preußen*](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a4/Preu%C3%9Fen.ogg) ([help](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AMedia_help)·[info](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File%3APreu%C3%9Fen.ogg)); [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin): *Borussia*, *Prutenia*; [Latvian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvian_language): *Prūsija*; [Lithuanian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanian_language): *Prūsija*; [Polish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_language): *Prusy*; [Czech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_language): *Prusko*; [Old Prussian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Prussian_language): *Prose*; [Hungarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_language): *Poroszország*; [Slovak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovak_language): *Prusko*; [Dutch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_language): *Pruisen*) was a historic state originating out of the [Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia) and the [Margraviate of Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margraviate_of_Brandenburg). For centuries this state had substantial influence on [German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) and European history. The last capital of the state of Prussia was [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin).

The name *Prussia* derives from the [Old Prussians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Prussians), a [Baltic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balts) people related to the [Lithuanians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanians) and [Latvians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvians). In the 13th century, "[Old Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia_%28region%29)" was conquered by the [Teutonic Knights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Knights). In [1308](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1308) Teutonic Knights conquered the formerly Polish region of [Pomeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomerelia) with [Gdańsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gda%C5%84sk) (Danzig). Their [monastic state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastic_state_of_the_Teutonic_Knights) was mostly [Germanized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanisation) through [immigration from central and western Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostsiedlung) and in the south it was [Polonized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polonisation) by settlers from [Masovia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masovia). After the [Second Peace of Thorn (1466)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Peace_of_Thorn_%281466%29) Prussia was split into the western [Royal Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Prussia), a province of Poland, and the eastern part, since 1525 called [Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia), a fief of the [Crown of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Poland) up to 1657. The [union of Brandenburg and the Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia) in 1618 led to the proclamation of the [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia) in 1701.

Prussia attained its greatest importance in the 18th and 19th centuries. During the 18th century, it became a great European power under the reign of [Frederick the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_II_of_Prussia) (1740–86). During the 19th century, Chancellor [Otto von Bismarck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck) pursued a policy of uniting the German principalities into a "[Lesser Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleindeutsche_L%C3%B6sung)" which would exclude the [Austrian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_Empire).

The Kingdom of Prussia dominated northern Germany politically, economically, in population, and was the core of the unified [North German Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_German_Confederation) formed in 1867, which became part of the [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire) or [*Deutsches Reich*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsches_Reich) in 1871.

With the end of the [Hohenzollern monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hohenzollern) in Germany following [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I), Prussia became part of the [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic) as a [free state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_State_of_Prussia) in 1919. It effectively lost this status in 1932 following the [Preußenschlag decree](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preu%C3%9Fenschlag) of Reich Chancellor [Franz von Papen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_von_Papen); Prussia as a state was abolished [*de facto*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto) by the [Nazis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism) in 1934 and [*de jure*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_jure) by the [Allies of World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_II) in 1947.

Since then, the term's relevance has been limited to historical, geographical, or cultural usages.

**Symbols**

Main article: [Coat of arms of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Prussia)

The main [coat of arms of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Prussia), as well as the [flag of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Prussia), depicted a [black eagle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_eagle) on a white background.

The black and white national colors were already used by the [Teutonic Knights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Knights) and by the [Hohenzollern dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hohenzollern_dynasty). The Teutonic Order wore a white coat [embroidered](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embroidery) with a black cross with gold insert and black imperial eagle. The combination of the black and white colors with the white and red [Hanseatic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanseatic_League) colors of the free cities [Bremen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremen), [Hamburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg), and [Lübeck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_City_of_L%C3%BCbeck) as well as of [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg) resulted in the black-white-red commercial flag of the [North German Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_German_Confederation), which became the flag of the German Empire in 1871.

[*Suum cuique*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedem_das_Seine) ("to each, his own"), the motto of the [Order of the Black Eagle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_the_Black_Eagle) created by King [Frederick I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia) in 1701, was often associated with the whole of Prussia. The [Iron Cross](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Cross), a military decoration created by King [Frederick William III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_III_of_Prussia) in 1813, was also widely associated with the country.

**Geography and population**

Prussia began as a territory, in what was later called East Prussia, which is now divided into the [Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warmian-Masurian_Voivodeship) of Poland, the [Kaliningrad Oblast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad_Oblast) [exclave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclave) of Russia, and the [Klaipėda Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaip%C4%97da_Region) of Lithuania. Originally the area was much larger, but was greatly reduced by newcomer countries [Masovia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masovia) and [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland). Much of Prussian [Sudovia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudovia) and [Yotvingians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yotvingians) territory was conquered and came to Poland, [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuania), and [Belarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus).

[The region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia_%28region%29), originally populated by Baltic [Old Prussians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Prussians) who were Christianized, became a preferred location for immigration by (later mainly Protestant) [Germans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germans) (*see* [*Ostsiedlung*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostsiedlung)) as well as [Poles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poles) and [Lithuanians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanians) along border regions.

Before its abolition, the territory of the [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia) included "Prussia proper" ([West](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Prussia) and [East Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Prussia)), [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Brandenburg), the [Province of Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Saxony) (including most of the present-day state of [Saxony-Anhalt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony-Anhalt) and parts of the state of [Thuringia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thuringia) in Germany), [Pomerania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Pomerania), [Rhineland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhine_Province), [Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Westphalia), [Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Silesia) (without [Austrian Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_Silesia)), [Lusatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusatia), [Schleswig-Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein), [Hanover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Hanover), [Hesse-Nassau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Hesse-Nassau), and a small detached area in the south [Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Hohenzollern), the ancestral home of the Prussian ruling family.

In 1871, Prussia's population numbered 24.69 million, accounting for 60% of the [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire)'s population. In 1910, the population had increased to a number of 40.17 million (62% of the Empire's population). In 1914, Prussia had an area of 354,490 km². In May 1939 Prussia had an area of 297,007 km² and a population of 41,915,040 inhabitants. The Principality of Neuenburg, now the [Canton of Neuchâtel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canton_of_Neuch%C3%A2tel) in [Switzerland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland), was a part of the Prussian kingdom from 1707 to 1848.

Although Prussia was dominated by [Protestant Germans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) it contained millions of Catholics, and millions of minorities, particularly Poles. East Prussia's southern region of [Masuria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masuria) was largely made up of Germanized Protestant [Masurs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazurian_ethnic_group). There were substantial [Roman Catholic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church) populations in the Rhineland and parts of Westphalia. Also West Prussia, [Warmia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warmia), [Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesia), and the [Province of Posen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Posen) had predominantly Catholic populations. The Kingdom of Prussia acquired these areas from countries with a Catholic majority: the [Kingdom of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth) and the [Austrian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habsburg_Monarchy).

In 1871, approximately 2.4 million Poles lived in Prussia, constituting the largest minority. Other minorities were [Jews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews), [Danes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danish_people), [Frisians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frisians), [Kashubians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashubians) (72,500 in 1905), [Masurians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masurians) (248,000 in 1905), [Lithuanians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanians) (101,500 in 1905), [Walloones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walloons), [Czechs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechs) and [Sorbs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sorbs).

The area of [Greater Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Poland) where the Polish nation had originated became the Province of Posen after the [Partitions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partitions_of_Poland). Poles in this Polish-majority province (62% Polish, 38% German) resisted German rule. Also, the southeast portion of Silesia ([Upper Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Silesia)) had a majority percentage of Polish population. But Catholics, ethnic Poles and other Slavs, and Jews didn't have equal status with Protestants.

As a result of the [Treaty of Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles) in 1919 the [Second Polish Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Polish_Republic) was granted these two areas, but also areas with a German majority in the Province of West Prussia. After [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), East Prussia, Silesia, most of Pomerania, and part of Brandenburg were taken over by either the Soviet Union or Poland.

**Early history**

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| **History of** [**Brandenburg**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg) **and Prussia** |
| [**Northern March**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_March)pre-12th century | [**Old Prussians**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Prussians)pre-13th century |
| [**Margraviate of Brandenburg**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margraviate_of_Brandenburg)1157–1618 (1806) | [**Ordensstaat**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastic_state_of_the_Teutonic_Knights)1224–1525 |
| [**Duchy of Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia)1525–1618 | [**Royal (Polish) Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Prussia)1466–1772 |
| [**Brandenburg-Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia)1618–1701 |
| [**Kingdom in Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia)1701–1772 |
| [**Kingdom of Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia)1772–1918 |
| [**Free State of Prussia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_State_of_Prussia)1918–1947 |  |
| [**Brandenburg**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg)1947–1952 / 1990–present |  |  |

Main articles: [Monastic state of the Teutonic Knights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastic_state_of_the_Teutonic_Knights) and [Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia)

The [Livonian Order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livonian_Order) joined the [Teutonic Order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Order) in 1237; the [Monastic State of the Teutonic Order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastic_State_of_the_Teutonic_Order) around 1455

After the [Second Peace of Thorn (1466)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Peace_of_Thorn_%281466%29)

[*The Prussian Homage*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Homage), [Jan Matejko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Matejko). After admitting the dependence of Prussia to the Polish crown, [Albert of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_of_Prussia) receives [Ducal Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ducal_Prussia) as a [fief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fief) from King [Sigismund I the Old](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigismund_I_the_Old) of [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Poland_%281385%E2%80%931569%29) in 1525.

In 1211 [Andrew II of Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_II_of_Hungary) granted the Burzenland ([fiefdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiefdom)) to the Teutonic Knights. In 1225, Andrew II expelled the Teutonic Knights from Transylvania, and they had to transfer to the Baltic Sea. In 1226 Duke [Konrad I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konrad_I_of_Masovia) of [Masovia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masovia) invited the [Teutonic Knights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Knights), a German [military order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_order) of [crusading](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crusades) knights, headquartered in the [Kingdom of Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Jerusalem) at [Acre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acre%2C_Israel), to conquer the Baltic [Prussian tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Prussians) on his borders. During 60 years of struggles against the Old Prussians, the order created an [independent state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastic_state_of_the_Teutonic_Knights) which came to control [the Old Prussian region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia_%28region%29). After the [Livonian Brothers of the Sword](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livonian_Brothers_of_the_Sword) joined the Teutonic Order in 1237 they also controlled [Livonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livonia) (now [Latvia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia) and [Estonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonia)) and western [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuania).

In the course of the [Ostsiedlung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostsiedlung) process, settlers were called in, a majority of which were [Germans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germans). This brought about changes in the ethnic composition as well as in language, culture and law. [Low German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_German) became the dominant language.

The Knights were subordinate only to the [pope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope) and the [emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roman_Emperor). Their initially close relationship with the Polish Crown deteriorated completely after they conquered Polish controlled [Pomerelia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomerelia) and [Danzig (Gdańsk)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gda%C5%84sk). The Knights were eventually defeated in the [Battle of Grunwald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Grunwald) in 1410 by Poland and Lithuania, allied through the [Union of Krewo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Krewo).

The [Thirteen Years' War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_Years%27_War) (1454–1466) began when the [Prussian Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Confederation), a coalition of [Hanseatic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanseatic_League) cities of western Prussia, rebelled against the Order and requested help from the Polish king. The Teutonic Knights were forced to acknowledge the sovereignty and pay tribute to King [Casimir IV Jagiellon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casimir_IV_Jagiellon) of Poland in the [Second Peace of Thorn (1466)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Peace_of_Thorn_%281466%29), losing western Prussia ([Royal Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Prussia)) to Poland in the process.

In 1525, Grand Master [Albert of Brandenburg-Ansbach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_I%2C_Duke_of_Prussia), a member of a cadet branch of the [House of Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hohenzollern), became a [Lutheran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheranism) Protestant and secularized the Order's remaining Prussian territories into the [Duchy of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Prussia). This was the area east of the mouth of the [Vistula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vistula) River, later sometimes called "Prussia proper". For the first time, these lands were in the hands of a branch of the Hohenzollern family, rulers of the [Margraviate of Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margraviate_of_Brandenburg) to the west, a German state centered on [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) and ruled since the 15th century by the Hohenzollern dynasty. Furthermore, with his renunciation of the Order, Albert could now marry and produce offspring.

Brandenburg and Prussia were unified two generations later. Anna, granddaughter of Albert I and daughter of Duke [Albert Frederick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Frederick%2C_Duke_of_Prussia) (reigned 1568–1618), married her cousin [Elector](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince-Elector) [John Sigismund](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Sigismund%2C_Margrave_of_Brandenburg) of [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margraviate_of_Brandenburg). Upon the death of Albert Frederick in 1618, who died without male heirs, John Sigismund was granted the right of succession to the Duchy of Prussia, which was still a Polish fief. From this time the Duchy of Prussia was in [personal union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_union) with the Margraviate of Brandenburg. The resulting state, known as [Brandenburg-Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia), consisted of geographically disconnected territories in Prussia, Brandenburg, and [Rhenish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhineland) lands of [Cleves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Cleves) and [Mark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_of_Mark).

Margrave [Frederick William](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William%2C_Elector_of_Brandenburg) of Brandenburg, the "Great Elector"

**Rise to power**

During the [Thirty Years' War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Years%27_War), the disconnected Hohenzollern lands were repeatedly marched across by various armies, especially the occupying [Swedes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_Empire). The ineffective and militarily weak Margrave [George William](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_William%2C_Margrave_of_Brandenburg) (1619–1640) fled from Berlin to Königsberg, the historic capital of the Duchy of Prussia, in 1637. His successor, [Frederick William](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William%2C_Elector_of_Brandenburg) (1640–1688), reformed the [army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Army) to defend the lands.

Frederick William went to [Warsaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw) in 1641 to render [homage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homage) to King [Władysław IV Vasa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C5%82adys%C5%82aw_IV_Vasa) of Poland for the Duchy of Prussia, which was still held in [fief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fief) from the Polish crown. Later, he managed to obtain a discharge from his obligations as a [vassal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassal) to the Polish king by taking advantage of the difficult position of Poland vis-à-vis Sweden in the [Northern Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Wars) and his friendly relations with [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) during a series of Russo-Polish wars. He was finally given full sovereignty over Prussia in the [Treaty of Wehlau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Wehlau) in 1657.

Frederick William became known as the "Great Elector" for his introduction of [absolutism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolutism) into Brandenburg-Prussia. Above all, he emphasized the importance of a [powerful military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Army) to protect the state's disconnected territories.

**Kingdom of Prussia**

[Frederick I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia), [King in Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_in_Prussia)

Main article: [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia)

On 18 January 1701, Frederick William's son, Elector Frederick III, upgraded Prussia from a duchy to a kingdom and crowned himself King [Frederick I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia). To avoid offending [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland), where a part of the old Prussia lay, [Leopold I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_I%2C_Holy_Roman_Emperor), emperor of the Holy Roman Empire where most of the lands of Prussia lay, allowed Frederick only to title himself "[King *in* Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_in_Prussia)", not "King *of* Prussia".

Growth of [Brandenburg-Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia), 1600–1795

The state of [Brandenburg-Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg-Prussia) became commonly known as "Prussia", although most of its territory, in Brandenburg, Pomerania, and western Germany, lay outside of Prussia proper. The Prussian state grew in splendor during the reign of Frederick I, who sponsored the arts at the expense of the treasury.

Frederick I was succeeded by his son, [Frederick William I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_I_of_Prussia) (1713–1740) the austere "Soldier King", who did not care for the arts but was thrifty and practical. He is considered the creator of the vaunted Prussian bureaucracy and the [standing army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_army), which he developed into one of the most powerful in Europe, although his troops only briefly saw action during the [Great Northern War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Northern_War). In view of the size of the army in relation to the total population, [Voltaire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voltaire) said later: "*Where some states have an army, the* [*Prussian Army*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Army) *has a state!*" Also, Frederick William settled more than 20,000 Protestant refugees from [Salzburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salzburg) in thinly populated eastern Prussia, which was eventually extended to the west bank of the [Memel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memel) river, and other regions. From Sweden he acquired [Western Pomerania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorpommern) as far as the [Peene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peene) in 1720.

King [Frederick William I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_I_of_Prussia), "the Soldier-King"

In 1740, Frederick William was succeeded by his son, [Frederick II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_II_of_Prussia), later nicknamed "Frederick the Great". As crown prince he focused on philosophy and the arts; yet, in the first year of his reign he ordered the Prussian army to march into [Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesia), a possession of Habsburg Austria to which the Hohenzollerns laid claim based on an old and disputed treaty of succession. In the three [Silesian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesian_Wars) (1740–1763) Frederick succeeded in conquering Silesia from Austria and holding his new possession. In the last, the [Seven Years' War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Years%27_War), he held it against a coalition of Austria, France, and Russia. [Voltaire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voltaire), a close friend of the king, once described Frederick the Great's Prussia by saying "...it was [Sparta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta) in the morning, [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) in the afternoon." From these wars onwards the [German dualism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_dualism) dominated German politics until 1866.

Silesia, a region of rich soils and prosperous manufacturing towns, greatly increased the area, population, and wealth of Prussia. Success on the battleground against Austria and other powers proved Prussia's status as one of the [great powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power) of Europe. The Silesian Wars began more than a century of rivalry and conflict between Prussia and Austria as the two most powerful states operating within the Holy Roman Empire (although, ironically, both had extensive territory outside the empire). In 1744 the County of [East Frisia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Frisia) fell to Prussia following the extinction of its ruling Cirksena dynasty.

King [Frederick II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_II_of_Prussia), "the Great"

In the last 23 years of his reign until 1786, Frederick II, who understood himself as the "first servant of the state", promoted the development of Prussian areas such as the [Oderbruch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oderbruch). At the same time he built up Prussia's military power and participated in the [First Partition of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_Poland) with Austria and Russia (1772), an act that geographically connected the Brandenburg territories with those of Prussia proper. During this period, he also opened Prussia's borders to immigrants fleeing from religious persecution in other parts of Europe, such as the [Huguenots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huguenots). Prussia became a safe haven in much the same way that the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) welcomed immigrants seeking freedom in the 19th century.

Frederick the Great, the first "King *of* Prussia", practiced [enlightened absolutism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightened_absolutism). He introduced a general civil code, abolished torture, and established the principle that the crown would not interfere in matters of justice. He also promoted an advanced secondary education, the forerunner of today's German [gymnasium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_%28school%29) (grammar school) system, which prepares the brightest students for university studies. The [Prussian education system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_education_system) became emulated in various countries.

**Napoleonic Wars**

Main articles: [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars), [Battle of Jena-Auerstedt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Jena-Auerstedt), and [War of the Sixth Coalition#War in Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Sixth_Coalition#War_in_Germany)

During the reign of King [Frederick William II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_II_of_Prussia) (1786–1797), Prussia annexed additional Polish territory through further [Partitions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partitions_of_Poland). His successor, [Frederick William III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_III_of_Prussia) (1797–1840), announced the union of the Prussian [Lutheran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheranism) and [Reformed churches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformed_churches) into [one church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_Union_%28Evangelical_Christian_Church%29).

Prussia took a leading part in the [French Revolutionary Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolutionary_Wars), but remained quiet for more than a decade due to the [Peace of Basel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Basel) of 1795, only to go once more to war with France in 1806 as negotiations with that country over the allocation of the spheres of influence in Germany failed. Prussia suffered a devastating defeat against [Napoleon Bonaparte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon_I_of_France)'s troops in the [Battle of Jena-Auerstedt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Jena-Auerstedt), leading Frederick William III and his family to flee temporarily to [Memel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaip%C4%97da). Under the [Treaties of Tilsit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaties_of_Tilsit) in 1807, the state lost about half of its area, including the areas gained from the second and third [Partitions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partitions_of_Poland), which now fell to the [Duchy of Warsaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Warsaw). Beyond that, the king was obliged to make an alliance with France and join the [Continental System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_System).

In response to this defeat, reformers such as [Stein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Friedrich_Karl_Reichsfreiherr_vom_und_zum_Stein) and [Hardenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_August_von_Hardenberg) set about modernizing the Prussian state. Among their reforms were the liberation of peasants from [serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serfdom), the [Emancipation of Jews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Emancipation) and making full citizens of them, and the institution of self-administration in [municipalities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipality). The school system was rearranged, and in 1818 free trade was introduced. The process of army reform ended in 1813 with the introduction of compulsory military service.

After the [defeat of Napoleon in Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon%27s_invasion_of_Russia), Prussia quit its alliance with France and took part in the [Sixth Coalition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sixth_Coalition) during the "Wars of Liberation" (*Befreiungskriege*) against the French occupation. Prussian troops under Marshal [Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gebhard_Leberecht_von_Bl%C3%BCcher) contributed crucially in the [Battle of Waterloo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Waterloo) of 1815 to the final victory over Napoleon. Prussia's reward in 1815 at the [Congress of Vienna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Vienna) was the recovery of her lost territories, as well as the whole of the [Rhineland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhineland), [Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westphalia), and some other territories. These western lands were to be of vital importance because they included the [Ruhr Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhr_Area), the center of Germany's fledgling [industrialization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrialisation), especially in the arms industry. These territorial gains also meant the doubling of Prussia's population. In exchange, Prussia withdrew from areas of central Poland to allow the creation of [Congress Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_Poland) under Russian sovereignty.

Prussia emerged from the [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars) as the dominant power in Germany, overshadowing her long-time rival Austria, which had given up the imperial crown in 1806. In 1815 Prussia became part of the [German Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Confederation).

King [Frederick William IV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_IV_of_Prussia)

The first half of the 19th century saw a prolonged struggle in Germany between [liberals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism), who wanted a united, federal Germany under a democratic constitution, and [conservatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism), who wanted to maintain Germany as a patchwork of independent, monarchical states, with Prussia and Austria competing for influence. One small movement that signaled a desire for German unification in this period was the [Burschenschaft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burschenschaft) student movement, by students who encouraged the use of the black-red-gold flag, discussions of a unified German nation, and a progressive, liberal political system. Because of Prussia's size and economic importance, smaller states began to join its free trade area in the 1820s. Prussia benefited greatly from the creation in 1834 of the German Customs Union ([Zollverein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zollverein)), which included most German states but excluded Austria.

In 1848 the liberals saw an opportunity when [revolutions broke out across Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1848). Alarmed, King [Frederick William IV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_IV_of_Prussia) agreed to convene a National Assembly and grant a constitution. When the [Frankfurt Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_Parliament) offered Frederick William the crown of a united Germany, he refused on the grounds that he would not accept a crown from a revolutionary assembly without the sanction of Germany's other monarchs.

The Frankfurt Parliament was forced to dissolve in 1849, and Frederick William issued [Prussia's first constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Kingdom_of_Prussia) by his own authority in 1850. This conservative document provided for a two-house parliament. The lower house, or [*Landtag*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landtag) was elected by all taxpayers, who were divided into [three classes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_three-class_franchise) whose votes were weighted according to the amount of taxes paid. Women and those who paid no taxes had no vote. This allowed just over one-third of the voters to choose 85% of the legislature, all but assuring dominance by the more well-to-do men of the population. The upper house, which was later renamed the [*Herrenhaus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herrenhaus) ("House of Lords"), was appointed by the king. He retained full executive authority and ministers were responsible only to him. As a result, the grip of the landowning classes, the [Junkers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junker), remained unbroken, especially in the eastern provinces.

**Wars of unification**

[Otto von Bismarck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck)

In 1862 King [Wilhelm I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_I%2C_German_Emperor) appointed [Otto von Bismarck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck) as [Prime Minister of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Prussia). Bismarck was determined to defeat both the liberals and conservatives and increase Prussian supremacy and influence among the German states. There has been much debate as to whether Bismarck actually planned to create a united Germany when he set out on this journey, or whether he simply took advantage of the circumstances that fell into place. Certainly his memoirs paint a rosy picture of an idealist, but these were written with the benefit of hindsight. What is clear is that Bismarck curried support from large sections of the people by promising to lead the fight for greater German unification. He eventually guided Prussia through three wars which together brought William the position of [German Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Emperor).

**Schleswig Wars**

The Kingdom of [Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark) was at the time in personal union with the Duchies of [Schleswig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig) and [Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holstein), both of which had close ties with each other, although only Holstein was part of the [German Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Confederation). When the Danish government tried to integrate Schleswig, but not Holstein, into the Danish state, Prussia led the German Confederation against Denmark in the [First War of Schleswig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_War_of_Schleswig) (1848–1851). Because [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) supported Austria, Prussia also conceded predominance in the German Confederation to Austria in the [Punctation of Olmütz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punctation_of_Olm%C3%BCtz) in 1850.

In 1863, Denmark introduced a shared constitution for Denmark and Schleswig. This led to conflict with the German Confederation, which authorized the occupation of Holstein by the Confederation, from which Danish forces withdrew. In 1864, Prussian and Austrian forces crossed the border between Holstein and Schleswig initiating the [Second War of Schleswig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_War_of_Schleswig). The Austro-Prussian forces defeated the Danes, who surrendered both territories. In the resulting [Gastein Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gastein_Convention) of 1865 Prussia took over the administration of Schleswig while Austria assumed that of Holstein.

**Austro-Prussian War**

Main article: [Austro-Prussian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austro-Prussian_War)

Expansion of Prussia 1807–1871

Bismarck realized that the dual administration of Schleswig and Holstein was only a temporary solution, and tensions escalated between Prussia and Austria. The struggle for supremacy in Germany then led to the [Austro-Prussian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austro-Prussian_War) (1866), triggered by the dispute over Schleswig and Holstein.

On the side of Austria stood the southern German states (including [Bavaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Bavaria) and [Württemberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C3%BCrttemberg)), some central German states (including [Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Saxony)), and [Hanover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hanover) in the north; on the side of Prussia were [Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy), most northern German states, and some smaller central German states. Eventually, the better-armed Prussian troops won the crucial victory at the [battle of Königgrätz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_K%C3%B6niggr%C3%A4tz) under [Helmuth von Moltke the Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth_von_Moltke_the_Elder). The century-long struggle between Berlin and Vienna for dominance of Germany was now over.

Bismarck desired Austria as an ally in the future, and so he declined to annex any Austrian territory. But in the [Peace of Prague](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Prague_%281866%29) in 1866, Prussia annexed four of Austria's allies in northern and central Germany—Hanover, [Hesse-Kassel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesse-Kassel) (or Hesse-Cassel), [Nassau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Nassau) and [Frankfurt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt). Prussia also won full control of [Schleswig-Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein). As a result of these territorial gains, Prussia now stretched uninterrupted across the northern two-thirds of Germany and contained two-thirds of Germany's population. The German Confederation was dissolved, and Prussia cajoled the 21 states north of the [Main](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main) River into forming the [North German Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_German_Confederation).

Prussia was the dominant state in the new confederation, as the kingdom comprised almost four-fifths of the new state's territory and population. Prussia's near-total control over the confederation was cemented in the constitution drafted for it by Bismarck in 1867. Executive power was held by a president, assisted by a chancellor responsible only to him. The presidency was a hereditary office of the [Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hohenzollern) rulers of Prussia. There was also a two-house parliament. The lower house, or [*Reichstag*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_%28institution%29) (Diet), was elected by universal male [suffrage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffrage). The upper house, or [*Bundesrat*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundesrat) (Federal Council) was appointed by the state governments. The Bundesrat was, in practice, the stronger chamber. Prussia had 17 of 43 votes, and could easily control proceedings through alliances with the other states.

As a result of the peace negotiations, the states south of the Main remained theoretically independent, but received the (compulsory) protection of Prussia. Additionally, mutual defense treaties were concluded. (See also "[Das Lied der Deutschen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Lied_der_Deutschen)".) However, the existence of these treaties was kept secret until Bismarck made them public in 1867, when France tried to [acquire Luxembourg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Prussian_War#The_Luxembourg_Crisis).

**Franco-Prussian War**

Main article: [Franco-Prussian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Prussian_War)

Emperor [William I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_I%2C_German_Emperor)

The controversy with the [Second French Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_French_Empire) over the candidacy of a [Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hohenzollern) to the [Spanish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) throne was escalated both by France and Bismarck. With his [Ems Dispatch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ems_Dispatch), Bismarck took advantage of an incident in which the French ambassador had approached William. The government of [Napoleon III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon_III_of_France), expecting another civil war among the German states, declared war against Prussia, continuing [Franco-German enmity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-German_enmity). Honoring their treaties, the German states joined forces and quickly defeated France in the [Franco-Prussian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Prussian_War) in 1870. Following victory under Bismarck's and Prussia's leadership, [Baden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden), [Württemberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C3%BCrttemberg), and [Bavaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Bavaria) — which had remained outside the North German Confederation — accepted incorporation into a united [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire).

The empire was a "[Kleindeutsche Lösung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleindeutsche_L%C3%B6sung)" or a "Lesser German Solution" to the problem of German unity, because it excluded Austria, which remained connected to [Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary) and further non-German population. On 18 January 1871 (the 170th anniversary of the coronation of King [Frederick I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I_of_Prussia)), William was proclaimed "German [Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaiser)" (not "Emperor of Germany") in the [Hall of Mirrors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_Versailles) at [Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Versailles) outside [Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris), while the French capital was still under [siege](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Paris).

**German Empire**

Main article: [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire)

Prussia in the German Empire 1871–1918

The two decades after the [unification of Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_of_Germany) were the peak of Prussia's fortunes, but the seeds for potential strife were built into the Prusso-German political system.

The constitution of the German Empire was a slightly amended version of the North German Confederation's constitution. Officially, the German Empire was a federal state. In practice, Prussia's dominance over the empire was almost absolute. The Hohenzollern kingdom included three-fifths of its territory and two-thirds of its population. The [Imperial German Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Army_%28German_Empire%29) was, in practice, an enlarged Prussian army, although the other kingdoms ([Bavaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bavaria), [Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony), and [Württemberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C3%BCrttemberg)) retained their own armies. The imperial crown was a hereditary office of the [House of Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hohenzollern), the royal house of Prussia. The prime minister of Prussia was, except for two brief periods (January–November 1873 and 1892–94), also imperial chancellor. While all men above age 25 were eligible to vote in imperial elections, Prussia retained its restrictive three-class voting system. This effectively required the king/emperor and prime minister/chancellor to seek majorities from legislatures elected by two completely different franchises. In both the kingdom and the empire, the original constituencies were never redrawn to reflect changes in population, meaning that rural areas were grossly overrepresented by the turn of the century.

[Emperor Frederick III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_III%2C_German_Emperor)

As a result, Prussia and the German Empire were something of a paradox. Bismarck knew that his new [German Reich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Reich) was now a colossus out of all proportion to the rest of the continent. With this in mind, he declared Germany a satisfied power, using his talents to preserve peace, for example at the [Congress of Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Berlin). Bismarck had mixed success in his domestic policies, such as the anti-Catholic [*Kulturkampf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulturkampf) and [Germanization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanisation_of_Poles_during_Partitions) or [expulsion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expulsion_of_Poles_by_Germany) of Poles of foreign nationality (Russian or Austro-Hungarian).

[Frederick III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_III%2C_German_Emperor) may have had the potential to be a leader in Bismarck's mold, but he was already terminally ill when he became emperor for 99 days in 1888 upon the death of his father. He was married to [Victoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria%2C_Princess_Royal), the first daughter of [Queen Victoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_of_the_United_Kingdom) of the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), but their first son William suffered physical and possibly mental damage during birth.

At age 29, William became [Emperor William II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_II%2C_German_Emperor) after a difficult youth and conflicts with his British mother. He turned out to be a man of limited experience, narrow and reactionary views, poor judgment, and occasional bad temper, which alienated former friends and allies. William, who was a close relative of the [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Windsor) and [Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanov) royal families, became their rival and ultimately their enemy.

Emperor [Wilhelm II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_II%2C_German_Emperor)

After forcing Bismarck out in 1890, William embarked on a program of militarization and adventurism in foreign policy that eventually placed Germany in isolation. A misjudgment of the conflict with [Serbia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbia) by the emperor, who left for holidays, and the hasty mobilization plans of several nations led to the disaster of [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) (1914–1918). As the price of their withdrawal from the war, the [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolsheviks) conceded large regions of the western [Russian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire), some of which bordered Prussia, to German control in the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk) (1918). German control of these territories lasted only for a few months, however, because of the defeat of German military forces by the western [Allies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_I) and the [German Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Revolution). The post-war [Treaty of Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles), which held Germany and her allies solely responsible for the war, was signed in Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, where the German Empire had been created.

**Free State of Prussia in the Weimar Republic**

Main article: [Free State of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_State_of_Prussia)

Federal States of the Weimar Republic. Prussia is light blue. After [WWI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) the Provinces of [Posen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Posen) and [West Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Prussia) came largely to the [2nd Polish Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Polish_Republic); [Posen-West Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posen-West_Prussia) and the [West Prussia district](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regierungsbezirk_Westpreu%C3%9Fen) were formed from the remaining parts.

Because of the [German Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Revolution) of 1918, William II abdicated as German Emperor and King of Prussia. Prussia was proclaimed a "Free State" (i.e. a [republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic), German: *Freistaat*) within the new [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic) and in 1920 received a democratic constitution.

All of Germany's territorial losses, specified in the [Treaty of Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles), were areas that had been part of Prussia: [Alsace-Lorraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alsace-Lorraine) to France; [Eupen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eupen) and [Malmedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malmedy) to [Belgium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium); [North Schleswig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Jutland_County) to Denmark; the [Memel Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaip%C4%97da_Region) to Lithuania; the [Hultschin area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hlu%C4%8D%C3%ADnsko) to [Czechoslovakia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia). Many of the areas which Prussia had annexed in the [partitions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partitions_of_Poland), such as the Provinces of [Posen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Posen) and [West Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Prussia), as well as eastern [Upper Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Silesia), went to the [Second Polish Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Polish_Republic). [Danzig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gda%C5%84sk) became the [Free City of Danzig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_City_of_Danzig) under the administration of the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations). Also, the [Saargebiet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saargebiet) was created mainly from formerly Prussian territories. [East Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Prussia) became an exclave, only reachable by ship ("shipping service East Prussia") or by a railway through the [Polish corridor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_corridor).

The German government seriously considered breaking up Prussia into smaller states, but eventually traditionalist sentiment prevailed and Prussia became by far the largest state of the [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic), comprising 60% of its territory. With the abolition of the older Prussian franchise, it became a stronghold of the left. Its incorporation of "Red Berlin" and the industrialized Ruhr Area — both with working-class majorities — ensured left-wing dominance.

From 1919 to 1932, Prussia was governed by a coalition of the [Social Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Party_of_Germany), [Catholic Centre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre_Party_%28Germany%29), and [German Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Democratic_Party); from 1921 to 1925, coalition governments included the [German People's Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_People%27s_Party). Unlike in other states of the German Reich, majority rule by democratic parties in Prussia was never endangered. Nevertheless, in [East Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Prussia) and some industrial areas, the [National Socialist German Workers Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Socialist_German_Workers_Party) (or Nazi Party) of [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) gained more and more influence and popular support, especially from the lower [middle class](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_class). Except for [Roman Catholic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church) Prussian [Upper Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Silesia), the Nazi Party in 1932 became the largest party in most parts of the Free State of Prussia. However, the democratic parties in coalition remained a majority, while Communists and Nazis were in the opposition.

Otto Braun by the artist [Max Liebermann](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Liebermann), 1932

The East Prussian [Otto Braun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Braun), who was Prussian minister-president almost continuously from 1920 to 1932, is considered one of the most capable Social Democrats in history. He implemented several trend-setting reforms together with his minister of the interior, [Carl Severing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Severing), which were also models for the later [Federal Republic of Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) (FRG). For instance, a Prussian minister-president could be forced out of office only if there was a "positive majority" for a potential successor. This concept, known as the [constructive vote of no confidence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_vote_of_no_confidence), was carried over into the [Basic Law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Law) of the FRG. Most historians regard the Prussian government during this time as far more successful than that of Germany as a whole.

In contrast to its prewar authoritarianism, Prussia was a pillar of democracy in the Weimar Republic. This system was destroyed by the [*Preußenschlag*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preu%C3%9Fenschlag) ("Prussian [coup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coup)") of [Reich Chancellor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reich_Chancellor) [Franz von Papen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_von_Papen). In this coup d'état, the government of the Reich unseated the Prussian government on 20 July 1932, under the pretext that the latter had lost control of public order in Prussia (during the Bloody Sunday of [Altona, Hamburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altona%2C_Hamburg), which was still part of Prussia at that time). Papen appointed himself Reich commissioner for Prussia and took control of the government. The *Preußenschlag* made it easier, only half a year later, for [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) to take power decisively in Germany, since he had the whole apparatus of the Prussian government, including the police, at his disposal.

**End of Prussia**

After the appointment of Hitler as the new chancellor, the [Nazis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism) used the opportunity of the absence of Franz von Papen to appoint [Hermann Göring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_G%C3%B6ring) federal commissioner for the Prussian ministry of the interior. The [Reichstag election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_election%2C_1933) of March 5, 1933 strengthened the position of the [National Socialist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Socialist_German_Workers_Party), although they did not achieve an absolute majority.

[Paul von Hindenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_von_Hindenburg)

Because the [Reichstag building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_%28building%29) had been [set on fire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_fire) a few weeks earlier, the new [Reichstag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_%28institution%29) was opened in the Garrison Church of [Potsdam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potsdam) on March 21, 1933 in the presence of President [Paul von Hindenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_von_Hindenburg). In a propaganda-filled meeting between Hitler and the Nazi Party, the "marriage of old Prussia with young Germany" was celebrated, to win over the Prussian monarchists, conservatives, and nationalists and induce them to vote for the [Enabling Act of 1933](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enabling_Act_of_1933).

In the centralized state created by the Nazis in the "Law on the Reconstruction of the Reich" ("Gesetz über den Neuaufbau des Reiches", 30 January 1934) and the "Law on Reich Governors" ("Reichsstatthaltergesetz", 30 January 1935) the states were dissolved, in fact if not in law. The federal state governments were now controlled by governors for the Reich who were appointed by the chancellor. Parallel to that, the organization of the party into districts ([*Gaue*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gau_%28German%29)) gained increasing importance, as the official in charge of a *Gau* (the head of which was called a [*Gauleiter*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gauleiter)) was again appointed by the chancellor who was at the same time chief of the Nazi Party.

In Prussia, this anti-federalistic policy went even further. From 1934 almost all ministries were merged and only a few departments were able to maintain their independence. Hitler himself became formally the governor of Prussia. His functions were exercised, however, by [Hermann Göring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_G%C3%B6ring), as Prussian prime minister.

As provided for in the "Greater Hamburg Law" ("Groß-Hamburg-Gesetz"), certain exchanges of territory took place. Prussia was extended on 1 April 1937, for instance, by the incorporation of the Free and Hanseatic City of [Lübeck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BCbeck).

The Prussian lands transferred to Poland after the Treaty of Versailles were re-annexed during [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II). However, most of this territory was not reintegrated back into Prussia but assigned to separate *Gaue* of [Danzig-West Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danzig-West_Prussia) and [Wartheland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wartheland).

With the end of National Socialist rule in 1945 came the division of Germany into Zones of Occupation, and the transfer of control of everything east of the [Oder-Neisse line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oder-Neisse_line), (including [Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesia), [Farther Pomerania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farther_Pomerania), [Eastern Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Brandenburg), and southern [East Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Prussia)), to Poland, with the northern third of East Prussia, including Königsberg, now [Kaliningrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad), going to the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union). Today the [Kaliningrad Oblast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad_Oblast) is a Russian exclave between Lithuania and Poland. During the [Soviet Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Army)'s takeover of eastern Germany an estimated ten million Germans fled, were [expelled](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expulsion_of_Germans_after_World_War_II) from (or were not able to return) to these territories as part of the [Potsdam Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potsdam_Agreement) and the sanctioned [German exodus from Eastern Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_exodus_from_Eastern_Europe).

Map of current [states of Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany) that are completely or mostly situated inside the old borders of [Imperial Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Germany)’s [Kingdom of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia)

As part of their war aims the Western allies sought the abolition of Prussia. Stalin was initially content to retain the name, Russia having a different historical view of its neighbor and sometime former ally. In Law #46 of 20 May 1947 the [Allied Control Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Control_Council) formally proclaimed the dissolution of Prussia.

In the Soviet Zone of Occupation, which became [East Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Germany) in 1949, the former Prussian territories were reorganized into the states of [Brandenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandenburg) and [Saxony-Anhalt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxony-Anhalt), with the remaining parts of the [Province of Pomerania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Pomerania) going to [Mecklenburg-Vorpommern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). These states were abolished in 1952 in favor of districts, but were recreated after the fall of communism in 1990.

In the Western Zones of occupation, which became [West Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Germany) in 1949, the former Prussian territories were divided up among [North Rhine-Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Rhine-Westphalia), [Lower Saxony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Saxony), [Hesse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesse), [Rhineland-Palatinate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhineland-Palatinate), and [Schleswig-Holstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein). [Württemberg-Baden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C3%BCrttemberg-Baden) and [Württemberg-Hohenzollern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C3%BCrttemberg-Hohenzollern) were later merged with [Baden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden) to create the state of [Baden-Württemberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden-W%C3%BCrttemberg).

Since the dissolution of the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union), a small number of [ethnic Germans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_Germans) from [Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakhstan) have begun to settle in the [Kaliningrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad) [exclave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclave) of [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia), once northern East Prussia, as part of the migration influx into the area, which was previously a restricted area (closed city). As of 2005, about 6,000 (0.6% of population) ethnic Germans, mostly from other parts of Russia, live there.

After [German reunification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_reunification) in 1990, a plan was developed to merge the States of Berlin and Brandenburg. Though some suggested calling the proposed new state "Prussia", no final name was proposed, and the combined state would probably have been called either "Brandenburg" or "Berlin-Brandenburg". However this proposed merger was rejected in 1996 by popular vote, achieving a majority of votes only in former [West Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Berlin).

**See also**

* [List of rulers of Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rulers_of_Prussia)
* [Prussian virtues](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_virtues)
* [Wilhelminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelminism)

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