1. **German facts**

**Population:**

82,490,000

**Capital:**

Berlin; 3,327,000

**Area:**

357,022 square kilometers (137,847 square miles)

**Language:**

German

**Religion:**

Protestant, Roman Catholic

**Currency:**

Euro

**Life Expectancy:**

78

**GDP per Capita:**

U.S. $26,200

**Literacy Percent:**

99

Responsibility for educational supervision in Germany is primarily organized within the individual [federal states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany). Optional [kindergarten](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindergarten) education is provided for all children between three and six years old, after which school attendance is [compulsory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_education) for at least nine years. Primary education usually lasts for four to six years and public schools are not stratified by academic ability at this stage.[[197]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-ED-202) Secondary education includes three traditional types of schools focused on different academic levels: the [*Gymnasium*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gymnasium_(school)) enrolls the most gifted children and prepares students for university studies; the [*Realschule*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realschule) for intermediate students lasts six years and the [*Hauptschule*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauptschule) prepares pupils for vocational education.[[198]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-203) The *Gesamtschule* ([comprehensive school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_school)) unifies all secondary education. A system of apprenticeship called *Duale Ausbildung* ([dual education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_education_system)) does not lead to an academic degree. Instead, it allows students in [vocational training](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocational_training) to learn in a company as well as in a state-run vocational school.[[197]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-ED-202) This model is highly regarded and reproduced all around the world.[[199]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-204)

Most of the German universities are public institutions, and students have traditionally studied without fee payment.[[200]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-205) The general requirement for university is the [*Abitur*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abitur), a qualification normally based on continuous assessment during the last few years at school and final examinations. However, there are a number of exceptions, depending on the state, the university and the subject. Academic education is open to international students and is increasingly common.[[201]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-206)

In the [Academic Ranking of World Universities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_Ranking_of_World_Universities) 2008, six of the top 100 universities in the world, and 18 of the top 200, are in Germany. The established [universities in Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Germany) include some of the [oldest in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_oldest_universities_in_continuous_operation), with [Heidelberg University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg_University) (established in 1386) being the oldest in Germany. Heidelberg is followed by [Leipzig University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leipzig_University) (1409), [Rostock University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Rostock) (1419), [Greifswald University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Greifswald) (1456), [Freiburg University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Freiburg) (1457) and the [University of Munich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Munich) (1472).[[202]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-207)

**VOCAB**

Prussia

Weimar Republic

Goths

Saxons

Federalism

Tuetonic

Franks

Charlemagne

Hansiatic League

Fuedalism

Gaul

Kaiser

Hohenstaufen dynasty

Hohenzollern

Alsace-Lorraine

1. **German States** 
   1. country broken up into states, just like the united states

[Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) is a [federal republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_republic) consisting of sixteen **federal states** ([German](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_language): *Bundesland*, or *Land*).[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Germany#cite_note-3) Since today's Germany was formed from an earlier collection of several states, it has a federal constitution, and the constituent states retain a measure of sovereignty. [Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) and [Hamburg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg) are frequently called *Stadtstaaten* ([city-states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City-state)), as is the [Free Hanseatic City of Bremen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremen_(state)), which in fact includes the cities of [Bremen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremen) and [Bremerhaven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremerhaven). The remaining 13 states are called *Flächenländer* (literally: area states).

The creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 was through the unification of the western states created in the aftermath of [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II). [West Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Berlin), while officially not part of the Federal Republic, was largely integrated and considered as a [*de facto*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto) state.

In 1952, following a referendum, Baden, Württemberg-Baden, and Württemberg-Hohenzollern merged into [Baden-Württemberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baden-W%C3%BCrttemberg). In 1957, the [Saar Protectorate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saar_Protectorate) rejoined the Federal Republic as the [Saarland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saarland). [German reunification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_reunification) in 1990, in which the [German Democratic Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Democratic_Republic) (East Germany) ascended into the Federal Republic, resulted in the addition of the [re-established eastern states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_states_of_Germany) as well as the reunification of [West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Berlin) and [East Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Berlin) into [Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) (more later).

[Federalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalism_in_Germany) is one of the entrenched constitutional principles of Germany. According to the [German constitution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_constitution) some topics, such as foreign affairs and defense, are the exclusive responsibility of the federation, while others fall under the shared authority of the states and the federation; the states retain residual legislative authority for all other areas, including "culture", which in Germany includes not only topics such as financial promotion of arts and sciences, but also most forms of education and job training. The states defend their interests at the federal level through the [*Bundesrat*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundesrat_of_Germany) (literally *Federal Council*, the upper house of the German Federal Parliament) and in areas where they have legislative authority they have limited powers to conclude international treaties "with the consent of the federal government

1. **German early history**

As Germanic tribes migrated south- and westward in the 1st centuries BC and AD, they also encountered the [Romans](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276779/ancient-Rome), who were expanding their territory northward. In 113 BC two Germanic tribes—the Cimbri and the Teutoni—began invading the Mediterranean regions. The Roman general Gaius Marius defeated them in 102 and 101 BC. To discourage further invasions, [Julius Caesar](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273442/Julius-Caesar) crossed the Rhine to make raids into Germanic land in 55 and 53 BC. In a famous battle in the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9, the Germanic leader destroyed three Roman legions. Historians believe that this rout convinced the Romans not to try to conquer the Germanic tribes. Instead, the Romans built a line of fortifications, called the Limes Germanicus, from the Rhine to the Danube to define and protect the Roman frontier. Trade and cultural exchange between Germanic peoples and the Roman Empire continued.

When Roman power weakened, waves of Germanic tribes migrated to various regions of the empire. The [Franks](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9323790/Frank) crossed the Rhine into Gaul (most of which is now France). The [Goths](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274607/Goths) migrated to the [Balkans](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273072/Balkans). The Alemanni moved into the Rhineland, and the Burgundians and [Vandals](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277543/Vandals) entered the Main River valley. In the 4th century AD the [Huns](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274992/Huns), a non-Germanic people from Asia, swept into Europe and pushed many more waves of Germanic tribes into Roman land.

.

1. **German medieval history**

By the beginning of the [Middle Ages](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9275833/Middle-Ages), the western part of the Roman Empire had come to an end, and Germanic peoples were spread throughout its territory. These tribes accepted [Christianity](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273658/Christianity) and adopted much of Roman culture. They included the Frisians, between what are now the Netherlands and Denmark; the Saxons, between the Rhine and Elbe rivers; the Thuringians, in what is now central Germany; the Alemanni, on the upper Rhine in Swabia; and the Franks, on the lower Rhine.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

In the late 5th century [Clovis](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273709/Clovis), king of the Franks, extended Frankish rule over northern Gaul. Clovis and his successors, who were of the [Merovingian dynasty](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-201135/France#201135.toc), eventually also ruled over much of what is now Germany. Another line of Frankish rulers, the Carolingians, came to power in the 8th century. Under the Carolingian ruler [Charlemagne](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273600/Charlemagne) the kingdom covered most of western Europe. In 800 the pope crowned Charlemagne emperor; his empire is today often called the [Holy Roman Empire](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274922/Holy-Roman-Empire).

Charlemagne died in 814. The Treaty of Verdun in 843 divided his empire among three of his grandsons. Louis the German acquired the eastern part, which developed into Germany. Charles the Bald ruled the west, which became France. Lothair obtained the middle part. The monarchy's authority in the German kingdom was weak, and the power of regional dukes increased. There arose five great tribal duchies—Saxony, Franconia, Bavaria, Swabia, and Lotharingia (Lorraine).

In 911 the Carolingian rule of Germany ended, and the German nobles elected Conrad I, the duke of Franconia, king. Rule soon passed to Henry I (919–936), the founder of the Saxon dynasty. The strongest Saxon king was [Otto I](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276227/Otto-I) the Great (936–973). He revived the Holy Roman Empire, which then included Germany and northern Italy but not France

In 1024 [**Conrad II**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273779/Conrad-II), founder of the Salian dynasty, was elected to rule. Soon the empire was torn by the [**Investiture Controversy**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-202102/Holy-Roman-Empire#202102.toc), a conflict over whether the German ruler or the pope had the right to appoint high clergy. It was begun between [**Henry IV**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274848/Henry-IV) and Pope [**Gregory VII**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-201770/Gregory-popes#201770.toc). Conflicts between the rulers and the popes over their relative authority continued under the next German ruling dynasty, the [**Hohenstaufens**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274907/Hohenstaufen-dynasty), especially under [**Frederick I (Barbarossa)**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274425/Frederick-I) and [**Frederick II**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274426/Frederick-II). The Hohenstaufens ruled Germany and the Holy Roman Empire for most of the period from 1138 to 1254.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Wars between various local [**feudal**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274299/feudalism) rulers weakened the empire. The duchies were split into hundreds of smaller powers. Some cities became free cities, many of which banded together into powerful alliances. One such alliance, the [**Hanseatic League**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274769/Hanseatic-League), dominated commercial activity in northern Europe. This league consisted of increasingly independent and powerful north German towns and commercial groups who defended their own trade concessions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

The decline of the Hohenstaufen dynasty resulted in the princes could not agree on a candidate to elect as king. Eventually, influenced by Pope Gregory X, they chose Rudolph of Hapsburg. To minimize election disputes and papal interference in German politics, in 1356 Emperor Charles IV issued a proclamation, known as the Golden Bull, that designated seven princes as electors, with the right to elect the ruler by majority vote.

Although Rudolf's successor was not a [**Hapsburg**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274770/House-of-Hapsburg), the Hapsburgs eventually established themselves as the ruling dynasty. From 1452 until 1806, when the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved, all the emperors came from the House of Hapsburg.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

In the 16th century, during the rule of [**Charles V**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273608/Charles-V), the German priest [**Martin Luther**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9275557/Martin-Luther) led the [**Reformation**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276678/Reformation), the religious revolt against the Roman Catholic church. Germany and later Europe were bitterly divided into Catholic and Protestant camps. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 granted some religious tolerance by giving each German prince the right to choose either Catholicism or [**Lutheranism**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9275558/Lutheranism) for his domain. Religious struggles continued, however, in the [**Thirty Years' War**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277329/Thirty-Years-War) (1618–48), which devastated Germany. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the war, almost entirely eliminated the central authority of the empire. It made the empire a loose confederation of hundreds of essentially sovereign principalities, duchies, free cities, and other territories.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Two of these territories—[**Prussia**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276562/Prussia) and [**Austria**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273024/Austria)—grew into major states. Austria was ruled by the Hapsburgs. The duchy and later kingdom of Prussia, centered in what is now northeastern Germany, began its rise to power under the [**Hohenzollern**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274908/Hohenzollern-dynasty) family. Frederick William I created a military state there. His son [**Frederick II the Great**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274427/Frederick-the-Great), who ruled from 1740 to 1786, made Prussia a leading power of Europe. After he seized Silesia from Austria, he annexed part of Poland, greatly increasing Prussia's territory.

In the European wars accompanying the French Revolution and [**Napoleon I**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276025/Napoleon-I)'s rise to power, French troops occupied western Germany. Prussia and Austria joined other European powers in some of the wars against France. After Napoleon formed the Confederation of the Rhine—a union that eventually included all the German states except Prussia and Austria, with Napoleon as “protector”—the Holy Roman Empire collapsed in August 1806. A few months later the French crushed the Prussians at Jena. Prussia then undertook reforms. Its leaders abolished serfdom, organized local self-government, and established universal military training.

Later Prussia and Austria helped defeat Napoleon at Leipzig in 1813. By then, Germany was no longer divided into several hundred states, as the larger ones had taken over most of the smaller ones. The [**Congress of Vienna**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277595/Congress-of-Vienna) (1814–15), an international assembly that reorganized Europe after the wars, created a Germany with 39 states grouped into a loose German Confederation. Austria and Prussia struggled to control the Confederation.

1. **Bismark**

The Prussian prime minister [Otto von Bismarck](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273234/Otto-von-Bismarck) was to finally unify Germany in 1871. In 1864 Prussia annexed Hanover and other northern German states. Bismarck reorganized Germany and excluded Austria. The German states north of the Main River united with Prussia in 1867 in the North German Confederation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Bismarck wanted to stir up German patriotism in order to build support for a united Germany, and he did so by having the German states fight a common enemy. In 1870 he provoked France into declaring [war](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274414/Franco-Prussian-War), and Prussia led the German states to victory. Defeated, France was forced to cede [Alsace-Lorraine](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9272822/Alsace-Lorraine). Before the war ended, the southern German states joined Prussia and the other North German states in forming a new German empire (or Reich). The king of Prussia, [William I](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9606557/William-I), was proclaimed emperor (or kaiser) of the Second Reich on January 18, 1871, at Versailles. Bismarck became the empire's first chancellor.

As chancellor, Bismarck built up Germany's industries. He also laid the foundation for a [colonial](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273735/empire) realm in Africa, China, and the Pacific.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

[William II](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9606558/William-II) succeeded Frederick III. He dismissed Bismarck and built the country into a military nation. In 1914 Germany backed Austria in a conflict with Russia, and [World War I](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277797/World-War-I) was launched. Germany sought to enlarge its territory. Planning to fight a war on two fronts, Germany swept through Belgium and invaded France in the west and also fought Russia in the east. Germany, Austria, and Turkey together fought against the Allies, a coalition that included mainly France, the United Kingdom, Russia, Italy, Japan, and later the United States.

1. **German general geography**

Germany is in [Western](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe) and [Central Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Europe), with [Denmark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark) bordering to the N, Poland and the [Czech Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_Republic) to the E, Austria to the SE and Switzerland to the SSW, France to the WSW and [Luxembourg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luxembourg) and Belgium to the W, and the [Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands) to the NW. Germany is also NNW bordered by the North Sea and NNE bordered by the Baltic Sea. Germany is also SSW bordered by the fresh-water [Lake Constance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Constance), the third largest lake in [Central Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Europe).[[82]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-87) German territory covers 137,847 sq mi. It is the seventh largest country by area in Europe and the [62nd largest in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_area).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-CIA-2)

Elevation ranges from the mountains of the [Alps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps) (highest point: the [Zugspitze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zugspitze) at 2,962 metres or 9,718 feet) in the south to the shores of the [North Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea) (*Nordsee*) in the northwest and the [Baltic Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Sea) (*Ostsee*) in the northeast. The forested uplands of central Germany and the lowlands of northern Germany (lowest point: [Wilstermarsch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilstermarsch) at 3.54 metres or 11.6 feet below sea level) are traversed by such major rivers as the [Rhine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhine), [Danube](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danube) and [Elbe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elbe). Germany's alpine glaciers are experiencing deglaciation. Significant natural resources include iron ore, coal, [potash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potash), timber, [lignite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lignite), [uranium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium), copper, natural gas, salt, nickel, [arable land](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arable_land) and water.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-CIA-2)

### Climate

Most of Germany has a [temperate seasonal climate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperate) dominated by humid westerly winds. The country is situated in between the [oceanic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceanic_climate) Western European and the [continental](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_climate) Eastern European climate. The climate is moderated by the [North Atlantic Drift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Current), the northern extension of the [Gulf Stream](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_Stream). This warmer water affects the areas bordering the North Sea; consequently in the northwest and the north the climate is oceanic. Germany gets an average of 789 mm (31 in) [precipitation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precipitation_(meteorology)) per year. Rainfall occurs year-round, with no consistent dry season. Winters are mild and summers tend to be warm: temperatures can exceed 30 [°C](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celsius) (86 [°F](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fahrenheit)).[[83]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-climate-88)

The east has a more continental climate: winters can be very cold and summers very warm, and longer dry periods can occur. Central and southern Germany are transition regions which vary from moderately oceanic to continental. In addition to the maritime and continental climates that predominate over most of the country, the Alpine regions in the extreme south and, to a lesser degree, some areas of the Central German Uplands have a mountain climate, with lower temperatures and greater precipitation

The 14 [national parks in Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_parks_of_Germany). In addition, there are 14 [Biosphere Reserves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biosphere_Reserves_in_Germany), as well as 98 [nature parks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature_parks_(Germany)). More than 400 registered zoos and animal parks operate in Germany, which is believed to be the largest number in any country.[[88]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-93) The [Berlin Zoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Zoological_Garden), opened in 1844, is the oldest zoo in Germany, and presents the most comprehensive collection of species in the world.[[89]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany#cite_note-94)

1. **Reichs**
   1. The German word 'Reich' means 'empire', although it can also be translated as government. In 1930's Germany the Nazi party identified their rule as a third Reich, and in doing so gave English speakers around the world a new, and wholly negative, connotation to the word. Some people are surprised to find that the concept, and use, of three reichs is not a solely Nazi idea, but a common component of German historiography. This misconception stems from the use of 'Reich' as totalitarian nightmare, and not as empire. In this article your Guide will examine the institutions referred to as reichs, and explore how they compare.
   2. **The First Reich: The Holy Roman Empire (800/962 - 1806)**
      1. Although the name dates to the twelfth century reign of [Frederick Barbarossa](http://militaryhistory.about.com/od/army/p/barbarossa.htm), the [Holy Roman Empire](http://historymedren.about.com/od/dynastictables/a/Table-Of-Holy-Roman-Emperors.htm) was created over 300 years earlier.
      2. 800 AD Charlemagne was crowned emperor of a territory which covered much of western and central Europe; this created an institution that would remain, in one form or another, for over a thousand years. The Empire was reinvigorated by Otto I in the tenth century, and his imperial coronation in 962 has also been used to define the start of both the Holy Roman Empire, and the First Reich. By this stage Charlemagne's empire had been divided, and the remainder was based around a set of core territories, occupying much the same area as modern Germany.
      3. The geography, politics and strength of this empire continued to fluctuate massively over the next eight hundred years, but the imperial ideal, and the German heartland, remained.
      4. In 1806 the Empire was abolished by the then Emperor Francis II, partly as a response to the Napoleonic threat. Allowing for the difficulties in summarising the Holy Roman Empire - which parts of a fluid thousand year history do you select? - it was generally a loose confederation of many smaller, almost independent, territories, with little desire to vastly expand across Europe.

**The Second Reich: The German Empire (1871 - 1918)**

The dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, combined with a growing feeling of German nationalism, led to repeated attempts at unifying the multitude of German territories, before a single state was created almost solely by the will of [Otto von Bismarck](http://history1800s.about.com/od/leaders/a/bismarckbio.htm). Between 1862 and 1871 this great Prussian politician used a combination of persuasion, strategy, skill and outright warfare to create a German Empire dominated by Prussia, and ruled by the Kaiser. This new state, the *Kaiserreich*, grew to dominate European politics at the close of the 19th, and start of the 20th, century. In 1918, after defeat in the Great War, a popular revolution forced the Kaiser into abdication and exile; a republic was then declared. The [German Empire](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/worldwar1/a/ww1countriesge.htm) was the largely the opposite of the Holy Roman, despite having the Kaiser as a similar imperial figurehead: a centralised and authoritarian state which, after the dismissal of [Bismarck](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/glossary/g/glbismarck.htm) in 1890, maintained an aggressive foreign policy.

**The Third Reich:** [**Nazi Germany**](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/Nazi-Germany/fl/Gleischaltung-the-Nazi-Governance-of-Germany.htm) **(1933 - 1945)**

In 1933, [President Paul von Hindenburg](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/famouspeople/a/Paul-Von-Hindenburg.htm) appointed [Adolf Hitler](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/hitleradolf/p/prhitler.htm) as Chancellor of the German State. Dictatorial powers and sweeping changes soon followed, as democracy disappeared and the country militarized. The Third Reich was to have been a vastly extended German Empire, expunged of minorities and lasting for a thousand years, but it was removed in 1945 by a combined force of allied nations, which included Britain, France, Russia and the US. The Nazi state proved to be dictatorial and expansionist, with goals of ethnic 'purity' that formed a stark contrast to the first Reich’s broad assortment of peoples and places.

1. **Germany since WWII**
   1. The war left Germany shrunken in size. In early 1939 it had been a country of 183,000 square miles population of about 60,000,000. In 1945 it was reduced to 144,000 square miles **reduced by several million inhabitants. The Soviets annexed northern East Prussia. Poland administered southern East Prussia, and Germany's eastern border was pushed back.** Pending a peace treaty, Allied leaders met at Potsdam in 1945 and divided Germany into four occupation zones—French in the southwest, British in the northwest, U.S. in the south, and Soviet in the east. [**Berlin**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273186/Berlin), deep in the Soviet zone, was also divided into four sectors.
   2. the division of Germany into occupation zones was intended to be only temporary. The breakdown between the democratic Western powers and the communist Soviet Union led to the partition of Germany. In 1947 the Germans were allowed to set up state parliaments in all three Western zones. These moves laid the foundations for the emergence of the West German state. In 1948 Soviet occupation forces blockaded the Western-controlled sectors of Berlin, the United States and Britain carried out a massive airlift of supplies to those sectors. By the spring of 1949 the blockade had been abandoned by the Soviets along with attempts to force West Berlin to become part of a Soviet-controlled city.
   3. After the blockade, the Western powers merged and a new constitution was drawn up. On May 23, 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, was proclaimed, with [**Bonn**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273286/Bonn) as its capital. On October 7 of the same year, the Soviet zone was proclaimed as the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany. Its capital was East Berlin. West Berlin, which was entirely surrounded by East German territory, was treated as part of West Germany.

At first, West Germany was not a fully independent country. The country was set up as a federal form of parliamentary democracy with a two-house parliament and a chancellor as head of government. The lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, was the main center of power at the federal level. The first federal elections, in 1949, resulted in [**Konrad Adenauer**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9272720/Konrad-Adenauer), the leader of the Christian Democrats, formed a coalition government with other smaller parties and became the first chancellor of the new state. Adenauer was one of the great political personalities of postwar Europe. He was a strong believer in an alliance with the United States and the Western powers and hoped for an eventual united Europe based on the federal principle. At the same time he hoped for a reunification of Germany—but only as a democratic state free of communist control.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Adenauer was faced with pressing problems. One of the most urgent was caused by the arrival of millions of ethnic German [**refugees**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276683/refugees) from the Polish-occupied area.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Other problems, including the status of the Saar and its coal mines, were a result of the Allied occupation. Before World War I the Saar had been German territory, though [**France**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274407/France) had controlled it at times in its earlier history. After World War I the French had attempted to obtain control of the Saar permanently. They had been forced to hand the territory over to the control of the League of Nations, who in 1935 gave it back to Germany. After World War II the area was initially part of the French occupation zone. The French detached the region from their own zone, joined it in a customs union with France, and gave it its own currency. A government was elected that gave France a 55-year lease on the coal mines. Adenauer opposed these moves strongly. With West Germany's prosperity growing, the people of the Saar voted against its becoming an autonomous territory in a referendum of 1955. It became a state of West Germany, the Saarland, in 1957.

On May 5, 1955, the occupation of West Germany ended, and it became fully sovereign. The country was then completely free to develop its own policies. In 1953 Adenauer had been reelected, and he had begun to lead West Germany into a period of economic prosperity. He proved to the Germans that democracy could bring success, an idea that helped to counter any pro-communist sympathy among the population.

In 1955 West Germany joined the [**North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9276123/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization-NATO). The country in 1957 became an original member of the European Economic Community (EEC), or Common Market, which later formed the core of the [**European Union**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274229/European-Union). It therefore became one of the leaders of Europe along with France and Great Britain. West Germany and East Germany joined the [United Nations](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277510/United-Nations) separately in 1973.

Controlled by the [**Soviet Union**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9277506/Union-of-Soviet-Socialist-Republics), East Germany developed along different lines. In May 1949 a constitution establishing the government of an East German state was adopted by the legislative body that became the Volkskammer (People's Chamber), or parliament. The government essentially served as an agent of the all-powerful communist-controlled party.

The period from 1949 to 1953 was marked by great unrest within the Socialist Unity Party and the country. Many people who were thought to be politically unreliable were expelled from the party, and some were imprisoned. The political upheavals, the agricultural collectivization, and the low standard of living caused many people to leave for the West. In 1952 East Germany closed off its borders with West Germany, but East Germans were still able to leave by traveling from East Berlin to West Berlin. From 1952 to 1954 about 700,000 people left East Germany, a loss of workers that hampered the planned development of farming and industry.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

The Soviet Union proclaimed East Germany a sovereign country in 1954. West Germany and other Western countries did not recognize East Germany until the early 1970s.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

The communists maintained what had become a totalitarian dictatorship with the aid of a secret military police and espionage agency known as the Stasi. The Stasi was widely feared and hated. It sought to infiltrate every aspect of people's lives, with its own spies as well as an enormous network of informants—ordinary East Germans who spied on and denounced their friends and neighbors. Those suspected of opposing the state were persecuted or sent to prison.

Some 3 million East Germans left for the West between the end of the war and 1961. In that year East Germany built a [**wall**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9310181/Berlin-Wall) separating East and West [**Berlin**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273186/Berlin) to halt the exodus of badly needed skilled workers and others. It marked a turning point. East Germans could no longer go to the West without official permission, which was difficult to obtain. Those who tried to escape by climbing the wall risked being shot by guards.

At the same time economic reforms that eased central planning controls were introduced. Industrial production increased rapidly, more consumer goods began to appear in stores, and a mood of optimism began to spread through the population. By the mid-1960s the standard of living was higher than in most other Soviet-bloc countries.

In 1968 the rise of a more liberal regime in [**Czechoslovakia**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9273892/Czechoslovakia) alarmed the Soviet and East German governments. East German military units took part in the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. In spite of this development, relations with West Germany began to improve

In 1989 the two Germanys individually celebrated their 40th anniversaries as separate states. As the Soviet Union began to adopt [**liberal economic and political reforms**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274571/glasnost-and-perestroika) in the late 1980s, so too did its satellite countries in eastern Europe. As it gave up its control of eastern Europe in 1989–90, reunification of the two Germanys became suddenly possible. In the summer of 1989 a new reformist government in Hungary began allowing East Germans to escape to the West through Hungary's newly opened border with Austria. West German embassies in Poland and Czechoslovakia were flooded with East German refugees trying to emigrate, and huge numbers of East Germans streamed into West Germany. Enormous pro-democracy demonstrations and marches broke out in cities across East Germany.  
The communist government of East Germany fell quickly. The opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9. That night tens of thousands of jubilant East Berliners poured through crossing points in the wall to celebrate their new freedom. East Germans voted overwhelmingly for a quick reunification with West Germany. Administration began dismantling the communist system that had been in place for 40 years and working with West German leaders to reunify the two Germanys.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

In July 1990 the West German deutsche mark became the sole legal currency in East Germany. Later that month Soviet control was removed. West German chancellor Helmut Kohl persuaded Soviet leader [**Mikhail Gorbachev**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274601/Mikhail-Gorbachev) to agree to accept a united Germany as a member of NATO. In return, West Germany provided the Soviet Union with substantial financial aid.

Germany was officially reunified on October 3, 1990. Berlin became its capital.

The integration of the two Germanys proved to be a very long and expensive process. Large sums of money were required to modernize the industries and infrastructure in what had been East Germany. The difficulties of reunification led to disillusionment and resentment between some westerners and easterners.

On December 2, 1990, the first free all-German parliamentary elections in 58 years were held. [**Helmut Kohl**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9275310/Helmut-Kohl), representing the Christian Democratic Union party, was elected Germany's new chancellor. The following year Kohl helped negotiate the treaty that created the [**European Union**](http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9274229/European-Union) (EU). Kohl was reelected in 1994, but his popularity declined throughout the 1990s. His efforts to integrate Germany into the EU led to the introduction of harsh fiscal measures in order to bring the country's economy in line with those of other European countries.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

With Germany's economy still worsening, elections were held a year early, in 2005. Merkel became not only the first woman to hold the chancellorship but also the first former East German to do so. She was returned to office for a second term in 2009. Under Merkel the government took some modest steps to tackle economic and welfare system reform. In foreign affairs, Germany pursued a closer relationship with the United States. Merkel was widely hailed for her mediation skills. She generally continued Germany's strong promotion of European integration, though after the economic crisis tensions arose between Germany and the rest of the EU over economic policy. Nevertheless, Germany remained a leader in Europe, central to its stability and prosperity.

As the campaign for the 2013 federal election began, Merkel's personal popularity was bolstered by strong economic numbers, which included an unemployment rate that was the lowest since reunification. Merkel's handling of the economy and her approach to the euro-zone debt crisis appeared to receive a huge endorsement from the German electorate when the CDU and CSU captured nearly 42 percent of the vote in the September 22, 2013, election, winning almost an absolute majority of the seats. Hopefully, you have been paying attention to the news lately. Merkel admitted to making mistakes in her dealing with the 100,000’s of immigrants to the nation in the past two years. She changed her stance mid-stream last year and ended up winning the election again last month…