

Reasons why unification was achieved

1. Prussian economic strength

The rising economic muscle of Prussia, combined with the decline in Austrian production meant that Prussia could develop a more modernised army. It also meant that the smaller German states began to look to Prussia for trade, especially with the benefits the Zollverein brought.

Early economic development

Prussia had become the most industrialised state in Germany. She was now a force to be reckoned with in Europe:

- Prussia was producing more key resources such as coal and iron than Austria
- it surged ahead of its rival in building road and rail networks to help promote trade
- Prussia had successfully set up the Zollverein with other German states - making trade between states easier and more profitable

Reforms to help the workers and peasants

Under Prussian Prime Minister Otto Theodor von Manteuffel, Prussia passed a number of reforms to help the lower classes:

- taxes were lowered
- the government helped peasants take out loans
- there was less regulation for the coal and iron industries
- workers experienced better working conditions.

Improved production

Acquisition of land on the Rhine and in the Saarland in 1815 gave Prussia access to vast amounts of raw materials including coal, iron and wood. This gave a boost to the development of industrial production. From the 1850s, Prussia began to overtake Austria in industrial output. By 1870:

- Prussia had double the length of railway lines of Austria
- production of iron was five times more than that of Austria
- production of coal was five times more than that of Austria

2. The decline of Austria

Austria had long been opposed to unification of the German states. However, Austrian power declined after 1850, making it unable to take a strong stand against Prussia. The decline came about due to:

- international issues
- economic issues

International issues

Austria had lost key allies and was losing influence in Europe, becoming increasingly isolated.

Austria had long been an ally of Russia. But Austria had refused to help Russia during the Crimean War of 1854-56 against France and Britain.

As a result, they lost a major ally. Russia would most likely stay neutral in any war involving Austria.

Austria was further isolated in 1859 when it fought a war with France and the northern Italian Kingdoms.

As a result, Austria was portrayed as an untrustworthy and weak empire. It was left to sort out its issues with the German states on its own.

Economic issues

Austria struggled to compete with the economic power of the revived Prussia.

Austria could barely compete with the economic benefits of the Zollverein. Many of the German states were involved and Austria was excluded.

Austria's geographical position meant that it could not trade as easily as Europe's northern states. The Danube was not as central as the Rhine and southern Europe had not benefited as much from the Industrial Revolution and spread of the railways. In fact, southern Europe was still relatively agricultural.

The poor performance of Austria's armies in the 1859 war with France emphasised how backward and inefficient their industry and economy were.

3. The role of Bismarck

Otto Von Bismarck was the Prussian Chancellor. His main goal was to further strengthen the position of Prussia in Europe. Bismarck had a number of primary aims:

- to unify the north German states under Prussian control
- to weaken Prussia's main rival, Austria, by removing it from the German Federation
- to make Berlin, not Vienna, the centre of German affairs
- to strengthen the position of the King of Prussia, Wilhelm I, countering the demands for reform from the Liberals in the Prussian Reichstag

Military improvements

In the 1850s, Bismarck and Wilhelm I wanted to build up Prussia's army to be ready if war broke out with the other German states or Austria

To do this they needed to raise money through taxation. The Prussian Parliament refused to allow money to be raised in this way.

Bismarck ignored the Parliament - he collected money for military reforms through direct taxation. These reforms included:

- an increase in army conscription from two to three years
- the introduction of new battle tactics
- the introduction of weapons such as the needle gun

The Congress of Princes 1863

To counter Prussia's growing influence, Austria tried to strengthen its position in the German Federation.

Since it was the most influential member of the Bund, an increase in the power of the German Federation would strengthen Austria.

Bismarck thwarted Austria's plans by insisting on popular elections to the Diet (the Federation's Parliament). Austria refused and the reforms were discarded.

Bismarck had successfully ruined Austria's plans. Ironically as a defender of the Liberal nationalists.

Was Bismarck really that influential?

There is much debate about Bismarck's aims to unify all German states under Prussian rule. Some historians argue that Bismarck only intended to unify the north German states.

According to this opinion:

- Bismarck did not begin with a master plan to control all German states
- Bismarck actually reacted to and capitalised on political changes in other German states
- strength of nationalist feelings after 1866 led to German unification under its own steam
- economic co-operation meant that unification may have happened eventually anyway
- Bismarck made sure that it happened

However, other historians believe that unification would not have happened without him:

- he made sure that the army reforms took place
- he successfully isolated other countries by making them look like aggressors
- he made Prussia appear to be the defender of the German states and protector of their rights

4. Prussian military power

Isolation of Austria



Bismarck was a proactive leader towards unification. However, bringing the German states together was not guaranteed. The response to Prussia's actions also played a large part in bringing about a united Germany.

The wars involving Prussia during this period have become known as the Wars of German Unification.

1st War of Unification, 1863-4 (Schleswig-Holstein)

In 1863, the Danish King invaded Schleswig attempting to integrate it with Denmark. Bismarck used this to weaken Austria's position and strengthen Prussia.

German Federation forces, led by Prussia and Austria defeated the Danish. The Treaty of Vienna (1864) was signed – Denmark surrendered Schleswig and Holstein.

Prussia and Austria disagreed on control of these new territories but in 1865, they negotiated the Convention of Gastein. This stated that:

- Prussia was to control Schleswig
- Austria was to control Holstein (which was sandwiched between Schleswig and Prussian territories)
- Prussia was to have right of transit on military roads through Holstein
- Both duchies were to join the Zollverein (even although Austria was not a member)

The treaty was unlikely to work. Austria was unhappy with the terms, particularly as Austrians would have to travel through Prussia to reach Holstein.

2nd War of Unification, 1866 (Austro-Prussian War)

Bismarck knew Austria was a major obstacle to unification. To succeed in his aims, war seemed inevitable. His actions against Austria can be seen as very deliberate. Before attacking Austria, Bismarck weakened its position in Europe. To isolate Austria, Bismarck built up alliances with other major powers:

- **Russia** - Prussia refused to help Poland when it rebelled against Russia in 1863 - opening a possible alliance with Russia
- **France** - in 1865, Bismarck met with Napoleon III - he promised that Prussia would support France in its plans to invade Belgium.
- **Italy** - Italy promised to help Prussia in any war against Austria, providing Austria was the aggressor and Italy gained Venetia in return.

These diplomatic moves made it unlikely these three powerful countries would aid Austria in any future war.

When territorial dispute over Schleswig and Holstein erupted again, Bismarck was able to make Austria look like the aggressor:

- Austria tried to use the German Bund to pressure Prussia to address the Schleswig-Holstein issue – this was against the terms of the Treaty of Gastein
- the Bund backed Austria in the dispute over Schleswig-Holstein
- Bismarck declared the Treaty of Gastein was ended
- Prussian troops entered Holstein
- Prussia said that the Bund was invalid and pushed for reorganisation of Germany
- Italy built up troops at its border with Austrian Venetia
- Austria too built up its military strength here. This divided Austria's forces
- Prussia accused Austria of aggression
- Bismarck demanded that Austria's allies Hanover, Saxony and Hesse-Cassel stopped any military preparations and accept Prussian federal reform

- when they refused, Prussia invaded the three states
- supported by some northern states, Prussia went to war with Austria
- despite having the support of the majority of German states, the Austrians were defeated and humiliated at the Battle of Sadowa

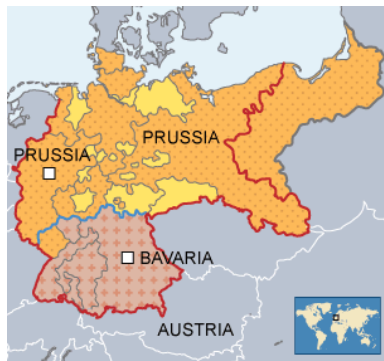
Treaty of Prague

The Seven Weeks War officially concluded when the Treaty of Prague was signed on 23rd August, 1866. According to the Treaty:

- Prussia kept all the territories it had captured
- a North German Confederation was set up under the control of Prussia
- an elected federal Diet (parliament) was established for this North German Confederation - each state could keep its own laws and customs
- the southern German states formed their own independent confederation
- Austria promised to stay out of German affair
- Austria paid compensation to Prussia but did not lose land to it

Prussia had successfully weakened and isolated Austria. But Bismarck did not want to weaken Austria too much since it might be a useful ally in the future against Prussia's enemies

Isolation of France



Map of the German states in 1867

With Austria weakened, Bismarck now turned his attention to the other great stumbling block to unification - the French. France had watched Prussia's growing power with alarm. Bismarck tried to weaken France as much as possible before war started:

- Officially, Russia was an ally of France but Bismarck used diplomacy to make sure Russia stayed out of the upcoming war.
- Bismarck also made sure Italy stayed neutral and wouldn't fight for France.
- Bismarck gambled that the British would stay out of the war since it didn't want France to become any more powerful than it already was.

Bismarck found his excuse for war when Spain offered its vacant crown to Prince Leopold (a relative of Prussia's Wilhelm I):

- France felt threatened by possible allegiance of Prussia and Spain against it
- Leopold withdrew acceptance of the Spanish throne

- France demanded that Wilhelm withdraw any future support from Prince Leopold
- Wilhelm refused - he sent a telegraph of the details to Bismarck
- Bismarck edited and published "The Ems Telegram" to offend the French
- France declared war on 19th July

Napoleon III was advised that the French army could defeat Prussia. In France, his popularity was in decline. Military victory could restore opinion. French generals felt their army was better organised and better equipped than Prussia.

Prussia and her allies outnumbered the French. In reality the Prussians were better organised too. They were mobilised quickly and well supplied.

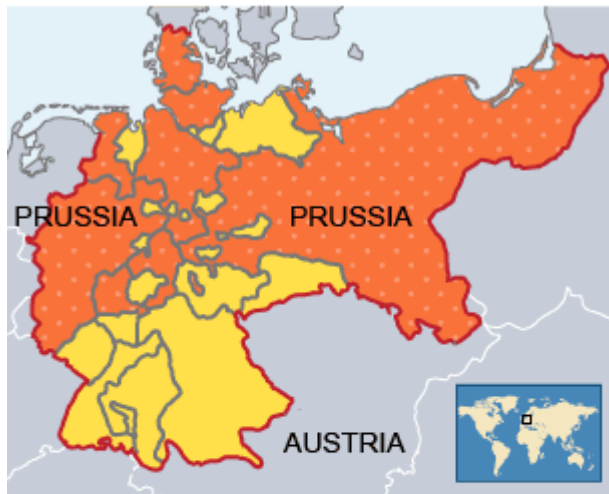
In contrast, the French were disorganised, with many late to reach the front. Their supplies were inadequate.

France was heavily defeated in the Franco-Prussian War. Napoleon III was overthrown by a French rebellion.

The circumstances leading to the war caused the southern German states to support Prussia. This alliance led to the unification of Germany.

Unification

In the build up to war, the southern confederate German states voluntarily joined the Prussian-controlled Northern German Confederation. Germany was now unified.



Emperor (Kaiser) of the German Empire

Map of German states in 1871

The Treaty of Frankfurt

The Franco-Prussian war was ended on 10th May with the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt.

- the border between France and Germany was established
- France lost the territory of Alsace-Lorraine on its border with Germany
- it also had to pay Germany £200 million in compensation.
- a new imperial constitution was set up within the now unified German states
- Wilhelm I, was officially recognised as