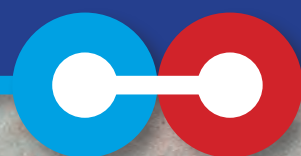


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Higher

# Germany

1815–1939



Euan M. Duncan

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# Introduction

The country we now call 'Germany' went through tremendous change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1815, Germany did not exist as a united country and unification of the German states seemed a long way off. Romantic ideas of a German 'nation' had been growing in popularity, and intellectuals advanced the ideas of one German *Volk* (people) who deserved their own political home, a united Germany.

Yet, the unification of Germany was a relatively slow process. Although during the revolutions of 1848 it appeared that the German states might have been close to uniting under one parliament, this did not come to pass. The regional particularism of the German states acted as a barrier to growing nationalism, as did the interventions of neighbouring Austria. Indeed, it was not until Prussia came to dominate German affairs, and grew strong enough to resist the influence of Austria and the reluctant German states, that unification was made possible.

This united Germany grew in strength and power. It was this Germany that entered the First World War in 1914. Though enjoying some military success, particularly in the early years of the war, Germany was ultimately defeated. Germany's last-ditch attempt to defeat the Allies on the Western Front failed, and in 1918 it was forced to surrender.

The impact of the war was felt keenly in Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and fled to the Netherlands. A new government was formed, although it was soon faced with numerous challenges and crises. Economic depression, unemployment, hyperinflation, and political assassinations and instability plagued the early years of the new Weimar government. The government survived these challenges, entering a 'Golden Age' in 1924. However, this stability would not last. By 1929, economic problems were once again plaguing Germany, and the 'old guard' of civil servants, military personnel and business leaders turned away from Weimar. So too did those middle-class and older Germans who viewed the economic crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s as the fault of democracy. Governments came and went with alarming regularity, and support for pro-republic parties waned.

It was in this political and economic crisis that support for Hitler and the Nazis soared. Hitler was unpopular with the aristocratic elite in Germany, but was eventually offered the role of chancellor after President Hindenburg feared the Nazis would disrupt parliament and prevent recovery. Hitler acted decisively and, by 1934, was secure in his position as the supreme leader of Germany.

The Germany Hitler created was exclusionist, violent and repressive. He was able to control the nation effectively from 1933 to 1939, as will be discussed in the last chapter.

This book covers all of these areas in greater detail, and will allow you to gather the knowledge and skills needed to write strong essays for this unit.

Good luck!

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# Chapter 1

## An evaluation of the reasons for the growth of nationalism in Germany, 1815–50

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the causes of the growth of nationalism in Germany between 1815 and 1850.

### LINK TO EXAM

#### Higher

Key issue 1: this chapter will examine the factors that led to the growth of nationalism in Germany, allowing pupils to judge the main reason or reasons why it grew.

## Background

In 1815, Germany as we know it today did not exist. Rather than a single, unified state, a collection of separate, small kingdoms coexisted around the borders of modern-day Germany. These states, including, among others, Bavaria, Franconia, Saxony, Swabia and Thuringia, had been part of the so-called Holy Roman Empire. Though not especially united, this collection of states did, at times, have a significant role to play in the politics of central and southern Europe. By 1789 around 22 million Germans were living in 314 states. Over a thousand towns had near full **autonomy**, and each region had its own rulers, traditions, laws and **sovereignty**.

This empire had a permanent imperial **Diet**, and each of the states sent representatives to attend proceedings. The Diet was chaired by the **Habsburg** emperor. However, there was no central political power, no common system of taxation, no legal obligation for states to follow decrees and no **standing army**. In fact, in many ways this Diet nurtured the so-called **particularism** of the German states.

Germany lacked clearly defined borders, and the Holy Roman Empire included people who identified as French, Dutch, Danish, Polish and Czech, to name but a few. It was not only ethnically and linguistically varied but also divided religiously: the north was predominantly Protestant and the south mostly Catholic.

German development lagged behind Britain and western Europe. Development was slowed by the feudal system, common in most states, with large rural populations tied to the land they worked and the emerging middle class precluded from positions of political power. There was no universal currency or system of money, and a powerful **aristocracy** wanted to maintain this **status quo**.



**Figure 1.1** The map shows the nature of the Holy Roman Empire in the late eighteenth century. Note how many small states exist within the borders of what is now Germany. Also note the dominant position of both Prussia and Austria. Both played an important role in relation to the growth of nationalism in Germany

However, by 1815 the geopolitical situation in Europe had changed dramatically. The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars had reshaped Europe, and in many ways had ushered in a modern age. Napoleon's defeat in Russia in 1812 and then at Waterloo in 1815 ended the French emperor's designs in continental Europe, but the changes the French Revolution brought left a lasting mark on the German states.

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The German historians T. Nipperdey and D. Nolan highlight the importance of Napoleon in Germany in Source 1:

### SOURCE 1

In the beginning was Napoleon. His influence upon the history of the German people, their lives and experiences was overwhelming at a time when the initial foundations of a modern German state were being laid. The destiny of a nation is its politics, and those politics were Napoleon's – the politics of war and conquest, of exploitation and repression, of imperialism and reform.

**Nipperdey, T. and Nolan, D. (1996) *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck: 1800–1866*, Princeton University Press**

By 1815, the Holy Roman Empire had been abolished and the number of German states had reduced to 39, a grouping known as the German Confederation. This body had one **executive**, or central authority – the Bundestag – presided over by Austria. Austria was deeply conservative and opposed both change and the emerging nationalism seen in Germany. Prussia, also very conservative, was emerging as the dominant power among the German states. Yet despite these conservative influences there is evidence of a growing nationalism within Germany between 1815 and 1850.

This chapter will discuss what historians call the **Vormärz** period, broadly occurring between 1815 and 1850. In many ways this was a period of oppression and suppression in Germany, with powerful rulers determined to maintain the political status quo. Yet it was also a time when a growing number of Germans began calling for a more united Germany. We will also examine the factors that led to this growth in nationalism.

## 1.1 What caused German nationalism to grow?

For the purposes of the examination, it is important to be able to evaluate the factors that caused nationalism to grow in Germany. This chapter sets out the main causes for the growth of nationalism and supports you in evaluating their relative importance.

This section will examine the following factors:

Economic factors
Cultural factors
Military weakness
Effects of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars
Role of the liberals

Understanding these issues will allow you to make a judgement on the main cause(s) of the growth of German nationalism between 1815 and 1850.

### 1.1.1 Economic factors

Although Austria was the dominant *political* force among the German states, Prussia was quickly becoming the dominant *economic* force.

When Napoleon was defeated, a peace treaty was drawn up at the Congress of Vienna, which was held from September 1814 to June 1815. The two states that benefited most from this settlement were Austria and Prussia.

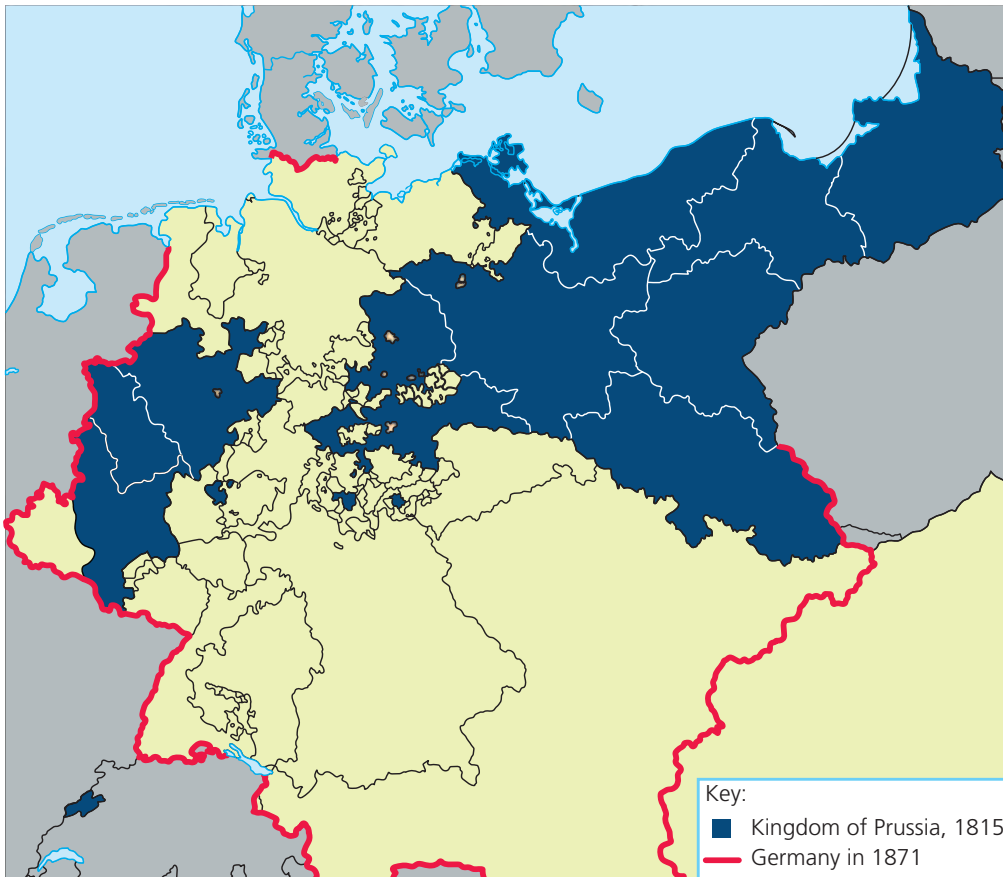
Some historians argue that a desire among German states to cooperate economically created a situation where there was a greater willingness to cooperate politically, causing the growth of nationalist support.



## Prussian economic development

After a series of catastrophic military defeats to the French, Prussia introduced a number of reforms. The reforms prompted widespread compulsory education and abolished taxes, tariffs and **serfdom**, which led to the growth of urban towns and cities. These modernisations allowed for significant economic development in Prussia in the years leading up to 1815, and the state grew in importance after the Vienna peace settlement was concluded.

In the peace settlement, Prussia made significant territorial gains in western Germany, including the rich states of Rhineland and Westphalia. Although Prussia was reluctant to take on these lands, instead preferring to consolidate power in the east, it acquired important economic strength as a result of the expansion. Its population doubled to nearly 10 million and it gained access to valuable raw materials.



**Figure 1.2** Prussia's population doubled in size as a result of the 1815 peace settlement, leading to it (somewhat reluctantly) being drawn into German politics

The historian M. Fulbrook points out the importance of this development in Source 2.

### SOURCE 2

In the process [of expansion], it doubled Prussia's population and gave the previously economically rather backward state the benefit of mineral riches and areas more advanced in commerce and industry ... The effective moving of Prussia westwards further shifted the balance of power between Prussia and Austria in favour of the former.

**Fulbrook, M. (2019) *A Concise History of Germany* (3rd edn), Cambridge University Press**

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As Prussia became more economically powerful, it was drawn ever deeper into German affairs. With the new territories in the west, Prussia was poised to outstrip Austria in terms of economic development, which would come to play a critical role in the Industrial Revolution. This facilitated stronger German cooperation without the intervention of Austria. Therefore, Prussia's economic development can be said to be connected to the growing sense of German nationalism.

### The Zollverein

After 1815, the 39 German states that had been created following the Congress of Vienna each used a different currency, and different weights and measures. Each state had its own economic policy and acted independently from all others. However, this changed during the Vormärz period.

Changes originated in Prussia. With increasingly spread-out lands following the territorial amendments in 1815, manufacturers in Rhineland complained to the Prussian king about the additional **customs duties** they were forced to pay. The expense was made worse by having to cross through multiple states, as Prussian lands were no longer **contiguous**. The king responded by introducing the Prussian Tariff Reform Law in 1818, which created a customs union that prevented internal tax on the movement of goods. The reform had an immediate economic impact and the Prussian finance minister, Friedrich von Motz, strove to expand the customs union beyond the state. While other customs unions existed in south and central Germany, the Prussian model was by far the most successful.

In 1834, Bavaria and Württemberg joined, and the newly enlarged union, the Zollverein, was formed. It was made up of 18 states and 23 million people. By 1836, this had grown to 25 states and 26 million people. By 1844, only Hanover, Mecklenburg, Oldenburg, some Hanseatic towns and Austria were not members. Austria preferred to form a customs union within its own empire, and so was excluded from the economic boom that occurred in Germany. The Prussian currency, the thaler, was adopted by all members of the Zollverein, leading Germany to become significantly more economically united.



**Figure 1.3** A Prussian thaler from 1766, which by 1844 became the common currency for all member states of the Zollverein. With a single currency and no internal customs barriers, member states' economies grew rapidly

This economic integration had political implications for the growth of nationalism. The historian M. Fulbrook argues that 'moves towards economic unification presaged the form which political unification would eventually take'. The economic success which resulted from such cooperation led many Germans to realise the possibilities



of a more united Germany. Economically, the states had proved their collective power – what could be achieved if they also cooperated politically? The idea led to growing nationalist fervour, particularly among liberals and the industrial middle class. Furthermore, the exclusion of Austria distanced the anti-nationalist Austrians from the economic progress within Germany, further contributing to the weakening of Austria and the rise in German nationalism.

### The development of transport infrastructure

Along with increased economic cooperation and **industrialisation** came important developments in communications. Throughout the 1830s in particular the German states saw extensive roadbuilding programmes, the introduction of steam ships on large rivers such as the Rhine, an extension of the canal network and, crucially, the building of railways. Important lines, such as that linking Leipzig to Dresden in 1839, stimulated increased production, particularly of coal and iron. The greatest expansion happened in the 1840s with 1100 km of track being laid in 1846 alone. This promoted the growth of factories, like the Borsig Works, an extensive iron foundry in Berlin producing locomotives, and, while the majority of Germans still worked in rural areas, these changes laid the foundation for Germany's future industrialisation. The growing infrastructure made goods cheaper to transport, encouraged economic growth and created industrial demand.



**Figure 1.4** The Borsig Works specialised in producing locomotives for the growing German rail network

The developing rail network contributed to the growth in German nationalism as it not only demonstrated the advantages that could be gained through cooperation but also allowed for the spread of ideas. German states became increasingly interconnected through road and rail, which helped break down regional barriers and local particularism, both of which had been a major impediment to nationalist growth. Nationalist pamphlets and papers could travel far and wide on the growing communication network, causing a further increase in the spread of nationalist ideas.

## On the other hand...

Although Prussia was gaining in economic power and increasingly able to challenge the power of Austria, it remained a deeply conservative state. Prussia did not gain a united parliament, King Frederick William III dropped many modernising reforms and many reformers had been dismissed by 1820.

Moreover, the administration of the Zollverein did not always run smoothly. Any member of the group was able to propose or veto a proposal, meaning progress in some areas was limited.

Both points limit the strength of the argument that an economically dominant Prussia led to a growth in nationalism.

## Overall

The Zollverein and growing Prussian economic dominance were clearly very important and contributed to an increasingly united and interconnected Germany. Indeed, the historian W. Carr called the Zollverein the 'mighty lever' of German unification.

### 1.1.2 Cultural factors

It was not only economics that caused a growth in German nationalism but cultural factors too. Partly, nationalism can be said to have grown out of emerging German literature which centred on the concept of the German **Volk**, those with a shared language and history. The **Romantic movement** also inspired many university students to promote the idea of German nationalism, and to think of Germany as the 'Vaterland' (Fatherland). Additionally, while France was growing more dominant, the German people were keen to establish a united front.

### Language and culture

Some of the emerging elements of German nationalism prior to the French Revolution were set out by the German jurist, state journalist and politician Friedrich Karl von Moser (Source 3).

#### SOURCE 3

We are one people with one name and one language. We live under a common leader, under one set of laws that determine our constitution, rights, and duties, and we are bound together by a common and great interest in freedom ... yet we remain the prey of our neighbours, the subject of their mockery, disunited among ourselves, enfeebled by our divisions, strong enough to hurt ourselves, powerless to save ourselves...

**Moser, F. K. von (1765) *Von dem deutschen Nationalgeist*, Schaefer**

This dramatic extract encapsulates much of Moser's writing; namely, that Germans should be united by their language (*Sprachnation*), culture (*Kulturnation*) and community of remembrance (*Erinnerungsgemeinschaft*). He opposed the particularism of states, emphasising the commonality in Germans across the different states. He argued that Germans should be proud of 'their own' (*sein Eigenes*), which he emphasised in relation to a shared idea about what it meant to be German.

During the Vormärz period, scholar Heinrich Heine built upon Moser's ideas via his dispatches from Berlin, which also became highly popular in the context of developing nationalism. German philosophers such as Johann Fichte, Georg Hegel and Johann Herder developed this idea that Germans were a unique, **primordial** Volk



and should all belong to the same state. Hegel argued that Germans had kept their language since ancient times, and this was used by some as a justification for growing nationalism and calls for a united Germany. Fichte, who became the most effective proponent of German nationalism, argued that Germans should be influenced by their supposed roots in northern Europe, rather than by France or the Catholic south. These philosophical arguments were made more popular and accessible through collections such as *Children's and Household Tales* (1812) by the Brothers Grimm, which contained over 200 folk tales that drew on Germans' common history and folk traditions. Through their writing, popular German authors also helped instil a sense of shared history and heritage, and blamed powerful neighbours, especially France, for the decline of German greatness.

The spread of these cultural ideals gave the German people a definition of what it meant to be German, providing justification for the creation of a united German **nation-state**. Importantly, this developed the sense of a shared identity, 'natural' characteristics and qualities, helping break down barriers between those from different states and encouraging a growing patriotism.

### Universities and student movements

Much of this nationalistic philosophical thought was put into practice through the formation of student societies, clubs and national festivals. The German historian C. Jansen describes these groups in Source 4.

#### SOURCE 4

Until 1867, the prototype of a nationalist organization in Germany was not a political party, but publicly operating clubs and societies, with the national festival becoming one of the most significant expressions of organized nationalism ... Organized nationalism appealed to intellectuals and the portion of the student body that created fraternities (*Burschenschaften*), the first explicitly nationalist organizations.

**Jansen, C. (2015) 'The Formation of German Nationalism, 1740–1850', in H. W. Smith (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, Oxford University Press**

Student fraternities, or **Burschenschaften**, began joining with **crypto-nationalist** gymnastic groups and calling for a strong, unified Germany that could stand up to its powerful neighbours, such as France. The General Association of German Fraternities was formed in 1818, made up of around 4000 students from 14 German universities. By this time, the gymnastic organisations had swelled to around 12,000 members. These groups organised and attended large festivals that called for the unification of Germany, for example in 1817 when a large number of organised nationalists from all regions gathered for a festival at the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach to openly oppose the existing political system and burn books that were critical of their movement. Similar scenes were seen at the Hambach Festival in 1832, where attendees called for a united, **republican** Germany. Around 25,000 to 30,000 people attended Hambach, although there was little consensus among them on how to achieve unification.

This led to a growth in nationalism as it gave students and intellectuals, who had been inspired by the ideas of the Romantic movement and philosophical discussions of nationalism, a way to express and advance their desires for a united Germany. In turn, this helped transform these ideas into real-world calls for political nationalism and unity.

## On the other hand...

Austria was deeply concerned about this growing nationalist expression in Germany, and acted decisively to halt its growth. The Austrian chancellor, Klemens von Metternich, decided to clamp down on what he viewed as the dangerous growth of nationalism. The German parliament, the Bund, enacted the Carlsbad Decrees in 1819. These called for strict censorship, a ban on gymnastic societies and student fraternities, the suspension of radical lecturers and broad press censorship. This brought an end to organised nationalism after only a couple of years, suggesting that nationalist expression through cultural factors may be limited as a reason for increasing nationalism, since its growth was physically limited by Austrian conservatism.

## Overall

It is clear that there was a great deal of Romantic and philosophical support for the idea of a German nation-state. Calls for a 'Fatherland' for all Germans stirred powerful, emotional demands for a united Germany, particularly among students, thinkers and writers. The fact that these Romantic ideas were given political voice through student fraternities also contributed to the growth in nationalism.

Yet, this also sparked opposition from Austria, arguably limiting the ability for these sentiments to develop further. Moreover, some historians, such as G. Mann, argue that these lofty theories were only ever consumed by a small elite, and that most ordinary Germans 'did not look up from the plough'. This suggests that cultural factors were perhaps not central to the growth of nationalism in Germany.

### 1.1.3 Military weakness

The military events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries revealed that a disunited Germany was militarily weak. Even the larger German states like Prussia were unable to fend off the military ambitions of neighbouring powers. Defeat left Germany vulnerable. Some historians argue that many Germans believed the unification of Germany would reverse this, which in turn led to the growth in nationalism between 1815 and 1850.

#### Prussian military weakness

While it was clear that Prussia was developing into the most important state economically, that was not true militarily. The immediate events leading up to the creation of the German Confederation had revealed the weakness of the Prussian military.

Although Prussia had been excluded from the Confederation of the Rhine, the precursor to the German Confederation, it was one of the largest and most powerful German states. However, in 1806, the king of Prussia, Frederick William III, unwisely decided to declare war on France. It became immediately obvious that the Prussian army was ill-disciplined and ill-prepared, with outdated tactics and equipment. This was amply demonstrated at the Battle of Jena, where Prussian forces were quickly and easily defeated by the French. The subsequent Peace of Tilsit saw Prussia lose significant amounts of land, in both the east and west. It was also forced to pay huge reparations for war damages and to accept that Prussian men would be forcibly enlisted in the French army.



## ACTIVITIES

- Write one sentence to define each of the following terms and groups:
  - liberal
  - reactionary
  - aristocracy
  - middle class
- Select three pieces of evidence that demonstrate liberal successes.
- There is an argument that the economic impact of the Zollverein was the most important reason why nationalism grew in Germany during this period, as it demonstrated how the German states could be more successful if they worked together.
  - Select two to three pieces of evidence that support this argument.
  - Explain how the evidence links to the argument, and supports the idea that the success of the Zollverein caused the growth in nationalism.
  - Provide a counter-argument to this idea. Explain it in two to three sentences.
  - Overall, argue how convincing this argument is as a reason for why nationalism grew in Germany during this period. Select an additional piece of evidence to back this up.
- Create a timeline of events to signify growing nationalism in Germany, starting with 1789 and ending in 1850. Look for additional dates in this chapter and place them on the timeline. Then respond to these questions:
  - Do you notice anything about the placement of the dates? Is there any pattern to them?
  - Which decade may have been the most important in terms of growing nationalism? Why do you think this? What evidence is there?
  - What were the critical moments in the growth of nationalism? Which events were most important? What caused those events?
- Using the responses connected to your timeline, write an argument about what the main cause of the growth of nationalism was in Germany from 1815 to 1850.

## GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
annex	To add territory through appropriation.
aristocracy	The highest class in society, typically comprising people of noble birth holding hereditary titles and offices.
autonomy	The quality of being self-governing.
Burschenschaft (plural: Burschenschaften)	A student fraternity that advanced the cause of German nationalism.
constitution	A set of formal laws, often set out in one document, which govern how a state is run.
contiguous	Sharing a common, unbroken border.
Continental Blockade	A foreign policy blockade designed by Napoleon to weaken Britain during the Napoleonic Wars by placing embargoes on British trade.
crypto-nationalist	Someone who secretly supports nationalism, but keeps their beliefs hidden for fear of persecution.
customs duty	A charge set on goods sent abroad or to another German state. Also called a tariff.
Diet	An assembly or parliament. The German Imperial Diet was the deliberative body of the Holy Roman Empire.

Term	Meaning
executive	The branch of government responsible for putting decisions or laws into effect.
Habsburg	The dynasty that ruled Austria between 1278 and 1918.
industrialisation	The development of industries in a country or region on a wide scale.
liberal	Relating to or denoting a political and social philosophy that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy and free enterprise.
nation-state	A sovereign state in which most of the citizens or subjects are united by factors that define a nation, such as language or common descent.
particularism	Exclusive attachment to one's own state, traditions or the history of a particular region.
primordial	Existing since the beginning of time.
reactionary	Someone who opposes political or social progress or reform.
republican	A person who believes in a state in which citizens, rather than a monarch or a small ruling class, hold the power. A republican state is one in which the people and their elected representatives hold the power.
Romantic movement	An artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It celebrated nature and the past over civilisation and industrialisation, and valued imagination and emotion over rationality.
serfdom	A system through which agricultural labourers are bound to the aristocratic estates in which they work.
sovereignty	Supreme power or authority.
standing army	A permanent army of paid soldiers.
status quo	The existing state of affairs.
Volk	The German people.
Vormärz	The period of German history between 1815 and 1848 characterised by the dominance of Austria and Prussia.

# Germany 1815–1939

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## What does the cover photo show?

A picture of Otto von Bismarck. Historians continue to debate the role that he played in the unification of Germany, though it seems impossible to separate him totally from the unification of Germany in 1871.

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