

# National Unification in Italy and Germany

## TIME LINE

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|-----------|---|
| 1849-1878 | Reign of King Victor Emmanuel I of Piedmont, who becomes king of Italy in 1861  |
| 1852      | Camillo Cavour becomes premier of Sardinia-Piedmont   |
| 1859      | Piedmont and France defeat Austria; Piedmont annexes Lombardy   |
| 1860      | Piedmont annexes Tuscany, Modena, Parma, and the Romagna  |
|           | Garibaldi and his Red Shirts land in Sicily   |
| 1861-1888 | Reign of King William I of Prussia, who becomes German emperor in 1871  |
| 1861      | The Kingdom of Italy is proclaimed  |
| 1862      | Bismarck becomes minister-president of Prussia  |
| 1864      | Prussia and Austria defeat Denmark  |
| 1866      | Prussia defeats Austria in the Seven Weeks' War<br>Italy annexes Venetia  |
| 1867      | Prussia creates the North German Confederation  |
| 1870      | France declares war on Prussia<br>Italy annexes Rome  |
| 1871      | Prussia and its German allies defeat France<br>The German Empire is proclaimed<br>Germany annexes Alsace and Lorraine |

*In 1848-1849, the liberal national idealists had been defeated in their efforts to unite Italy and Germany. By the early 1850s, the Austrians had reimposed their control over Italian and German affairs, and the German Confederation had been reestablished. Nevertheless, the desire for national unification remained strong in both Italy and Germany.*

*Leadership now passed into the hands of professional politicians. They possessed what the revolutionary idealists of 1848 had lacked:*

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*power and the will to use power, practical political experience, and a clear vision of their goals.*

*In Italy, Camillo Cavour, the premier of Piedmont, established a united Kingdom of Italy in 1861, while in Germany, Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian minister-president, created a united German Empire a decade later.*

*Although Cavour and Bismarck both unified their respective countries, they differed in political principles. Cavour was both a sincere liberal and a sincere nationalist who unified Italy as a liberal, constitutional state. In contrast, Bismarck was fundamentally a conservative and a Prussian patriot, a loyal servant of the Hohenzollern king of Prussia. His primary objective was to enhance Prussia's power by establishing its dominance over Germany.*

## Italy

The failure of the Italian revolutionaries of 1848 largely discredited the republican idealists led by Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), and it provided an opportunity for a political leader of another sort.

## Divided Italy

Following the defeat of the Italian revolutions of 1848, Italy remained divided into three parts.

In the south, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was ruled by a king of the Bourbon dynasty. In the center, the pope governed the Papal States. In the north, several small states, including Tuscany, Modena, and Parma, were subject to Austrian domination. In addition, the northern Italian provinces of Lombardy and Venetia had been an integral part of the Austrian Empire since 1815. Northern Italy also included the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, frequently referred to simply as Piedmont, ruled by the House of Savoy. While Piedmont retained its liberal constitution, the Statute of 1848, the other Italian states had been restored to reactionary rulers.

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**Count Camillo Cavour** (1810-1861)

Cavour, the unifier of Italy, proved to be one of Europe's most brilliant statesmen in the nineteenth century.

***Youth and Early Career***

Born into a family of the Piedmontese nobility, Cavour became a liberal while he was still in his teens. Although he planned to pursue a career as an army officer, his liberalism aroused the distrust of the royal authorities. Realizing that he could not expect to achieve success in a military career, Cavour resigned his commission. He traveled in France and Great Britain, increasing his admiration for their constitutional governments and progressive development.

Following the revolution of 1848, Cavour won election to the new Piedmontese parliament. He quickly proved his ability and was named minister of commerce and agriculture in 1850 and finance minister in 1851. King Victor Emmanuel II (r. 1849-1878) appointed him to the premiership in 1852.

***Premier of Piedmont***

As premier, Cavour carried out a program of liberal reform. These policies both reflected his sincere conviction and helped further the achievement of his initial goal: to unite northern Italy as a liberal constitutional monarchy ruled by the House of Savoy. A liberal Piedmont, Cavour believed, would discredit the tyranny of the reactionary Italian princes and Austria and would win the support of Italian nationalists, as well as the admiration of progressive elements in Great Britain and France.

Cavour's program included reforming the Piedmontese currency and state finances, and he succeeded in balancing the state budget. He promoted economic development, including the establishment of banks, the construction of railroads, the building of factories, the importation of machinery, and the development of the port of Genoa. Under Cavour's direction, Piedmont became a prosperous and progressive state.

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### *Foreign Policy*

Austria presented a major obstacle to the achievement of Cavour's plans. Realizing that Piedmont alone was not strong enough to defeat Austria, he sought to gain French assistance. In the mid-1850s, he sent a Piedmontese force to support the French and British in the Crimean War. Piedmont had no argument with Russia; its participation in the war was an obvious effort to curry favor with France and Great Britain.

Closer to home, Cavour offered assistance to the newly established Italian National Society. This secret organization operated in several northern Italian states, promoting revolts against the local pro-Austrian rulers.

In July 1858, Cavour met secretly with Napoleon III at Plombières in eastern France. The French emperor had a fondness for Italy, where he had lived during his youth, and he promised to send troops to aid Piedmont in a war against Austria. Piedmont would acquire the Austrian-ruled provinces of Lombardy and Venetia, and in return Cavour agreed to cede the Piedmontese provinces of Nice and Savoy to France.

### **The War Against Austria**

In April 1859, Cavour provoked Austria into declaring war on Piedmont. As the Austrians pushed into Piedmont, a combined Piedmontese and French army counterattacked, driving the invaders back into Lombardy. Defeated at the battles of Magenta on June 4 and Solferino on June 24, the Austrians withdrew to their strongholds in Venetia.

Shocked by the bloodiness of the battles and fearful of a hostile reaction by French Catholics if Piedmont moved to annex the Papal States, Napoleon III decided to make a separate peace with Austria. Under the terms of the Peace of Villafranca of July 1859, Austria agreed to cede Lombardy to Piedmont. Austria, however, would retain Venetia. Furious at Napoleon's double-dealing, Cavour resigned as premier.

## Piedmont's Annexations in Northern Italy

Piedmont's gains quickly proved far greater than Cavour had anticipated. In August and September 1859, revolutionary assemblies in Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Romagna, a part of the Papal States, offered to unite with Piedmont. Returning to the premiership in January 1860, Cavour carried out these annexations. Napoleon III acquiesced in Piedmont's gains in return for Piedmont's cession of Nice and Savoy to France.



## Revolution in Southern Italy

In April 1860, a revolution broke out in Sicily in opposition to the reactionary policies of Francis II (r. 1859-1860), the new

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Bourbon ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. This spread of revolution to the south was more than Cavour had anticipated and more than Napoleon III was prepared to support.

### **Garibaldi's Expedition**

In May, Garibaldi sailed from the Piedmontese port of Genoa with his famous force of about 1,000 volunteers, the Red Shirts. Officially, Cavour opposed Garibaldi's expedition, but he supported it secretly. Under the protection of British ships, the Red Shirts landed in Sicily. At the end of May, the Red Shirts and local recruits took Palermo, Sicily's major city.

In August 1860, Garibaldi's forces crossed the Strait of Messina to the Italian mainland. King Francis II fled, and on September 7, Garibaldi entered Naples, the capital of the Two Sicilies.

### **Annexation of the Papal States**

Cavour had not expected the Red Shirts' rapid success, and he feared that Garibaldi might now attempt to seize Rome, which could lead France and Austria to intervene in defense of the pope. In an effort to restrain Garibaldi, Cavour decided to send Piedmontese troops into the Papal States. On September 18, the Piedmontese defeated papal troops at Castelfidardo on the Adriatic coast and quickly took control of most of the Papal States, although the pope retained possession of Rome. King Victor Emmanuel II then joined forces with Garibaldi, who agreed to the Piedmontese annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

### **Proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy**

On March 17, 1861, an Italian parliament proclaimed the establishment of the kingdom of Italy, and King Victor Emmanuel II became king. Italy's liberal constitution was patterned after the Piedmontese Statuto of 1848. Italy's first capital was Turin, the capital of Piedmont, but the Italian capital was soon moved to Florence. Cavour did not long survive the creation of Italy, dying less than three months later at the age of fifty-one.

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## **Annexation of Venice and Rome**

In April 1866, Italy concluded an alliance with Prussia, which defeated Austria in the Seven Weeks' War during the summer. Austria ceded Venetia to the Italians.

After the kingdom of Italy was created in 1861, French troops remained in Rome to defend the pope's possession of the city and its surroundings. When the French withdrew these troops during the Franco-German War of 1870, the Italians occupied and annexed Rome, which now became Italy's capital.

The annexations of Venetia and Rome completed the process of unification and marked the fulfillment of the Risorgimento, the great political and cultural revival of Italy during the nineteenth century.

## **Italy After Unification**

When the Kingdom of Italy was established in 1861, Victor Emmanuel II (r. 1861-1878), the Piedmontese king, became king of Italy. The Piedmontese constitution, the Statuto of 1848, was the model for the new Italian constitution. The two-house parliament consisted of the Senate, whose members included aristocrats and officials appointed by the king, and the Chamber of Deputies, which was elected by property-qualified voters. Executive authority was entrusted to a premier and cabinet, who were responsible to the parliament. While the political system was liberal, it was not democratic. In a population of 25 million, only about 500,000 possessed enough property to qualify as voters.

Economically, Italy was poor, overpopulated, and underdeveloped. It lacked raw materials and produced no coal or iron. This paucity of resources hindered the country's economic and social development. Some industrialization had occurred in northern Italy, but the region continued to lag behind most of the rest of Western Europe. In the south, impoverished and illiterate peasants lived in miserable conditions, reminiscent of medieval serfdom.

## **The Roman Question**

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Following the Italian seizure of Rome in 1870, Italian politics was troubled by the Roman Question, the conflict between the papacy and the Italian state. Pope Pius IX (r. 1846-1878) declared himself to be a “prisoner of the Vatican.” He refused to recognize the Italian state and instructed Italy’s Catholics not to participate in politics.

The conflict with the papacy continued until the negotiation of the Lateran accords in 1929 (see Chapter 31).

### **Political Developments**

In the years following unification, Italy’s governments were dominated by upper-middle-class and upper-class liberals from northern Italy who had been political allies of Cavour in the struggle for unification. The multiparty system made government by coalition necessary, and the coalitions were often unstable.

### ***Economic and Political Unrest***

Poor economic conditions led to considerable unrest. In 1893, serious peasant revolts broke out in Sicily and spread to other areas.

Although socialist and anarchist organizations were outlawed in 1894, the unrest continued, reaching its culmination in riots that engulfed Milan and other northern Italian cities in the spring of 1898. During 1901 and 1902, Italy was swept by a great wave of strikes, which reflected both the continuing discontent of the workers and the spread of socialist and other radical ideas.

In 1900, an anarchist assassinated King Humbert I (r. 1878-1900), who had become king following the death of Victor Emmanuel II in 1878. Humbert was succeeded by Victor Emmanuel III (r. 1900-1946).

### ***Giolitti’s Premiership***

During most of the period from 1903 to 1914, Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) held the premiership. In dealing with continuing unrest, Giolitti followed the policy of his predecessors, using repressive measures in an attempt to restore order.

The right to vote was gradually extended. In 1881, the voting age was reduced from twenty-five to twenty-one, and property



requirements for voters were also reduced. In 1912, universal manhood suffrage was introduced.

During the decade prior to 1914, Italy experienced the fastest rate of economic growth in Western Europe. Nevertheless, neither the extension of the right to vote nor economic growth obscured the fact that Italy was a deeply troubled country.

*In Italy, the political system gradually evolved toward democracy, but the country's stability was threatened by the unresolved Roman Question and unrest among peasants and workers.*

## Germany

The failure of the German revolutionaries of 1848 weakened the liberal nationalists and provided an opportunity for a political leader of another sort.

### Divided Germany

Following the failure of the 1848 revolution, the German Confederation was reestablished as a loose union of the thirty-nine German states. Of these states, the most powerful were Austria, ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty, and Prussia, ruled by the House of Hohenzollern. Holding the presidency of the German Confederation, the Austrians dominated Germany much as they dominated Italy.

### Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898)

Bismarck, like his Italian counterpart Cavour, proved to be one of nineteenth-century Europe's most brilliant statesmen.

#### Youth and Early

Career Born into a family of the Prussian Junker aristocracy, Bismarck studied law and set out on a career in the Prussian civil service. He found the work of a bureaucrat unsatisfying, however, and resigned, spending the next several years as a gentleman farmer. In 1847, Bismarck was elected to the Landtag, the Prussian parliament. In 1851, the Prussian king, Frederick William IV (r. 1840-1861), appointed Bismarck as Prussia's representative to the diet of the German Confederation, which met in Frankfurt.

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Witnessing Austria's domination of German affairs, Bismarck became convinced that Germany was too small for both Austria and Prussia. However, the Prussian government was not yet ready to challenge Austria and found

Bismarck's anti-Austrian attitude embarrassing. In 1859, Bismarck became Prussia's ambassador to Russia, and in 1862, he was named ambassador to France.

### ***Minister-President of Prussia***

The increasingly unbalanced King Frederick William IV dominated the Prussian government until he was declared insane in 1858. His brother became regent and then, when Frederick William IV died in 1861, succeeded to the throne as William I (r. 1861-1888).

William I introduced a program to strengthen the Prussian army. This program required a large appropriation, but the liberals in the Prussian Landtag demanded concessions from the king in exchange for their approval of new taxes. As the deadlock continued, Albrecht von Roon (1803-1879), the minister of war, suggested that Bismarck would be able to put the military reform program into effect, either with the support of the Landtag or against it, if necessary.

In September 1862, William I named Bismarck Prussia's minister-president. Addressing the Landtag, Bismarck presented his views forthrightly. The great issues of the day, he declared, would not be settled by parliamentary debate and majority vote. Instead, they would be settled by "blood and iron."

The Landtag continued to refuse to approve the new taxes. Acting unconstitutionally, Bismarck proceeded to collect the taxes anyway, and the military reform program was carried out.

## **The Schleswig-Holstein Affair**

The Schleswig-Holstein affair provided Bismarck with an opportunity to begin the process of eliminating Austria from German affairs.

Schleswig and Holstein were two duchies located south of Denmark. The Danish king ruled the partly Danish-speaking and partly German-speaking duchies, although they were not a part of Denmark. In 1863, the Danish parliament annexed Schleswig, an action that infuriated German nationalists.

### ***Prussian Alliance with Austria***

Bismarck proposed a Prussian alliance with Austria to take action against Denmark. The Austrians accepted the proposal, and Prussia and Austria went to war against Denmark in 1864. Denmark was quickly defeated and surrendered the two duchies. In the Convention of Gastein, signed in August 1865, Bismarck arranged for joint Austro-Prussian possession of the duchies, with Prussia occupying Schleswig and Austria occupying Holstein. This provided Bismarck with opportunities to provoke arguments with the Austrians.

### ***Neutralizing Other Powers***

Before moving against Austria, Bismarck sought to gain assurances of French, Italian, and Russian neutrality. Meeting with Napoleon III in October 1865, he hinted vaguely at the possibility that France might receive some territorial compensation in Belgium and Luxembourg or in the German Rhineland in the event of war between Prussia and Austria. The French emperor agreed to remain neutral. He underestimated Russia's military power and expected a long war that Austria would ultimately win.

Turning to Italy, Bismarck formed an alliance with the Italians, which provided for the Italian acquisition of Austrian-ruled Venetia in the event of a Prussian victory over Austria.

Bismarck had already put Russia in his debt. In 1863, when a revolt occurred in Russian Poland, Prussia had supported the

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Russian suppression of the revolt, the only major European power to do so.

### **The Seven Weeks' War**

#### ***Defeat of Austria***

In the spring of 1866, Prussia accused Austria of violating the Convention of Gastein and proposed the abolition of the German Confederation. The Seven Weeks' War between Austria and Prussia began in June. The Prussian army decisively defeated the Austrians at the Battle of Königgratz (Sadowa) in Bohemia on July 3.

#### ***Austrian Exclusion from Germany***

In the Treaty of Prague, signed in late August 1866, Bismarck made a moderate peace with Austria. Prussia gained full possession of Schleswig and Holstein and also annexed the northern German states of Hanover, Hesse, Nassau, and Frankfurt. Austria agreed to the dissolution of the German Confederation and in effect, ceased to be an effective German power. Italy acquired Venetia.

### **The North German Confederation**

With Austria excluded from German affairs, Prussia proceeded to establish the North German Confederation (1867), which united the German states north of the Main River under Prussian leadership.

#### ***The Independent South German States***

While Prussia dominated the North German Confederation, to the south there were four independent states: the kingdoms of Bavaria and Württemberg, the grand duchy of Baden, and the duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. Few Germans expected this division to remain permanent, and Bismarck himself wanted to absorb the south.

There were, however, several obstacles in the path of the extension of Prussian control over southern Germany. The south German states were largely Catholic in religion and had a relatively liberal political tradition. They were reluctant to be subordinated to the control of autocratic and militaristic Prussia, which was predominantly Lutheran. Furthermore, Napoleon III opposed a

further increase in Prussian power. For centuries, France had benefited from a divided Germany, and the growth of Prussian power that had already occurred was to France's disadvantage. Bismarck believed it would be necessary to fight a war against France in order for Prussia to gain control of the south German states.

### **The Hohenzollern Candidacy**

In 1868, a revolution in Spain began a series of events that ended with Prussia's defeat of France and the creation of the German Empire.

The Spanish revolution resulted in the overthrow of Queen Isabella, whereupon the Spanish began the search for a new monarch. Someone suggested the name of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a south German Catholic relative of the Prussian king.

The French strongly opposed Leopold's candidacy. If he became Spain's ruler, a dynastic alliance might then come into being between Spain and Prussia. In the face of French protests, King William I of Prussia agreed to have Leopold's name withdrawn from consideration.

### ***French Demands on Prussia***

Not content with this diplomatic victory, the French made the mistake of making further demands. On July 13, 1870, the French ambassador to Prussia, Count Benedetti, met with William I in the town of Ems and asked the king for a formal guarantee that the Hohenzollern candidacy would not be renewed. Believing that the concessions he had already made to the French were sufficient, William I refused and later sent a report of his meeting with Benedetti to Bismarck in Berlin.

### ***The Ems Dispatch***

Bismarck edited the king's report of the conversation and released it. This so-called Ems Dispatch made it appear that King William I and Ambassador Benedetti had insulted each other. This angered Napoleon III, who responded by declaring war on Prussia on July 19, 1870.

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Anticipating the possibility of war with France, Bismarck had already concluded alliances with the independent south German states. Now all of Germany, under the leadership of Prussia, went to war against France, the Germans' hereditary enemy.

### The Franco-German War and the Proclamation of the German Empire

Mobilizing efficiently, the German armies invaded France. On September 2, Napoleon III and a large French army surrendered to the Germans at Sedan. In Paris, rebels proclaimed the establishment of the Third Republic, which sought to continue the war.



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### **Completion of German Unification**

On January 18, 1871, while the German siege of Paris was still in progress, King William I of Prussia was proclaimed German emperor before an assembly of German princes and other dignitaries in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. The unification of Germany under the leadership of Prussia had been accomplished.

### **Annexation of Alsace and Lorraine**

On May 10, 1871, France and Germany signed the Treaty of Frankfurt, ending the Franco-German War. The French ceded the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany and were also obliged to pay an indemnity of 5 billion gold francs (\$1 billion). The German annexation of Alsace and Lorraine enraged the French and created an enduring obstacle in the path of peaceful relations between the two countries.

*Although Cavour died soon after the creation of the kingdom of Italy, Bismarck served as chancellor of the German Empire until his dismissal by Emperor William II in 1890.*

*The unification of Italy and Germany brought a dramatic change in the European balance of power at the expense of Austria and France. Germany now became the most powerful state on the European continent, while Italy's position among the great powers had not yet been determined.*