

# Administrative Districts in the German Reich (1905)

## Abstract

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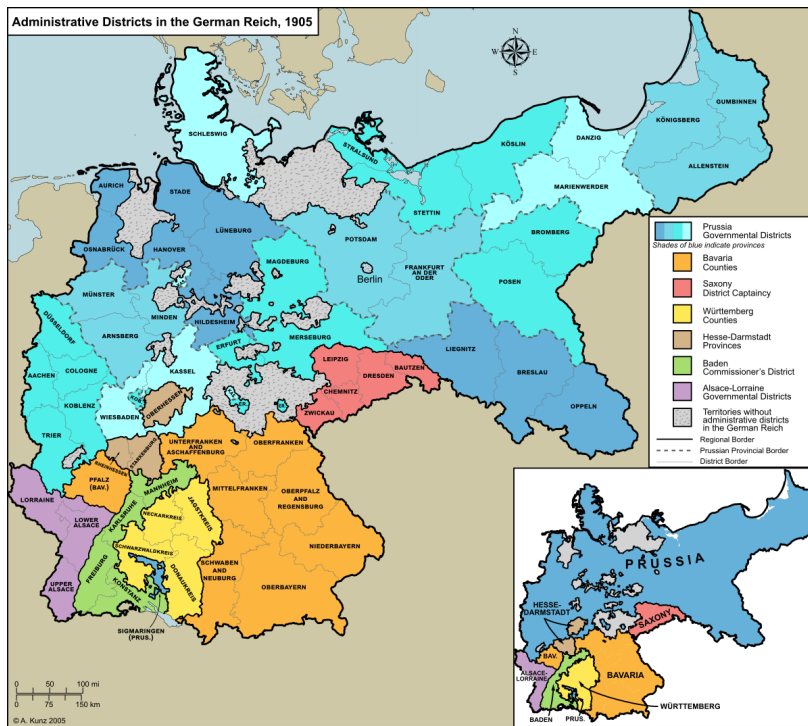
In the German Empire [*Reich*], different federal states had different administrative structures. Within this framework, Prussian provinces enjoyed the highest degree of administrative sovereignty. But while these administrative units possessed limited independence, they had no political autonomy. Prussian provinces were divided into government regions, which were then subdivided into districts. Provincial districts came together in a provincial assembly, which consisted of three organs: the provincial parliament (legislative body), the provincial board (executive body), and the regional director [*Landesdirektor*] or captain [*Landeshauptmann*], who was elected by the provincial parliament. The highest administrative official was the “High President” [*Oberpräsident*], who represented the imperial government; the adjudicator was the provincial council.

Aside from Prussia, Hesse was the only other federal state with a provincial system. Likewise, the other large federal states had regional districts as a form of mid-level state administration, but the terms used for them varied. Thus, Bavaria and Württemberg were divided into districts [*Kreise*], Baden into districts headed by a superintendent [*Landeskommissarbezirke*], and Saxony into counties headed by captains [*Kreishauptmannschaften*]. There was no mid-level administration in the smaller federal states. The states with their own administrative structures enjoyed far-reaching administrative sovereignty. As a rule, they were responsible for administering imperial laws and attending to matters of general and internal administration, which included establishing procedures and regulations, maintaining their own police force, and collecting taxes and administering their own finances.

Prussia dominated the German Empire in many ways. As the map below makes clear, it comprised two-thirds of the imperial territory, and accounted for 60% of the German population. Bismarck’s constitution and the expansion of Prussian bureaucracy, the priority Prussia enjoyed in the Federal Chamber on account of the fact that the Prussian king and the German Emperor were one and the same person (as were the Prussian prime minister and the German chancellor, with two exceptions), and the increasing militarization of society – all of this was perceived by critics as evidence of the “Prussianization” (“*Verpreußung*”) of Germany. The primacy of Prussia, however, was not the only weakness of the German Empire’s federal system. Its financing was also problematic: each state, for example, had to pay contributions to the federal government, which made the empire dependent on them. Moreover, some southern German states enjoyed special rights: Bavaria and Württemberg, for example, had their own postal systems and armies. Thus, no proper balance of power could be achieved among the federal states or between them and the empire.

## Source

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Source: Original cartography by IEG-MAPS, Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz, A. Kunz, 2004.  
 Revised cartography (WCAG-compliant) by Gabriel Moss, 2022.

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