



Volume 4. Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890
Law on Freedom of Religion (July 3, 1869)

Apart from introducing direct universal suffrage in the North German Confederation, Bismarck sought to win over his left-wing opponents with many other liberalizing measures. The law concerning equal civil rights and admission to public office from 3 July 1869 was one such initiative. Its most important effect was to place Jews on an equal legal footing with Christians in the new Germany: thus one can speak of Jewish emancipation – at least in the formal sense – as dating from July 1869. This law did not suffice, however, to force recalcitrant federal states – much less ordinary citizens – to abandon regulations and prejudices that discriminated against the Jews. It also failed to defuse the brewing conflict over the role of institutionalized religion in public affairs, a conflict that soon boiled over in the form of the anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf*.

Law Concerning the Equality of all Religions with Respect to Civil Rights and Citizenship (July 3, 1869)

Single Article

With this, all prior restrictions on citizenship or civil rights based on differences in religious confession are abolished. In particular, the right to participate in municipal and state legislatures and the right to hold public office shall be independent of religious confession.

Source: *Bundesgesetzblatt [Federal Law Gazette]*, 1869, p. 292.

Original German text reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte [Documents on German Constitutional History]*, 3rd rev. ed., vol. 2, 1851-1900. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986, p. 312.

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