

Political Participation in the Prussian Rhine Province

The research project focuses on the political culture of the Prussian Rhine Province between 1815 and 1845. As an administrative sphere, the Rhine Province was artificially created at the Congress of Vienna and is analytically understood as a *political space*, which stood at the beginning of its process of formation.

This formation was related to *translocal interconnections* between a complex set of negotiation-processes between the administration-cities Aachen, Düsseldorf, Koblenz, Köln, and Trier and its political actors (entangled history) – thus ultimately leading to the special role of the Rhineland-Parliamentarians during the revolution of 1848/49.

Contrary to the conventional view of the transitional time until the revolution as a phase of political stagnation or regression, it is assumed that several groups as well as individuals were able to influence the contemporary politics under Prussian reign.

Especially in the regions on the left side of the Rhine the Napoleonic-Statesystem had offered professional advancements based on real estate, property and efficiency for both people of aristocratic as well as bourgeois background. Consequently a new extended elite was established during the 20 years of French government, which can be called society of *notables*.



Historical map of the Rhine Province 1905
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These *notables* had gained important experiences in parliamentary practice, which they tried to defend against the widespread restrictions under the Prussian governance. After the abolition of the French committees, they were forced to find new spaces to discuss political topics. This indicates that social relations for example in associations and family circles became increasingly important developing new political strategies and forms of participation. In order to analyse in which way they interact to maintain their political influence, the study aims at reconstructing the multi-layered family connections of three generations and their presence in different associations and corporations.

Therefore, in the first half of the 19th century *political networks* were less characterised by political opinions and shared principles than by their strategic function as a way of successfully participating in politics.