

1 Unit

Emergence of an Authoritarian Regime in Germany

TIMELINE

- 1918 Nov:** Germany is defeated in First World War; a republic is declared
- 1919 Jun:** Weimar Republic is forced to accept the harsh Treaty of Versailles
- 1920** National Socialists produce 25-point programme, reconciling nationalism and socialism
- 1923 Jan:** French and Belgian troops invade the Ruhr; massive inflation results
- Nov:** Hitler attempts the Munich Putsch and fails
- 1924 Feb:** Hitler is imprisoned in Landsberg Fortress and writes his semi-autobiographical *Mein Kampf* (released early in December)
- 1929 Oct:** Wall Street Crash leads to unemployment in Germany
- 1930 Mar:** Müller's Grand Coalition collapses and Brüning becomes chancellor
- Sep:** Nazis win 107 seats in elections (18.3% of the vote)
- 1932 Feb:** unemployment reaches 6 million
- Apr:** Hindenburg beats Hitler in presidential elections
- Jun:** von Papen replaces Brüning as chancellor
- Jul:** Nazis win 230 Reichstag seats becoming the largest single party
- Nov:** Nazis win 196 Reichstag seats – a sign that their support has passed its peak
- Dec:** von Schleicher becomes chancellor
- 1933 Jan:** Hitler becomes chancellor
- Feb:** Reichstag Fire is blamed on the communists
- Mar:** Nazis win 288 Reichstag seats; Enabling Act gives Hitler dictatorial powers for four years

Overview

- The Weimar Republic, which was set up in 1919, proved to be politically weak. It faced both left-wing communist rebellion and right-wing conservative and nationalist opposition, focused on the humiliating peace treaty, the Treaty of Versailles.
- Economic conditions also proved unfavourable. When the French and Belgians invaded the Ruhr in 1923, hyperinflation resulted, ruining middle-class savings. When US loans were withdrawn following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, Germany fell into depression.
- National Socialism thrived on the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic. Hitler's personal leadership, aims and ideology attracted a variety of supporters and his promises to restore German prosperity, provide jobs and 'smash' the Treaty of Versailles won increasing electoral success after 1930.
- In March 1930, the country's last democratic government – the 'Grand Coalition' – collapsed and subsequent chancellors relied on the president's right to issue decrees (under article 48 of the Weimar Constitution). By July 1932, the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag (parliament).
- President Paul von Hindenburg was persuaded to appoint Hitler as chancellor on 30 January 1933 following 'backstairs intrigue', which Hitler had worked to his own advantage.
- The Reichstag Fire permitted a further law that allowed the imprisonment of communists and helped to increase support for the Nazis in the March 1933 elections. Hitler forced through an Enabling Act, which gave him dictatorial powers over Germany.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did political conditions in Germany after 1918 contribute to the emergence of a Nazi state?
- How did the economic conditions in Germany in the years 1919 to 1929 contribute to the emergence of a Nazi state?
- How did the aims and ideology of the Nazi Party develop between 1919 and 1929?
- How far did the conditions of 1929–33 contribute to the establishment of the Nazi state?
- Where did the support for National Socialism come from?

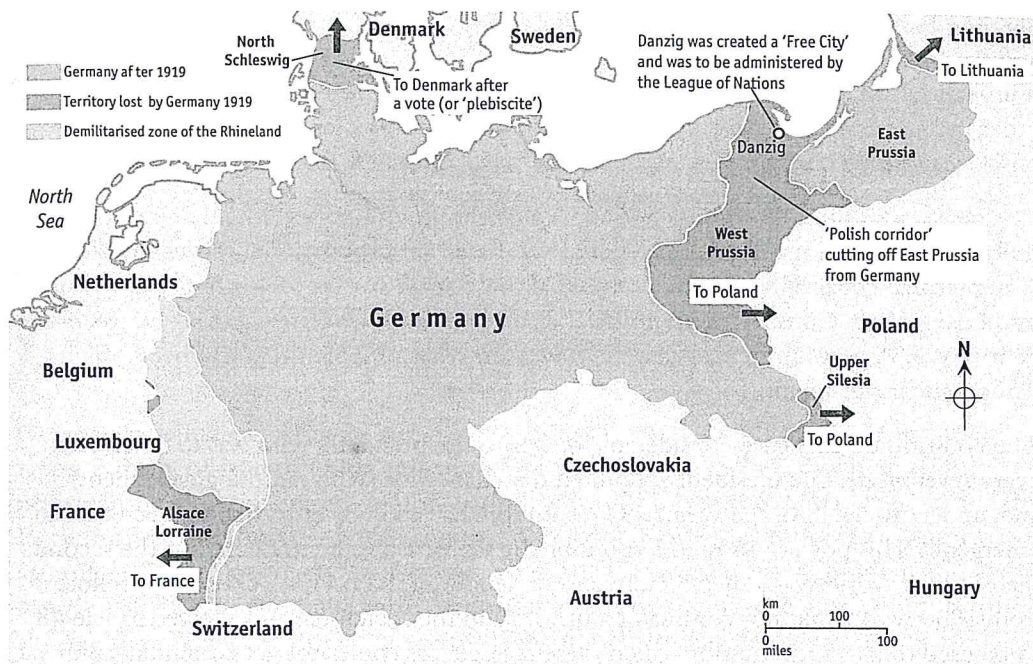


Figure 3.1 The impact of the Treaty of Versailles on the borders of Germany

3.1 How did political conditions in Germany after 1918 contribute to the emergence of a Nazi state?

Before the First World War, Germany had been ruled by the authoritarian Kaiser Wilhelm II. Although the German constitution of 1871 had made provision for a Reichstag (elected parliament), this had never been allowed to develop effectively, causing a good deal of political tension. The kaiser had pursued an ambitious foreign policy, partly to deflect attention away from political troubles, and this led to the First World War in 1914.

The war destroyed the imperial regime. As defeat threatened in 1918, the Kaiser tried to install a more liberal government. However, the country descended into chaos with strikes and mutinies. The Kaiser abdicated on 9 November 1918 and a republic was declared.

A new socialist government under **Friedrich Ebert** signed an armistice to end the war in November 1918, and in January 1919 a new democratic constitution was drawn up in the town of Weimar. The armistice came as a shock to the Germans, who had been encouraged to believe that their country would be victorious. Nationalists claimed that the German army had been 'stabbed in the back' by politicians who made peace when the army could have fought on.

The **Treaty of Versailles** in June 1919 caused further anger. Germany lost 13 per cent of its territory in Europe, plus all of its colonies. It was left with severely restricted armed forces, a demilitarised Rhineland in the west and a corridor of land given to Poland,



Figure 3.2 Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925)

Friedrich Ebert was a socialist leader who took over government in November 1918 after the Kaiser's abdication. As elected president of the Weimar Republic from February 1919, he faced political instability, the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, economic problems resulting from the war, the invasion of the Ruhr and hyperinflation.

Treaty of Versailles: This was the peace treaty imposed on Germany after the First World War by the victorious Allies – Britain, France and the USA.

self-determination: This term refers to the right of racial groups to be settled in a country of their own race and ruled by their own people.

Anschluss: This is the term used to refer to the joining together of Austria and Germany. Hitler carried this out in 1938 to create the greater German Reich (state).

proportional representation: Under this system of elections, electors vote for a party rather than a candidate. Parties can then choose deputies from a list, according to the number of votes cast for that party. The number of deputies in the Reichstag would therefore correspond proportionately to the number of votes that party received in the country as a whole.

Spartacus League: Led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the Spartacus League was a radical socialist group. Its members were the founders of the KPD (German Communist Party), which was set up at a congress in Berlin held from 30 December 1918 to 1 January 1919. The group remained committed to violent revolution until about 1923, whereafter it contested Reichstag elections with some success. The KPD and SPD (Social Democratic Party) refused to work together, which was one factor that allowed the Nazis to come to power.

conservative élite: This is the name given to traditionally right-wing aristocratic landowners, industrialists, senior army officers, judges and civil servants.

dividing East Prussia from the rest of Germany. By forcing the Germans to accept war guilt and binding them to pay reparations (finally fixed at £6.6 billion in 1921), the humiliation of Germany seemed complete. Although **self-determination** was applied to other parts of Europe, Germany was left with many ethnic Germans living outside its borders, and **Anschluss** (union) with Austria was expressly forbidden.

The new constitution also contained some significant weaknesses, which were to cause problems in later years. The voting system was based on **proportional representation**. This produced coalition governments and allowed small parties to gain representation in the Reichstag. Constant governmental changes (with fourteen coalitions between February 1919 and June 1928) helped to weaken what support there had been for democratic government.

The constitution also gave considerable power to the president, who was to be elected every seven years. The president appointed the chancellor (who ran the government) and, under article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, had the power to rule by decree in an emergency. This power was used responsibly by the first president, Ebert, but the second, the old First World War general Paul von Hindenburg (1925–1934), chose chancellors from 1930 who could not command a majority in the Reichstag and allowed article 48 to be used to pass measures for which these chancellors could not get Reichstag approval.

The political weaknesses of the Weimar Republic left it exposed to continual political threats in its early years. The **Spartacus League** (*Spartakusbund*), an extreme left-wing socialist movement, attempted to overthrow the Republic in January 1919. There was also trouble from communists in the Ruhr in March 1920 and in Saxony and Thuringia in 1923.

Similarly, the right-wing **conservative élite** was lukewarm, if not hostile, towards the Republic. German conservatism and nationalism remained strong and most ex-army officers, judges, senior civil servants and university professors resented the new style of parliamentary rule. This continuation of nationalist values favoured the development of right-wing extremism, of which Nazism was to be one example, in Germany in this period.



Figure 3.3 Street fighting in Berlin between government troops and the Spartacus League, during the Spartacist uprising, January 1919

SOURCE A

In the eyes of the right, the Republic was associated with the surrender, a shameful and deliberate act of treachery, and the peace treaty, a further act of betrayal. The fact that the new republican institutions were democratic added to the hostility. It was openly said that loyalty to the fatherland required disloyalty to the Republic.

Bullock, A. 1962 (rev. edn). *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny*. Harmondsworth, UK. Penguin Books. pp. 58–59.

German nationalists showed their contempt for the Republic in the military Kapp **Putsch** of March 1920 and the 'White Terror' of 1920–22, when 400 political murders occurred, many committed by the **Freikorps**. Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923 (see section 3.3, Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)), the first attempt of the Nazi Party to show its strength, was yet another incident in this long line of political challenges. Although a failure, it reinforced the picture of the Weimar Republic as a struggling parliamentary democracy.

The Republic enjoyed a more stable period between 1924 and 1929, when moderate parties made gains. From 1928 to 1930, a 'Grand Coalition' commanded over 60 per cent of the seats in the Reichstag. However, political problems had been submerged rather than going away. From 1929, as economic problems worsened, the parties of the Reichstag became so divided that in 1930 the Grand Coalition collapsed, opening the way for the total breakdown of the democracy.

3.2 How did the economic conditions in Germany in the years 1919 to 1929 contribute to the emergence of a Nazi state?

The costs of war and the impact of the wartime blockade, compounded by the Treaty of Versailles, undermined the German economy. Returning soldiers could not find work, and valuable industrial land was lost. In 1923, when Germany could not meet the impossibly heavy demands for **reparations** set by the victorious Allies in 1921, the French and Belgians occupied the Ruhr.

To pay welfare assistance to workers, who were ordered to meet the invasion of the Ruhr with **passive resistance**, the government over-printed paper money. This, plus the loss of production, provoked **hyperinflation**. Although hyperinflation was cured by a new currency in 1924, the loss of value in savings, which hit middle-class families particularly hard, caused lasting damage. Furthermore, a shortage of domestic investment, which forced the government to look for US loans under the 1924 Dawes Plan, was to place the economy in a dangerously dependent position.

putsch: An attempt to overthrow the state.

Freikorps: These were volunteer groups of demobilised soldiers who continued to fight for right-wing values.

KEY CONCEPTS QUESTION

Causation: Why was the Weimar Republic regarded as weak between 1919 and 1924?

reparations: Compensation for war damage that was payable to Germany's former enemies.

passive resistance: A non-violent refusal to work – in the Ruhr, for example, this meant a refusal to work for the occupying troops of France and Belgium.

hyperinflation: This term is used to describe a very high rate of inflation, when money is so devalued that prices rise constantly and excessive amounts are needed to buy everyday items. Effectively, the currency becomes worthless.

Although the years 1925–29 saw some improvements, agriculture never shared in the boom. Prices remained low as farmers faced competition from Canada and the USA. However, it was the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 that once again sent the economy into crisis as the USA recalled its loans. This created the desperate economic conditions in which democracy broke down and the Nazis were able to rise to power.

3.3 How did the aims and ideology of the Nazi Party develop between 1919 and 1929?

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

Table 3.1 Biography of early life

1889	Born in Branau, Austria, the son of a customs inspector
1907	Was refused admission to the Viennese Academy of Art
1908	Failed again to enter the Academy; lived rough in Vienna, painting scenes from postcards
1913	Moved to Munich in Bavaria, Germany
1914	Volunteered for military service and was sent to the Western Front as a dispatch runner; became a corporal
1918	Was recovering from a poison gas attack when he heard news of the armistice
1919	Returned to Munich and served in the army in an 'enlightenment project' to investigate new political groups

NSDAP:

Nationalsozialistische

Deutsche Arbeiterpartei:

This is the full name of the Nazi Party. Members were called 'Nazis' in the same way that the socialists were known as 'Sozis'. Nazi came from the NA of *National* and the ZI of *sozialistische*.

swastika: This term refers to an ancient religious symbol in the form of a cross with the arms bent at right angles. It had been used by right-wing groups in Austria and was associated with Aryanism even before Hitler chose to adopt it. It became the best-known symbol of the Nazi Party and was used on flags, arm-bands and badges.

ideology: This refers to a set of beliefs and ideas that characterise a political movement and provide the principles from which its policies derive.

The **NSDAP** (National Socialist German Workers' Party) or Nazi Party was just one of a number of right-wing political opposition groups that developed in Germany in the early years of the Weimar Republic. Founded in Munich as the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or DAP (German Workers' Party) in 1919 by Anton Drexler, the party soon fell under the spell of Adolf Hitler.

After the war, Hitler worked as an army informant, 'spying' on left-wing political groups for the authorities. On 12 September 1919, he investigated Drexler's party. He was attracted by its philosophy and decided to join. By 1 April 1920, Hitler had left the army to become a full-time political agitator. He gave the party its new name, its drive and its **swastika** emblem. In July 1921, he became its chairman.

The **ideology** of National Socialism – the superiority of the German race, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, the survival of the fittest, the 'national community' and the cult of the leader – had already taken shape in Hitler's mind as a consequence of his own

experience. His time living rough in Vienna before the First World War had helped to turn him into a fervent German nationalist and anti-Semite. His bitter disappointment that democratic socialist politicians should agree to an armistice in 1918 – and still worse, a humiliating peace treaty in 1919 – strengthened his convictions. He associated democracy with weakness, believing the German army had been ‘stabbed in the back’ by the ‘November Criminals’. He saw the socialist politicians as communists, and tainted by association with Jewry.

Nevertheless, the 25-point programme embraced an element of ‘socialism’, probably in an effort to entice workers away from the communist groups that flourished in the aftermath of war. There were demands for the abolition of unearned income, the nationalisation of businesses and the closure of big department stores in favour of the small trader – although by the later 1920s, these elements had been largely forgotten.

Since the Nazis refused to recognise the Weimar government, no candidates were put up for election before 1924, but the party steadily increased its membership and influence through the 1920s. In 1921, the SA (*Sturmabteilung* – originally a ‘gymnastics and sports division’, although it became a paramilitary force) was created and the *Völkischer Beobachter* (*People’s Observer*) was established as a Nazi newspaper. Regional branches or *Gau* were established, and by the end of 1923 the party had 55,000 members, although this was still a tiny number compared with a national German electorate of 38 million.

The Nazis attracted ex-soldiers and members of the Freikorps, who supported the nationalist views of the party and seized on the opportunities it provided for jobs. It also attracted conservative lower middle-class workers, lower-ranking Bavarian civil servants and students fired with desire for political change.

It was not until November 1923 that Hitler’s name came to be known nationally when he attempted to seize control of the Bavarian government, as a preliminary to marching on Berlin. In 1922, Benito Mussolini had taken control in Italy through a ‘March on Rome’. Hitler was eager to carry out a similar coup.

On 8 November 1923, Nazis interrupted a political meeting in a Munich beer cellar. Under duress, three right-wing Bavarian leaders, Gustav von Kahr, Otto von Lossow and Hans Ritter von Seisser, were persuaded to agree to Hitler’s plan to march on Berlin and establish a new government. Immediately afterwards, however, Kahr contacted the police and army. On 9 November, Hitler and General Erich Ludendorff led a column of around 2,000 armed Nazis through Munich. Shots were fired and Ludendorff was arrested. Hitler dislocated his shoulder when his companion was shot and both fell. Hitler escaped but was found and arrested on 11 November.

The Munich Putsch, or Beer Hall Putsch, failed, but it proved a propagandist success. At his trial for treason, Hitler claimed that his actions had been taken out of patriotic concern for his country. He was convicted of high treason, but he was only condemned to the minimum sentence of five years, thanks to a sympathetic right-wing judiciary.

Hitler actually served just nine months, at Landsberg Fortress, which according to the historian Ian Kershaw was ‘more akin to a hotel’. He spent that period writing a semi-autobiographical book *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*).

Fact: Nationalised industries are run directly by the state.

Theory of knowledge

History and ideology:
How important is ideology for a political leader?

KEY CONCEPTS
QUESTION

Significance: What is the significance of the failed Beer Hall Putsch?

Mein Kampf

The main messages of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* were:

- Germany had to fight international Marxism (communism – see Chapter 1) in order to regain its world power status.
- Communism was the invention of Jews intent on Jewish world domination.
- National Socialism was the only doctrine capable of fighting communism. Liberal 'bourgeois' or 'middle-class' democracy was the first stage to socialism and communism.
- Nazism had to prepare the population for war in order to obtain *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east. To achieve this there had to be racial unity, the elimination of Jews, authoritarian control and no tolerance of diversity or dissent.

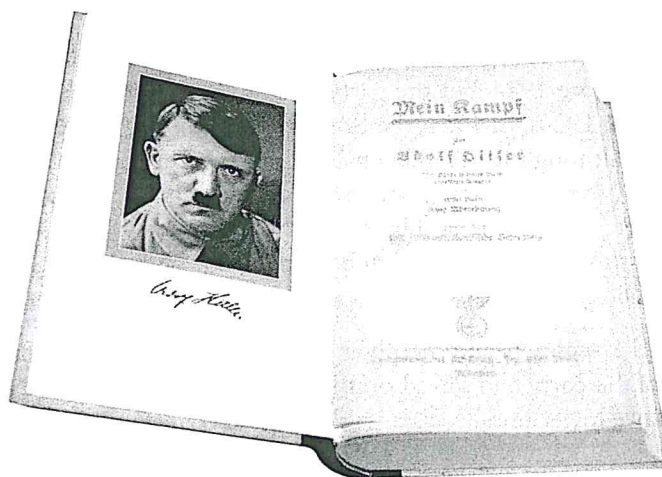


Figure 3.4 A first-edition copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), featuring the Führer on the frontispiece



Figure 3.5 Members of the SA during a training march outside Munich in 1923

Führerprinzip

After 1924, the Nazi Party changed tactics, tightening party discipline and contesting Reichstag elections. Hitler exerted his leadership (known as the *Führerprinzip*), demanding obedience because 'he knew best'. The SS (*Schützstaffel*) was set up in 1925–26 as Hitler's personal bodyguard and the SA was refounded in 1926, with its distinctive brown uniforms.

New party organisations were also created, for women, students, young people and teachers. These helped the party to direct its appeal to a wide spectrum of society and to make more people and institutions aware of Nazism. Although the relative prosperity of 1925–29 did not help, Nazis pursued some energetic recruitment, concentrating on the middle class and the farmers of northern Germany who did not benefit from Weimar's 'golden years'. This yielded some success, although the results of the elections of May 1928 were disappointing – the Nazis won only twelve seats (2.6 per cent of the vote).

Fact: Members of the SA were often called 'brownshirts' because of the colour of their uniforms. It was by chance that the SA adopted a brown uniform. A shipment of brown uniforms, intended for German troops in Africa, fell into Nazi hands and the historic decision was made to clothe the SA that way.

golden years: This refers to the period between 1925 and 1929 when the Weimar economy flourished with the help of US loans.

SOURCE B

No realist could have reckoned much to [the Nazis'] chances of winning power. For that, Hitler's only hope was a massive and comprehensive crisis of the state. He had no notion just how quickly events would turn to the party's advantage. But on 24 October 1929, Wall Street crashed. The crisis Hitler needed was about to envelop Germany.

Kershaw, I. 1998. *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*. London, UK. Allen Lane/Penguin Books. p. 311.

However, Hitler gained more publicity by joining the DNVP (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, the right-wing German National People's Party) in campaigns against the 1929 Young Plan, which had been negotiated to ease the reparations burden. By December 1929, membership had risen to 178,000. Nonetheless, it would have been hard to predict at the end of 1929 that Hitler would become the German chancellor just over three years later.

3.4 How far did the conditions of 1929–33 contribute to the establishment of the Nazi state?

The 1929–30 withdrawal of US loans and the collapse in the export market had catastrophic repercussions for Germany. The 'Grand Coalition', formed under Chancellor Müller in 1928, seemed powerless as unemployment soared from 2 million in 1929, to 4.5 million in 1931 and nearly 6 million in 1932.

Around one-third of all Germans found themselves with no regular wages. This was fuel for extremist parties, such as the Nazis (and also the communists), who mocked the government's inaction and made wild promises that they held the key to future prosperity.

The Nazis played on their claim to be a 'national party' that would keep out communism, uphold law and order, return to traditional middle-class values and restore national strength. However, they had no specific formula to end the slump and their promises of full employment, subsidies to help German peasants and aid to small-scale traders remained vague.

With the break-up of the Grand Coalition in March 1930, there followed five Reichstag elections in three years. Chancellors Heinrich Brüning (March 1930–May 1932), Franz von Papen (June 1932–November 1932) and Kurt von Schleicher (December 1932–January 1933) struggled to rule without parliamentary majorities and were propped up by the use of the president's decree powers.

Meanwhile, the Nazis kept up the pressure with, according to the historian Alan Bullock, 'a display of energy, demand for discipline, sacrifice, action and not talk'. In the Reichstag elections of September 1930, the Nazis obtained 107 seats – a huge increase on its previous 12. Hitler also used the presidential elections of 1932 to his advantage when he challenged von Hindenburg and forced a second vote.

In the Reichstag elections of July 1932, the Nazis won 230 seats and became the largest German party in the Reichstag. However, with just 37.3 per cent of the vote, they had less than an outright majority and they were financially exhausted after two elections in quick succession. Hitler refused Hindenburg's offer of the vice-chancellorship, wanting only the 'top job', but he found it increasingly difficult to restrain the impatient SA, who believed that they should grasp power by revolution.

Fact: Central to Nazism was the belief that the leader's 'will' was the source of all political authority. This *Führerprinzip* was cultivated even before Hitler became chancellor and could claim to be above the law. Hitler demanded unquestioning obedience. He was not prepared for others to challenge him – as the Strasser brothers tried to do in 1926 – nor was he prepared to bow to the will of the SA who pressed for a revolution in 1932–33, while he sought power by legal means.

Fact: Between 1928 and 1932 the political parties became increasingly divided. On the left, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and communists (KPD) refused to work together. The formerly moderate Catholic Centre Party (*Zentrum*) became more right-wing. This left the moderate liberals without allies. The right-wing conservatives (DNVP) sought more authoritarian government and had some sympathy with the Nazis. Unable to agree on the necessary cuts needed after October 1929, the coalition broke up in March 1930.

SOURCE C

On 8 August 1932, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary:

The air is full of presage. The whole party is ready to take over power. The SA down everyday tools to prepare for this. If things go well everything is alright. If they do not it will be an awful setback.

Bullock, A. 1962 (rev. edn). *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. Harmondsworth, UK. Penguin Books. p. 218

Another Reichstag election, in November 1932, saw Nazi support decline to 196 seats. This suggested that the Nazis' electoral fortunes had peaked. Joseph Goebbels, director of propaganda from 1929, commented, 'This year has brought us eternal ill luck. The past was sad, and the future looks dark and gloomy; all chances and hopes have quite disappeared.' Furthermore, the KPD, which had won eighty-nine seats in July, increased its vote by 17 per cent to obtain 100 seats in November. However, it was to the Nazis' advantage that the communists refused to cooperate with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (who had 121 seats) and that the KPD's electoral victories

and huge presence in the streets had the effect of frightening the conservative élite and encouraging them to turn to Hitler.

Chancellor von Papen found himself faced by a hostile Reichstag and even considered using the army to force its dismissal as a prelude to adopting a new German constitution. However, this course of action was opposed by von Schleicher, minister of defence, who feared civil war. Hindenburg tried to prop up von Papen's government, but when this proved impossible he dismissed the chancellor and turned to von Schleicher to form a government. Von Schleicher became chancellor in December 1932.

Von Schleicher had rather optimistically hoped to be able to lure the more left-wing 'socialist' element of the Nazi Party, under Gregor Strasser, away from mainstream Nazism into a coalition with the SPD under his own control and, for a short time, a potential party split added to Hitler's anxieties. However, Hitler demanded and won 'total obedience' from his followers, and Strasser resigned. Von Papen, infuriated by von Schleicher's actions, was encouraged to look to Hitler as a potential ally in a Nazi-Nationalist coalition. The continuing difficulties faced by von Schleicher's government, whose refusal to increase tariffs on food imports had angered influential Prussian landowners, served to help Hitler's negotiations. By 28 January 1933, Hindenburg had no option but to dismiss von Schleicher and turn to von Papen once more. Both knew that a future government would have to include Hitler.

Both von Papen and Hindenburg were convinced, however, that the Nazis were in decline and that it was the right time to harness their energies. They believed the Nazi Party was still strong enough to counter the threat from the left, but that Hitler's position was too weak to threaten traditional élite rule. Consequently, they were prepared to offer Hitler the chancellorship, with just two Nazi cabinet posts for Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Goering, alongside nine nationalist ministers.

Hitler was summoned on 30 January 1933 to head a government with von Papen as his deputy. Hitler, Hindenburg and von Papen alike were content with their behind-the-scenes discussions and deals. Von Papen believed that he had made a good deal and would be able to push Hitler 'into a corner' within two months. Hindenburg, too, had little idea as to what the consequences of his action would be. Only Hitler had a clear idea of where he was going.

Hitler called for immediate elections and mounted another massive propaganda campaign. He was helped by the Reichstag Fire on 27 February 1933, which gave him an excuse to blame the communists and ask Hindenburg to issue an emergency decree, 'For the Protection of People and State' (28 February). With the power to search, arrest and censor 'until further notice', the Nazis were able to remove opponents before the elections took place.

On 5 March 1933, the Nazis gained 43.9 per cent of the total votes cast. While impressive, this left Hitler reliant on other parties to obtain the two-thirds majority needed to change the constitution. The conservative DNVP, which won 8 per cent, offered support, but a deal had to be struck with the Catholic Centre Party, which had won 11.2 per cent. This committed Nazism to protect the Church (see section 3.13). The emergency decree was also used to expel all communists from the Reichstag.

Fact: In the first round of the presidential elections, in March 1932, Hitler won 30.2 per cent of the total votes cast and forced a second ballot. He visited twenty-one different towns by plane in a week and increased his share of the vote in the second round in April to 36.7 per cent.

KEY CONCEPTS ACTIVITY

Change and

Significance: Draw a horizontal timeline to illustrate the results of the Reichstag elections between September 1930 and November 1932. Beneath the line, add a few notes on each election to explain the significance of the result.

Fact: On 27 February 1933, the Reichstag building was burnt down. The Nazis claimed this was the work of a Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, acting on behalf of the KPD. However, there is no reliable evidence to prove this was the case. There has been speculation that Hitler or Goering and the SA provoked this incident as an excuse to act against their opponents. Almost fifty years later, the West German government pardoned van der Lubbe.

Table 3.2 The end of Weimar democracy

Chancellors	Developments
Figure 3.6 Heinrich Brüning March 1930– May 1932 	• No majority in the Reichstag; relied on president's emergency decrees • Nazis became the second-largest party with 18.3% of the vote in elections of September 1930 • Government seemed weak and unable to control street violence although SA was banned in April 1932 • Economic depression continued; proposed agrarian reforms angered the powerful Prussian landowners (Junkers) and Hindenburg; Brüning resigned
Figure 3.7 Franz von Papen June 1932–November 1932 	• Little Reichstag support and government formed from outside the Reichstag • Tried to gain Nazi support by lifting ban on SA (June 1932) – violence grew • Relied on presidential decrees and ended democratic government in Prussia • Nazis became largest party (37.3% of the vote) in July 1932; with communists, they held over half of the Reichstag seats • Nazis won 33.1% of the vote and communists 16.9% in November 1932; von Papen resigned
Figure 3.8 Kurt von Schleicher December 1932–January 1933 	• Persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss Brüning and von Papen, but reluctant to be chancellor • Tried to ally with Gregor Strasser and 'socialist' Nazis, but Strasser refused • Relied on presidential decrees • Von Papen schemed against von Schleicher to get Hitler made chancellor with von Papen as vice-chancellor; von Schleicher dismissed

As the SA and SS whipped up support in the localities, in a piece of cleverly timed propaganda President Hindenburg was persuaded to stand alongside Hitler, in full military dress, at a ceremony of national reconciliation in Potsdam on 21 March 1933. Consequently, on 23 March, the Enabling Act was passed with only ninety-four SPD members voting against it. This was to provide the basis for Hitler's dictatorship. It virtually destroyed the power of the Reichstag by allowing the chancellor to issue laws without consultation for a period of four years.

After the Enabling Act was passed it took Hitler just four months to set up a single-party, authoritarian state. He was able to combine his legal powers and the threat of force to remove or Nazify those groups or institutions that might limit his power in a process known as *Gleichschaltung*. The constitution of 1919 was never formally abandoned and the Reichstag survived, but in the first six months of 1933, what lingering democracy there had been was destroyed.

Gleichschaltung: This refers to a coordination process whereby all German institutions were to conform to Nazi ideals.

KEY CONCEPTS QUESTION

Significance: What was the significance of the Enabling Act?

3.5 Where did the support for National Socialism come from?

It used to be thought that most Nazi support came from the 'middle classes' (*Mittelstand*) who were frightened by communism, desperate after their losses in the 1923 hyperinflation crisis and disillusioned with the Weimar Republic. However, more recent thinking and the analysis of election results has shown that Nazi support came from a very wide spectrum of the community. Some were swayed by Nazi propaganda, some by self-interest and some by a genuine belief that National Socialism was the answer to the country's problems. (See section 3.8 for more information on the role of Nazi propaganda in the consolidation of power.)

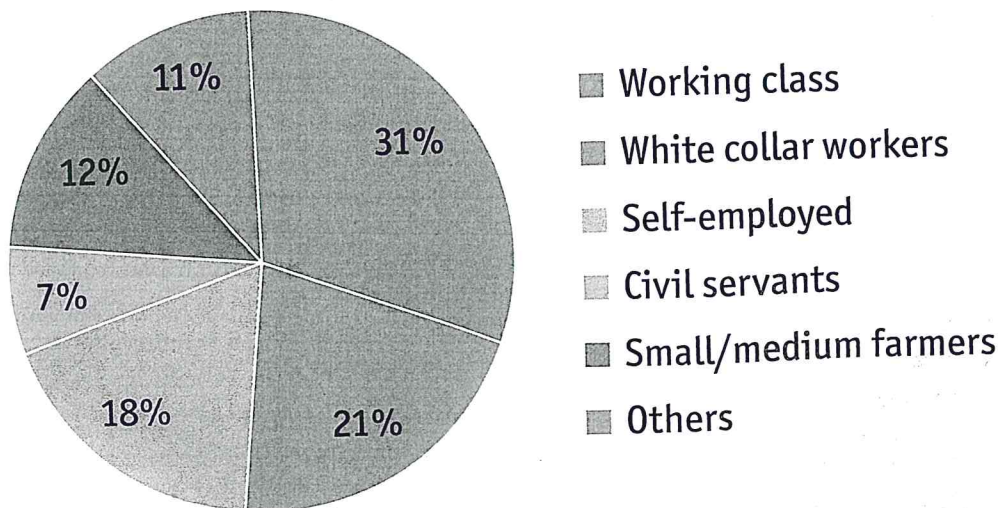


Figure 3.9 Support for National Socialism as a reflection of voting patterns

Another way of identifying support for National Socialism is to look at party membership, and this produces a similar picture.

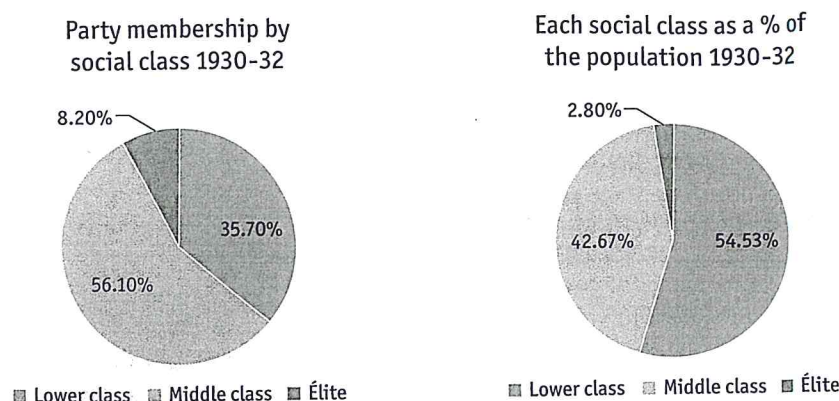


Figure 3.10 Support for National Socialism as a reflection of party membership

Whilst National Socialism failed to win over the mass of the working class – with its trade-unionist/socialist allegiances, whose support helped to increase the communist vote substantially in the same period as the Nazis' rise – it nevertheless attracted a substantial lower-class following. Working people were attracted by promises of work through interventionist economic policies and some saw the promise of a 'third way' between the state-controlled economy of the communists and rampant capitalism, as promising them a better life in the future.

Among the lower middle classes, self-employed shopkeepers, craftsmen and small traders saw National Socialism as protecting their traditional place within the economic structure, while the small/medium farmers welcomed the promise of controls on prices, the reduction of imports in the interests of self-sufficiency and financial controls to protect those in debt. The Nazis made much of their ideological commitment to the 'blood and soil' of the small farmer, promising 'any German who works and creates will be guaranteed not just a slave's ration of bread but an honourable life, decent earnings and the sanctity of his hard-earned property' in their Nazi Party election leaflets. (From a Nazi election leaflet in 1929 – given in Hite and Hinton, page 125.)

Historical debate:

The historians A. J. P. Taylor and William Shirer linked the rise of Nazism to the aggressive nature of the 'new' German state forged by war in 1871. Karl Bracher emphasised the circumstances of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Marxist historians associate the rise of Nazism with capitalists' attempts to resist communism. More recently, Alan Bullock and Ian Kershaw have emphasised the personality of Hitler.

Higher up the social hierarchy, the white collar office workers and professionals sought the protection from Marxism, big capitalists and the Jews of the banking world, which National Socialism promised. Similarly, civil servants, while supposedly 'neutral' and above party politics, tended to be right-wing in their attitude. They were fearful of communism and 'weak democracy' and anxious to return to the respectability they associated with the pre-Weimar era and which National Socialism promised to restore. It is sometimes said that it was the 'politics of anxiety' that attracted these middle ranks, in disproportionate numbers, to support National Socialism.

However, National Socialism also managed to appeal to the élites – to big businessmen and wealthier agrarian interests – who were deliberately targeted by the Nazis in the 1930–32 period in particular, in order to boost party funds. Some (although certainly not all) were attracted by the aggressive Nationalism of the party, its hostility to Marxism and commitment to self-sufficiency, whilst also being disillusioned by Germany's succession of unstable governments in the Depression. However, big

business was divided in its attitude, and such financial support as they offered may have been more of an 'insurance premium' against a possible future Nazi government, rather than a true sign of support. Large landowners and the army also ranked among those élites that supported National Socialism and, in the political intrigue surrounding Hitler's final rise to power, these interests certainly played a role.

As well as looking at class and profession, it is also possible to identify other influences that affected support for National Socialism. Voting statistics have shown that, geographically, support was at its strongest in the north and east of the country, in the more rural and protestant areas. So, for example, the Nazis had a very high level of support in Schleswig-Holstein and Pomerania, but in the Catholic cities of the west, such as Cologne (Köln), they recorded their lowest levels of support. Rather interestingly, Nazism's birthplace, Catholic Bavaria, also had a fairly low Nazi vote. Quite apart from the ideological and economic appeal to the farming community, some of this may relate to the power of the Catholic Church, with its own ideology, strong organisational structure and powerful community influence – features that were much less in evidence in protestant areas.

Indeed, the voting patterns also reflect the influence of region on the electorate. There was, for example, a high Nazi vote in Silesia, even though it was a Catholic, urbanised and industrial area, but here a strong sense of nationalism and injured pride at the post-war loss of territory to Poland ensured that National Socialism had an overwhelming appeal.

Yet one further influence was age. Whilst National Socialism won support from the pre-war generation whose conservatism had been assaulted by Weimar experimentation, it also gained a strong following from those who were just coming of age when the Depression hit and jobs declined. Some 41–43 per cent of those who became party members before 1933 were aged 20–29, even though this group represented only 25.3 per cent of the national population.

QUESTION

Analyse the factors that led to Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933.

Theory of knowledge

Historical determinism: Taylor has suggested that Hitler was a product of Germany's militaristic history and that the Germans never developed a democratic tradition because they preferred strong, authoritarian government – which Hitler continued. Is it possible to talk of 'national characteristics'? Can these account for, and perhaps excuse, a nation's actions?

End of unit activities

- 1 Make a diagram to illustrate why Germany became a single-party authoritarian state in 1933, using the following layout.

Long-term	Short-term	Catalyst	Specific event(s)
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- 2 Marxist theory suggests that Hitler was the 'pawn' of self-interested capitalists – both businessmen and leading agrarian élites who 'used' him as a way of controlling the masses. Undertake some further research into the relationship between Nazism and big business, and in particular find out more about the significance of leading industrialists, Thyssen, Krupp, Siemens and Bosch.
- 3 Make a PowerPoint presentation for your class displaying a variety of election posters used by the Nazis to win support before 1933.
- 4 Make a spider diagram to illustrate why parliamentary government collapsed in Germany in the years 1930–33.