

Overview

- Without removing the old structures entirely, Hitler nevertheless ensured that the Nazi Party gained control over government at both central and local level.
- Hitler made sure that no sectional interests that might conflict with Nazism would be able to exist, by banning trade unions and other political parties, concluding a Concordat with the Catholic Church, purging the SA and, by 1938, bringing the army under control.
- Hitler's personality and the extensive use of propaganda helped to promote the dictatorship, although Hitler's fundamental laziness weakened the regime.
- National Socialist government combined state and party institutions and relied on the mighty SS to ensure the repression of dissident voices. However, the style of rule suggests that Hitler's position at the top of the party and state hierarchy was not as authoritarian as it might have appeared in theory. Some historians have described him as a 'weak' rather than a 'strong' dictator.
- Before 1939, there appeared to be little opposition to Nazi rule but, beneath the surface, political, ideological and religious hostility remained and an element of dissension continued in some groups of young people. Opposition grew appreciably in wartime.
- Foreign policy successes to 1940 added to Hitler's popularity and power, but failure thereafter weakened the regime and by 1945 few mourned Hitler's suicide.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did Hitler consolidate his power to create an authoritarian regime?
- What part did personality and propaganda play in the consolidation of power?
- What were the main characteristics of National Socialist government?
- What was the nature and extent of opposition to Nazi rule and how was it dealt with?
- What was the impact of foreign policy on Hitler's consolidation and maintenance of power?

TIMELINE

- 1933 Mar:** Enabling Act is passed; first concentration camp established
May: all trade unions are dissolved
Jul: Concordat is concluded with the Pope; Germany becomes a one-party state
Oct: Germany leaves League of Nations; rearmament begins
- 1934 Jun:** Night of the Long Knives
Aug: Hindenburg dies; Hitler becomes Führer
- 1936** Himmler becomes Chief of German Police
Mar: remilitarisation of the Rhineland
Oct: makes Axis Alliance with Italy
Nov: Hitler makes anti-Comintern Pact with Japan
- 1938 Feb:** army is reorganised; the Beck plot to overthrow Hitler
Mar: Anschluss with Austria
Sep: Munich Agreement
- 1939 Mar:** invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia
Aug: Nazi-Soviet Pact
Sep: invasion of Poland; Britain and France declare war
- 1940 Apr:** invasion of Denmark and Norway
May: invasion of the Low Countries and France
- 1941** formation of the White Rose Group at Munich University
Apr: Nazi Germany occupies Yugoslavia and Greece
Jun: operation Barbarossa – invasion of USSR
Dec: Germany declares war on USA
- 1942 Nov:** defeat at El Alamein
- 1943 Feb:** defeat at Stalingrad
Mar: first allied bombing raid of German cities
- 1944 Jun:** D-Day
July: failed bomb plot
- 1945 Apr:** Hitler commits suicide
May: Germany surrenders

Länder: This is the name for the separate states within Germany. These had power over local domestic policy at the time of the Weimar Republic, which had a federal structure.



Figure 3.12 Heinrich Himmler (1900–45)

Himmler became the head of the *Schützstaffel* (SS) in 1929 and head of all German political police outside Prussia in 1933. He helped to organise the Night of the Long Knives and in 1936 took over the Gestapo (the secret police). In December 1940, he established the Waffen SS. During the war, the SS Death's Head Units were put in charge of the concentration camps. In June 1944, Himmler took over the *Abwehr* (the military intelligence organisation) but his attempts to seek peace with the Allies led to his arrest. Himmler committed suicide at the end of the war.



Figure 3.11 Hitler is welcomed by supporters at Nuremberg, 1933

3.6 How did Hitler consolidate his power to create an authoritarian regime?

Between March and July 1933, all other political parties were forced to disband. The KPD (German Communist Party) had been banned under the presidential decree of February, after the Reichstag Fire, shortly after Hitler became chancellor. Many less extreme socialists had also been imprisoned, although the SPD was not officially banned until 22 June. Similarly, the DNVP (the right-wing nationalist party) lost its role once it became part of the Nazi coalition, and disbanded itself. On 5 July the Catholic Centre Party followed as part of the Concordat with the Pope, which was signed later that month (see section 3.13, The Catholic Church). The culmination of this activity was the Law Against the Establishment of Parties of 14 July 1933. This made it a criminal offence to organise any party outside the NSDAP. Consequently, although there was an election in November 1933, only the Nazis were able to stand and so took all of the Reichstag seats.

The Nazi one-party authoritarian state was a centralised state. In the localities, the Nazis had begun to infiltrate state (*Länder*) governments from early in 1933, seizing public buildings and newspaper offices, and from March many state governments had been forced to resign since they had proved unable to control SA violence.

The Nazi government had already appointed many loyal commissioners to the states before a law passed in January 1934 formalised the situation. The old provincial assemblies of the *Länder* of Germany were abolished and all areas were placed under the

control of Nazi governors (*Reichstatthalter*) and subordinated to the Reich government in Berlin. These Nazi governors often also had positions as local Nazi *Gauleiters* (the party representatives in the area).

By the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service of April 1933, non-Aryans were forced to retire and Jews and other opponents described as 'alien elements' were purged from positions in the administration, courts, schools and universities. However, it was not until 1939 that membership of the Nazi Party became compulsory, and in the interests of efficient government there was a remarkable continuity of personnel.

The left-wing socialist trade unions were dissolved in May 1933 and the German Labour Front (DAF) under Robert Ley was set up to replace them. Membership was compulsory and employees could no longer negotiate over wages and conditions with employers. New academies (or 'fronts') also controlled the professions, and teachers were, for example, required to join the National Socialist Teachers' League (NSLB), while in November 1933 university lecturers were required to sign a declaration in support of Hitler and join the Nazi Lecturers' Association.

Hitler's authoritarian state was legally established by the 'Law to Ensure the Unity of Party and State' (December 1933). However, the situation was not as simple as it sounds. Hitler allowed parallel institutions to develop rather than creating undiluted party rule, so there was competition within the state between different agencies, and sometimes between different branches of the Nazi Party itself. For example, in local government the minister-presidents of each *Land* were retained alongside the new Reich governors. Some intentionalist historians, such as Karl Bracher and Klaus Hildebrand, believe Hitler did this on purpose so that he could retain ultimate control. Structuralists such as Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen believe that this situation was unintentional and resulted from Hitler's disinterest and neglect. Furthermore, although by the end of July 1933 most major interest groups had been brought under Nazi control and a one-party, authoritarian state had been created, Hitler was not secure until he had dealt with the radical wing of the SA, while the army had also largely survived Hitler's early measures unscathed.

Night of the Long Knives

Hitler had been content to use the paramilitary SA to destroy the communist movement when seeking power. However, he was concerned about the SA's violent and sometimes uncontrollable behaviour and about the demands of its leader, Ernst Röhm, who had ambitions to place himself at the head of a merged SA and army. Röhm openly condemned Hitler's compliance with the élite in 1933 and called for a second revolution to complete the 'Nazi uprising'.

Hitler could not afford to upset the army, whose loyalty he needed. Since the army was hostile to the SA, he increasingly took the view that the SA had served its purpose and was expendable. When **Heinrich Himmler** (head of the elitist and disciplined **SS (*Schützstaffel*)**) and **Hermann Goering** spread rumours of a planned coup by the SA, Hitler decided that it was time to take action.

According to official pronouncement, Röhm and eighty-five others were killed by SS men in the Night of the Long Knives on 30 June 1934 in order to forestall a revolt. In reality, the figure may have been nearer 200 and the reasons were far more complex.

SS (*Schützstaffel*): The SS – and its subsection the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*), the security service – was a highly trained and élitist Aryan organisation with extensive powers as a military force and as political police.

Hermann Goering (1893–1946)

Goering joined the Nazi Party in 1923 and after 1933 became minister of the interior and prime minister of Prussia, taking control of the Gestapo. He helped to establish the concentration camps, arranged (with Himmler) the Night of the Long Knives and ran the 1936 Four-Year Plan. He was also behind the purge of Werner von Blomberg and Werner von Fritsch in 1938. In February 1938 he became head of Germany's armed forces and in 1939 Hitler's deputy and heir. He was in charge of the *Luftwaffe* (air force) during the war and was found guilty at the Nuremberg Trials of German war criminals in 1945–46. He committed suicide before he could be hanged.

Fact: Some members of the SA favoured a 'second revolution' that would bring more socialist change to Germany. They wanted to implement the 25-point programme, but Hitler could not afford to alienate big business and the élite on whom he depended.

Hitler and Nazi Germany



Figure 3.13 Paul Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945)

Goebbels joined the Nazi movement in 1924 and became director of Nazi propaganda in 1929. In 1933, he became minister for enlightenment and propaganda. He committed suicide shortly before Hitler, in Hitler's bunker in Berlin in 1945.



Figure 3.14 Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934)

Paul von Hindenburg was commander-in-chief of Germany's forces on the Eastern Front from 1914. He retired from public life in 1918, but returned in 1925 to stand as president. He held this post until his death but grew increasingly senile and may not have appreciated the consequences of his decisions in 1930–33 to allow the use of article 48, which undermined parliamentary democracy and allowed Hitler to come to power.

Not all of the murders were of SA men. The Nazi Gregor Strasser (who had attempted to split the party in 1932) was shot, as was Kurt von Schleicher, the former chancellor. Von Papen was put under house arrest and was lucky to escape with his life.

The Night of the Long Knives helped to confirm Hitler's authority. He justified his actions to the Reichstag, two weeks after the event, by saying that he alone had acted on behalf of the German people at a time of emergency and he thus gained credit for a 'heroic' action. The Reichstag confirmed that Hitler's powers had no constitutional bounds and that his authority was derived from the will of the people and could not be challenged. In condoning his action, the Reichstag effectively made murder acceptable.

The purge also had other important consequences. **Goebbels** was able to portray Hitler as a man who had personally saved the country, and this helped in the growing cult of the Führer. The purge also left the way open for Himmler's SS to assume dominance in Germany, while Hitler gained the support of the army commanders. When **Hindenburg** died in August, all members of the armed forces swore a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler. Henceforward, Hitler combined the chancellorship and presidency.

Control over the army

Even after the Night of the Long Knives and the army's oath of loyalty in August 1934, Hitler knew that the army was the one institution that still retained the power to prevent his ambitions from being realised. Hitler was therefore careful not to cause trouble, and left the army structurally unchanged until 1938. However, every attempt was made to Nazify the institution through the adoption of the swastika insignia, Nazi training schemes and indoctrination. Hitler referred to the army as the 'second pillar

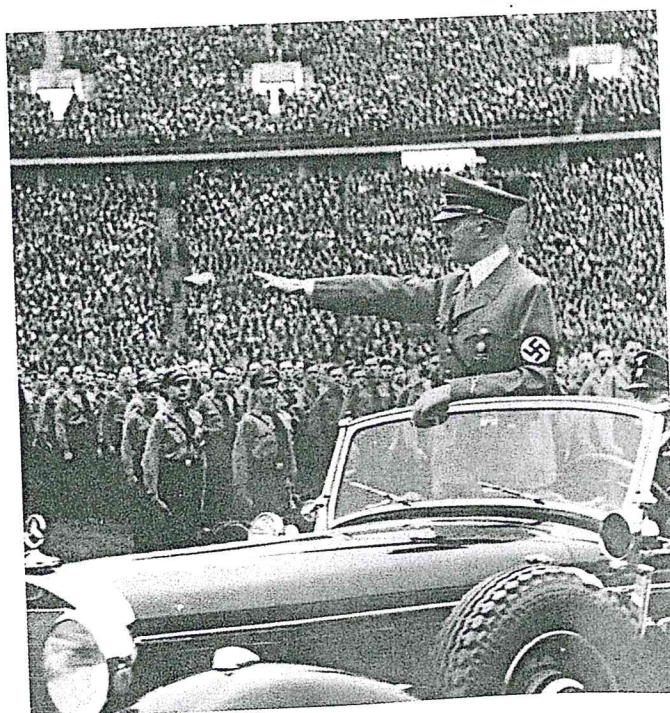


Figure 3.15 Adolf Hitler giving a Nazi salute to a crowd of soldiers at a Nazi rally, 1 May 1938

of the state', working alongside the Nazi Party and, since most officers shared Hitler's nationalist aspirations, the relationship was reasonably successful. The army favoured the Nazis' enforcement of law and order, and Hitler's repudiation of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles in March 1935, restoration of conscription and promise to expand the peacetime army to more than 500,000 men also met with favour.

However, there was some friction, which grew in proportion to Hitler's military ambitions. Some generals condemned the pace of rearmament, and the commander-in-chief, Werner von Fritsch, complained that Hitler was 'rushing everything far too much and destroying every healthy development'. There was also concern about the role of the SS, which Hitler had always claimed to be a domestic police force, but which expanded markedly after the destruction of the SA. The *SS-Verfügungstruppe* (eventually known as the *Waffen SS*) was established to be 'part of the wartime army' in August 1938. This caused considerable unease among the professional army leadership. The *SS-Totenkopf* (Death's Head) units were also expanded as a reserve military force and, according to the historian Bernd Wegner, 'It was no longer a question of whether the SS units would be allowed to share in military conquests in the years to come; the disputes now concerned only their assignment, size and organisation.'

Another argument concerned Hitler's expansionist policies themselves. The army favoured the reversal of the Treaty of Versailles and limited conquest to restore the old empire. However, it was strongly against the idea of war with Russia, the traditional ally of the Prussian Junkers (the landed nobility of Prussia, who dominated the officer class of the German army), and did not support Hitler's policies of *Lebensraum*. Top army generals were critical when, at the Hossbach Conference of 5 November 1937, Hitler laid down aggressive plans for rapid expansion in the east. The plans were summarised in the 'Hossbach memorandum'. Only Goering spoke in Hitler's favour; von Fritsch and Hitler's war minister, General Werner von Blomberg, opposed the plans.

Consequently, in 1938 Hitler contrived to dismiss the war minister General von Blomberg, alleging that the woman he had just married in January had been a prostitute. Commander-in-Chief von Fritsch was also dismissed, on the grounds of allegedly being gay (which was later disproved, although he was never reinstated).

With the departure of von Blomberg and von Fritsch, Hitler became his own war minister, so combining his position as supreme commander (the president's role) with an additional political role. To reinforce his intentions, he changed the name of the War Ministry into the 'High Command of the Armed Forces' (the OKW) and Wilhelm Keitel was appointed as its chief. In practice, Keitel was little more than an office manager and worked under Hitler's direct control.

These changes were accompanied by a drastic reshuffle of those who had failed to support Hitler's ideas. Sixteen generals left the army and forty-four were transferred. Although many aristocratic officers still remained suspicious of Hitler, this effectively brought Hitler's consolidation of power to a close.

Hitler's popular triumphs, beginning with the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936 and embracing Anschluss with Austria and entry into Czechoslovakia in 1938, made him virtually unassailable and the new generation of commanders such as Heinz Guderian and Erwin Rommel became his faithful followers.

3.7 What part did personality and propaganda play in the consolidation of power?

Personality

Hitler's own personality certainly helped in the creation of the National Socialist state. Quite apart from his own skills as an orator, his supreme confidence and faith in himself and the destiny of the German nation imparted a new optimism, which transformed a depressed and broken nation into what, at least to outside observers in the 1930s, appeared to be a happy and thriving state. Hitler's passionate commitment to the German nation and its people seemed to fulfil an emotional need for a strong figurehead to take the country forward. Policy success and propaganda combined to produce a carefully cultivated image of a man who had a unique mission. The 'will of the Führer' represented all that was best for the German nation. He, himself, was beyond petty and selfish interests and above criticism; this was reserved for lesser officials. This 'Führer Myth', as Ian Kershaw has called it in a book of the same name, contributed to Hitler's amazing popularity and brought Germans together in its emotional appeal.

QUESTION

By what means did Hitler consolidate his power in Germany?

This 'cult of Hitler' was almost like an alternative religious cult. Nazi propaganda portrayed Hitler as all-powerful and all-knowing. The media carried details of what he wore, said and did, and posters and books of photographs were sold. He was depicted as a father figure, a friend of children and a leader who really cared about his people. He was also portrayed as a strong man and a powerful statesman. Anything that showed a human 'failing', such as wearing glasses, was carefully erased.

However, although Hitler had plenty of fanaticism and charisma, routine governmental business failed to interest him. He was not an early riser and preferred to spend his days reading the newspaper, going for walks, watching feature films and talking with his cronies. It was well known that Hitler preferred to talk rather than to listen and that, when he did listen, he only heard what he wanted to hear – so much so that subordinates often withheld information they feared might displease him. From 1934, Hitler actually played very little part in the meetings of the Reich cabinet. From 1937, it ceased to meet altogether.

Hitler spent a considerable amount of time at his mountain retreat, the Berghof in the Bavarian Alps. Although government papers were conveyed to him for his signature, wherever he might be, there was no guarantee he would read them. Very often it was the case that individuals had to fight for access to the Führer to get approval for actions.

Hitler avoided making decisions as far as possible and, when he did so, often made them on the spur of the moment, perhaps over lunch or tea without full reference to all of the facts. He had to be caught at the right time and patient Nazi officials had to be prepared to wait for a chance or casual remark which they could then claim to be the 'authority' of the Führer (see section 3.18, Was Nazi Germany a totalitarian state and was Hitler 'Master of the Third Reich'?).

The use of propaganda

One of Hitler's first tasks as chancellor, in March 1933, was to set up a new Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda under the control of Goebbels. Hitler believed that the masses, for whom he had little respect, could easily be won over through regular exposure to propaganda in schools, towns and the workplace, and in their leisure pursuits. Consequently, the ministry established separate chambers to oversee the work of the press, radio, theatre, music, the creative arts and film.

The ministry controlled the press through censorship and by allowing the Nazi publishing house, Eher Verlag, to buy up private newspapers until by 1939 it controlled two-thirds of the press. A German news agency regulated the supply of news and Goebbels held a daily press conference with editors to ensure the right messages arrived in print. Editors were held responsible for their papers and were liable for prosecution if they published unapproved material.

The Nazis made extensive use of the radio as a medium for reinforcing Nazi rule, with the Reich Broadcasting Corporation, set up in 1933, controlling all that was broadcast. Workplaces, shops, cafés and blocks of flats were expected to relay important speeches through loudspeakers for all to hear, while in the home, the *Volksempfänger* (people's receiver) became a standard item. These radio sets had a limited range, preventing individuals from listening to foreign broadcasts, and they were deliberately sold cheaply. Consequently, ownership of sets increased from under 25 per cent of households in 1932 to over 70 per cent by 1939 and the population could be subject to daily exposure to Nazi views.

Stamps carried Nazi slogans, and posters bearing Nazi quotations were put up in offices and public buildings. Furthermore, the 'Heil Hitler' salute became the official form of greeting and helped to reinforce enthusiasm for the leader.

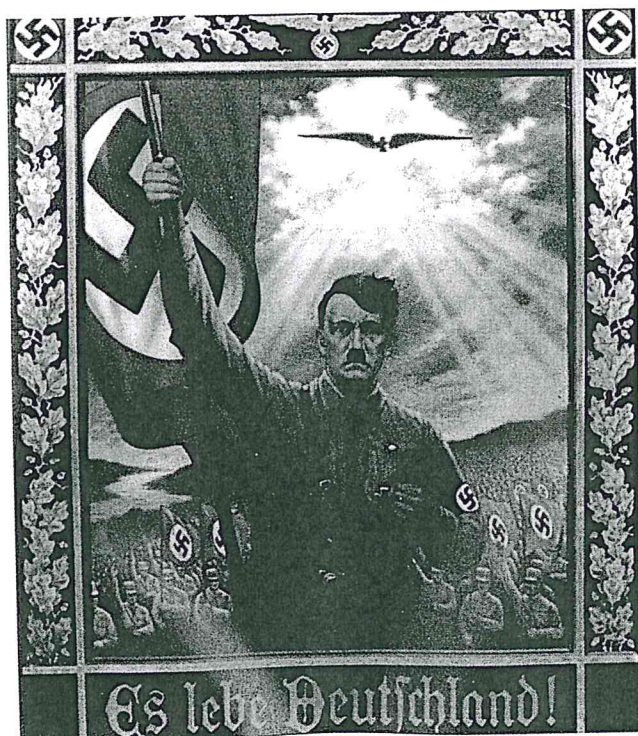


Figure 3.16 A Nazi poster from c. 1935 depicting Adolf Hitler bearing the German flag at the head of a vast army, with the caption 'Es Lebe Deutschland!' ('Long Live Germany!')

ACTIVITY

Find out about some Nazi films and the messages they tried to convey. You could start with films such as *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) about the Hitler Youth, *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of Will*) (1934) about the Nuremberg Rally, *Der Ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*) (1940), *Jud Süß* (1940) reinforcing anti-Semitism, and *Ich Klage An* (1941) (*I Accuse*) about euthanasia.

The cinema was another propaganda tool, although the Nazis used film less effectively than the radio. Nevertheless, all films were censored and 'degenerate' artists were forbidden. Light-hearted entertainment – even romances, thrillers and musicals – had to conform to Nazi ideological principles.

It was hard to avoid the propagandist messages in Nazi Germany. Even culture became a form of propaganda, with concert halls bedecked in swastikas. There were constant meetings, rallies, festivals, such as that established to celebrate Hitler's birthday and the anniversary of his appointment as chancellor, and sporting events that provided opportunities to extol Nazism.

Of course, it is not easy to evaluate the success of propaganda since the German people were also subject to a number of other influences, most notably repression. However, the very ubiquity of propaganda must have played some role in strengthening the regime. According to the historian David Welch, propaganda was more successful at reinforcing than at countering existing attitudes. Insofar as it was able to do that, however, it must take some credit for the ease with which Hitler was able to consolidate his rule.

3.8 What were the main characteristics of National Socialist government?

From the establishment of the one-party state in July 1933, the Nazi Party exercised political authority over every aspect of German life. The 'Law to ensure the Unity of Party and State' of December 1933, decreed that the party was 'inseparably linked with the state' and party membership became essential for those wishing to advance themselves. For example, by 1939 all civil servants had to be party members.

However, the party-state cooperation was not as clear-cut in practice as it might have seemed in theory and Hitler's dislike of formal committees and paperwork meant that the governmental structure could be quite chaotic, with competing agencies and individuals. However, amidst this confusion, the SS maintained a constant vigilance and control that ensured there was an appearance, at least, of strong government.

During the consolidation of power in 1933–34, Himmler, who had been the leader of the SS since 1929 and had also set up the special Sicherheitsdienst (SD) security service in 1931, assumed control of all political police, including the Prussian gestapo. It was the SS that purged the SA in the Night of the Long Knives, and in 1936 all police powers were unified under Himmler as chief of police. As *Reichsführer* SS, Himmler commanded a huge SS-police-SD power block – sometimes described as a 'state within a state' – which controlled security, ran the concentration camps and eventually extended its influence into military and economic affairs.

Historical debate:

Tim Mason, a Marxist historian, has suggested that absenteeism, strikes and sabotage amongst workers were common, and Richard Overy has indicated that certain working-class areas were 'no-go' zones for Nazi officials. Kershaw has produced evidence of public grumbling, while Detler Peukert has identified extensive resistance among the young people of Cologne and Hamburg. Gellately, however, has produced evidence to reinforce the traditional picture that most ordinary Germans were ready to accept or support the Nazi regime.

In 1939, the Reich Main Security Department was set up to oversee all of this security apparatus. The individual was made well aware of the consequences of non-conformity, be it political, racial or moral. The state employed a stream of informants, including the dreaded 'block wardens', who paid regular visits to individuals' homes, creating an image of power that must have helped to reinforce obedience.

When those arrested were given a trial, the law courts were no longer impartial. Under the 1933 Civil Service Law, judges whose political beliefs conflicted with Nazism lost their positions. Lawyers had to be members of the Nazi Lawyers Association and were required to study Nazi ideology, so although the law itself did not always change, it was interpreted differently by Nazi lawyers. This was summed up by Ernst Hüber, who was at the time a prominent constitutional law professor at the University of Kiel. He defined the Nazi concept of law, stating that the individual can be judged by the law only from the point of view of the individual's value for the *völkisch* (people's) community. The law was reinterpreted according to the will of the Führer and the 'best interests' of the German community.

Theory of knowledge

History and emotion:
If you had lived in Nazi Germany, would you have become involved in opposition?

3.9 What was the nature and extent of opposition to Nazi rule and how was it dealt with?

There would seem to have been very little opposition to Nazi rule in Germany after 1933–34. This has been explained by the propaganda, repression and general success of Hitler's policies both at home and, until 1943, abroad. However, there were acts of defiance, of both a private and public nature.

In private, individuals might read banned literature, listen to foreign news broadcasts, protect Jews and other Nazi victims or even refuse to join Nazi organisations or contribute to campaigns. Some, particularly among the young, listened to American jazz music or joined the Swing Movement or Edelweiss Pirates (see section 3.14), while others simply grumbled or told anti-Nazi jokes. Such 'opposition' is difficult to measure and, of course, not all such behaviour was politically inspired.

There was also more overt public opposition. Some brave socialists, for example, continued to distribute anti-Nazi leaflets or write slogans in public places. Others protested by emigrating and joining the SPD in exile, which operated from Prague and organised underground groups such as the Berlin Red Patrol and the Hanover Socialist Front. In November 1939, a socialist cabinet-maker, Georg Elser, planted a bomb in a beer hall where Hitler was speaking, although it failed to kill him as the Führer left the hall early. The KPD also formed underground cells, particularly in Berlin, Mannheim, Hamburg and central Germany, from where they issued leaflets attacking the regime. The *Rote Kapelle* (Red Orchestra) was a



Figure 3.17 Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45)

Bonhoeffer was an academic theologian who strongly opposed Nazism. In 1940, he was banned from preaching and publishing. He joined the underground resistance, working with other opponents such as Ludwig Beck. He was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in 1943 and was executed in 1945.

QUESTION

How might a historian measure the extent of opposition to Nazism?

ACTIVITY

Find out more about the resistance activities of Ludwig Beck, the Kreisau Circle and the July Bomb plotters. What impelled the participants to resist Hitler?

resistance network that gathered information to send to the Russians, but it was broken up in 1942.

Opposition to Hitler might also be seen in the action of judges who refused to administer 'Nazi' justice, and of churchmen, such as Bishop Galen (see section 3.13, The Catholic Church) and Pastor **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, who spoke out against Nazi policies. One centre of opposition was the Kreisau Circle, which met at the home of Helmut von Moltke. Here, aristocrats, lawyers, SPD politicians such as Julius Leber, and churchmen such as Bonhoeffer engaged in discussion as to how to remove Hitler. The group held three meetings in 1942–43 before being broken up by the **Gestapo**.

Opposition also festered within the army. Between June 1940 and July 1944 there were six attempts on Hitler's life, all led by army officers. Following the last of these, the July Bomb plot of 1944, over 5,000 army officers were executed, including Ludwig Beck, Hans Oster and Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg. Even the Nazi's own intelligence agency, the *Abwehr*, was rife with resistance workers. The head of the agency, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, supported resistance activities and did what he could to protect Jews.

The universities, most notably Munich University, were another centre of organised resistance in wartime. At Munich University, Hans Scholl formed the White Rose group in 1941. Members distributed pamphlets and revealed the truth about the Nazi treatment of Jews and Slavs. In 1943, they became even more daring and painted anti-Nazi slogans on public buildings. However, the members were caught, and Hans Scholl, his sister Sophie and other members of the movement were executed. Such activities and the alternative youth culture that flourished in a number of parts of Germany showed that not all young people were readily indoctrinated by the regime.

It is difficult to give any reliable estimate of the extent of opposition, but it certainly increased in wartime. Throughout the Nazi period, all opposition was firmly dealt with by the security police. From the earliest years, concentration camps were used as places for the 're-education' of dissidents, and although not extermination camps, they could be brutal places in which prisoners were forced to work for long hours on meagre rations. Between 1933 and 1939, around 225,000 Germans were convicted of political crimes and a further 162,000 were placed in 'protective custody' in prison without trial. Whether these were true opponents or merely victims of SS zeal it is difficult to say, but as a percentage of the population the figures are quite low.

In wartime, opposition was seen as treachery and usually involved execution or prolonged incarceration in camps that became increasingly inhuman. During these years, the army and the Churches provided the best opportunities for opposition, and Beck's plans of 1938 and the 1944 July Bomb plot were probably the most serious moments for the regime. For suspected involvement in the July bomb plot, for example, there were c. 5,000 executions, including nineteen generals and twenty-six colonels. However, apart from the assassination attempts, the Nazi regime remained secure to the end and was only ultimately toppled by the coalition of enemy powers.

3.10 What was the impact of foreign policy on Hitler's consolidation and maintenance of power?

SOURCE A

'If Germany is to become a world power, and not merely a continental state (and it must become a world power if it is to survive), then it must achieve complete sovereignty and independence. Do you understand what that means? Is it not clear to you how tragically mutilated we are by the restriction and hemming-in of our vital space, a restriction which condemns us to the status of a second-rate power in Europe? Only nations living independently in their own space and capable of military defence can be world powers. Only such nations are sovereign in the true sense of the word.'

Hitler's response to a question, in 1934 from Dr Hermann Rauschning, a member of Hitler's inner circle. From Rauschning, H. 1940. *The Voice of Destruction*. New York, USA. Putnam's Sons. pp. 121–22.

Gestapo (Geheime

Staatspolizei): The Gestapo was the state secret police force, established by Goering in April 1933. It served to root out and intimidate potential opposition. However, the number of Gestapo officers was limited and many were engaged in routine bureaucratic work, so the regime had to rely on spies and informers. This has led to the conclusion that the survival of the Nazi regime rested on the compliance of the public, who were prepared to betray their colleagues and neighbours, rather than on an atmosphere of terror. For example, Robert Gellately put forward the theory that surveillance was dependent on the reports provided by ordinary German people rather than a ubiquitous force of the Gestapo.

Foreign policy success 1933–39

Hitler made no secret of his desire to 'right the wrongs' of the Versailles Treaty and achieve '*lebensraum*' (living space) for the German people. Indeed, this had been one of the platforms on which he had achieved electoral success in 1930–32. His own personal interest lay in foreign affairs, so it is hardly surprising that one of his first actions, in October 1933, was to take Germany out of the League of Nations and begin rearmament. He even attempted a takeover of Austria in 1934, although he was hastily forced to withdraw when the Italians intervened against him, but he was able to take advantage of the Saarlanders' decision to vote in a plebiscite (as prearranged at the Treaty of Versailles) to join Germany, rather than France, to whom the region had been assigned for fifteen years from 1919 to allow the French to take its coal as reparations. The formal announcement of conscription at a huge public rally in March 1935 and a naval treaty with Britain in June won Hitler great acclaim at home. He was seen as a leader who was not scared to defy the 'unjust' peace treaty of 1919 and who could negotiate with Germany's erstwhile enemy, Britain, on an equal footing.

Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 provided the opportunity for Hitler to go further whilst the powers of Europe were distracted elsewhere. In March 1936, he defiantly marched his troops into the officially demilitarised Rhineland and scenes of joyous Rhinelanders – no doubt staged for domestic and international consumption – increased the belief that here was a man who was prepared to take on the world and win. The French, too timid to act without Britain's backing, and a Britain that was combating the effects of the Depression and dubious about the morality of the Versailles Treaty anyway, allowed Hitler to express his open defiance and with this confirm his authority at home.

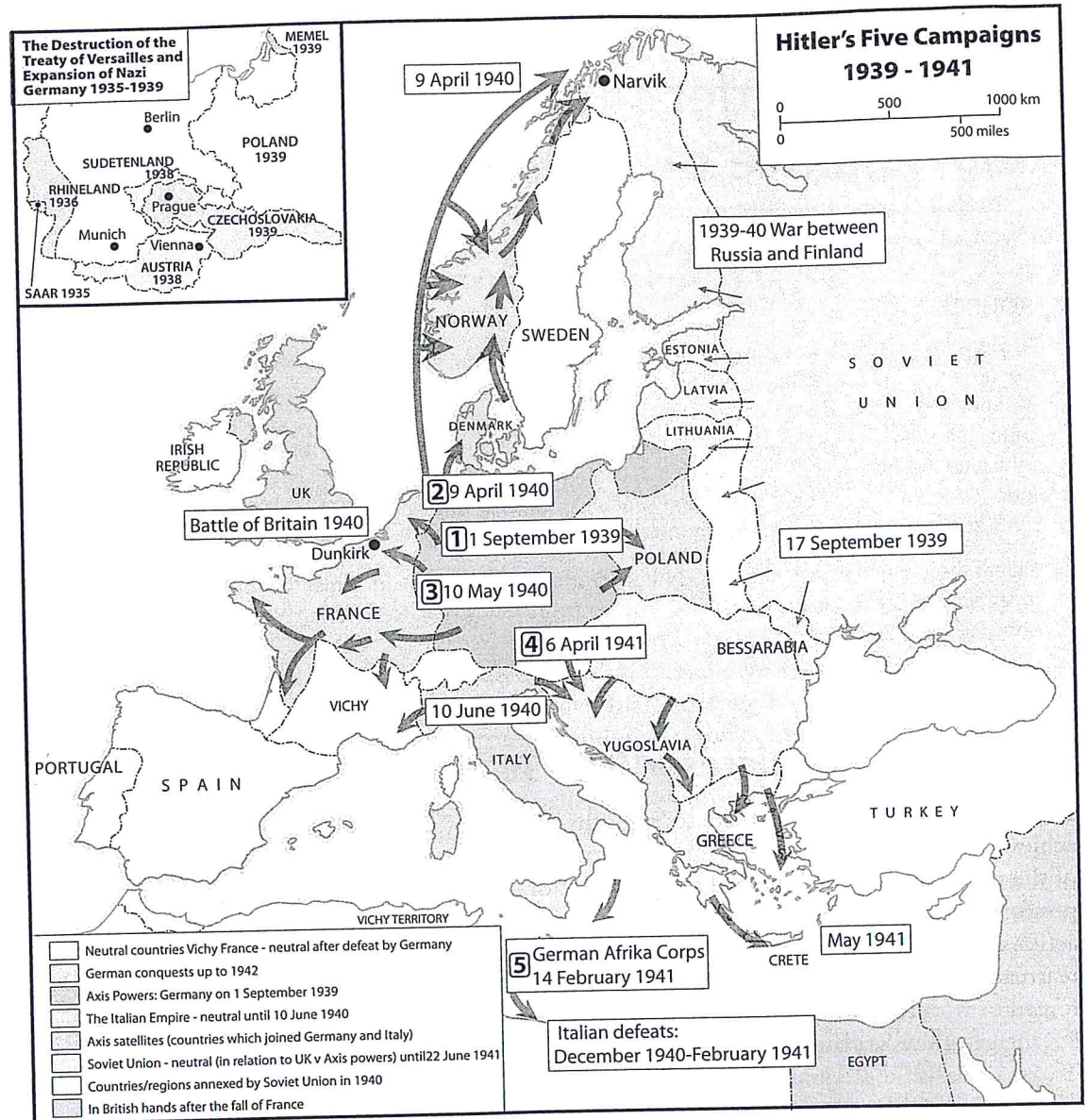


Figure 3.18 Map showing areas of Nazi expansion

Hitler's next steps followed with such rapidity that it has left historians debating how far he had always planned a war of conquest and how far he was opportunistic in his actions. With Mussolini as an ally in the Axis alliance of October 1936, a partnership confirmed by their fighting together in the Spanish Civil War, Hitler was finally able to effect his Anschluss with Austria in March 1938. There swiftly followed a series of meetings with the British leading to the Munich agreement of September 1938, which allowed Hitler to take over the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland. An invasion of the whole of Czechoslovakia followed in March 1939 and, having surprised the world by signing a Nazi-Soviet Pact in August, Hitler ordered the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. With this, the Second World War began and patriotic Germans applauded the opportunity to show their 'master race' in battle.

At each step of the way between 1933 and 1939, the press hailed Hitler's victories. He moved from being the junior to the senior partner in his relationship with Mussolini. He duped Chamberlain at Munich. He absorbed 'true Germans' in Austria, the Sudetenland and Poland back into the German Reich and showed what he thought of a peace treaty that had offered self-determination to all European peoples except Germany. There were many good reasons why appeals to national values and German pride worked. After the lacklustre years of the Weimar Republic, the people of Germany finally had something to feel good about.

Foreign Policy Failure 1939–45

Hitler's triumphs were to continue through to 1942 and, in the closely guarded and heavily censored world of wartime Germany, belief in victory and success maintained its magic for longer. There was limited opposition to Hitler before 1944 and it was not until the first allied bombs began to rain down on Germany in March 1943 that most people started to learn the truth about what their Führer had brought them to. The seizure of Denmark and Norway (April 1940), the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France (May 1940), Yugoslavia and Greece (April 1941) created a myth of invincibility that even Hitler probably came to believe in. However, by 1942, the German armies were overstretched. The decision to invade the USSR (Operation Barbarossa) in June 1941, to declare war on the USA (December 1941) – honouring the terms of the anti-Comintern Pact that had been signed with the Japanese in November 1936 – and to bail out the Italians in Northern Africa placed an intolerable strain on German resources which, despite Albert Speer's best efforts (see section 3.12, Speer's management of the wartime German economy) proved unsupportable.

The German people were largely shielded from news of defeats, as in the second battle of el Alamein in November 1942 and Stalingrad in February 1943, but they could not escape the impact of allied bombing, the food shortages and the loss of their menfolk as women and the young desperately tried to keep the German economy going. By the time of D-Day in June 1944, many illusions were already shattered. Some Germans welcomed the British/American advance (and all the more so because they feared the advance of the Soviet Red Army which swept against Nazi Germany from the east).

Nevertheless, the surprise is not that the German people finally lost faith in Hitler, but that they supported him for as long as they did. Hitler's sensational coups – initially effected without recourse to war – were fundamental to his hold on the German people. By employing the methods that had brought him success in his rise to power (high-risk gambles and unpredictable moves that caught his opponents off-guard) Hitler's foreign adventures paid off at least until the chain of success was broken. It took time before the Germans saw the truth behind Hitler's charisma, but whilst his foreign policy provided him with the highest peaks of adulation it also brought about his downfall.

Fact: General Ludwig Beck opposed Hitler's expansionist plans in 1938 and, following his dismissal, attempted to overthrow Hitler in a series of plots involving other army officers. These included two attempts to kill Hitler with a bomb in 1943. There were a number of army officers involved in other resistance activities, notably in the Kreisau Circle. Claus von Stauffenberg's bomb plot of July 1944 came very close to killing Hitler.

Theory of knowledge

History and bias:
How do historians know how the German people felt about Hitler's foreign policy? Why is it difficult for historians to write about people living in an authoritarian regime? Is it ever possible to discern the 'truth' about people's feelings?

End of unit activities

- 1 Draw a flow chart to show the stages by which Hitler consolidated his rule.
- 2 Write an obituary for Röhm (who died in the Night of the Long Knives). Comment on his significance. You could decide whether your obituary is for a pro-Nazi German newspaper or a more neutral British one.

KEY CONCEPTS QUESTION

Causation: Draw a diagram to show the reasons for opposition to Hitler's authority. Which groups in German society were most likely to oppose Hitler? Explain your answer.

Change and Continuity: Make a two-column diagram to record the ways in which Hitler's coming to power brought change in government, and the ways in which there was continuity.

- 3 Imagine you are interviewing Hitler for a TV news programme at the end of 1938. Produce ten questions and (after swapping scripts with another member of your group) fill in the replies that Hitler might have given.
- 4 Find one piece of visual propaganda and one piece of contemporary written evidence illustrating the 'cult of Hitler'. Explain your findings to your group.
- 5 Make a chart on which you can record the arguments that Hitler was a strong dictator and those that suggest he was a weak dictator. Try to add historians' names to the arguments and where possible find quotations from their books to support what you write.
- 6 Create a graph to illustrate Hitler's foreign policy successes and failures 1933–45. Identify three significant turning points and below your graph indicate how/why each turning point increased or decreased support for Hitler and the Nazi State.

Theory of knowledge

History and ethics:
What is a dictatorship? Is dictatorship always wrong?
Is it possible to create a benign dictatorship?