

Chapter

THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY

SOURCE 1

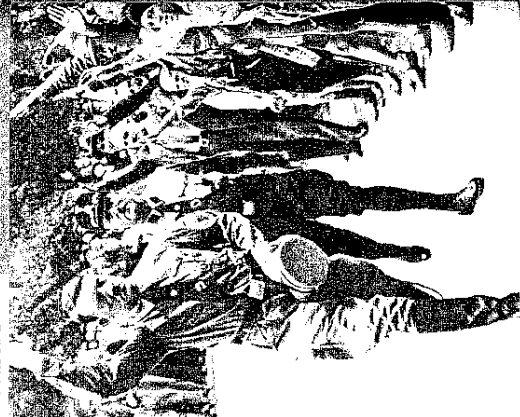
He wore an ancient black overcoat, which had been given him by an old-clothes dealer in the hostel, a Hungarian Jew named Neumann, and which reached down over his knees. From under a greasy, black derby hat, his hair hung long over his coat collar. His thin and hungry face was covered with a black beard above which his large staring eyes were the one prominent feature....He disliked regular work. If he earned a few crowns, he refused to draw for days and went off to a café to eat cream cakes and read newspapers. He had none of the common vices. He neither smoked nor drank and was too shy and awkward to have any success with women. His passions were reading newspapers and talking politics.

Hitler in his twenties as described by an acquaintance who knew him in Vienna

SOURCE 2



SOURCE 3



How did the down-and-out in the long black coat, who resisted work whenever possible and possessed so few social skills, emerge as the leader of a political party, the leader of Germany and the perpetrator of some of the worst crimes committed against mankind?

Introduction

The history of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century has in some ways been replaced by the history of the Nazi Party. It is easy, if mistaken, to regard the Weimar Republic merely as the occasion and partial cause of Hitler's rise to power. This is extraordinary given that the Nazis were in power for just 12 years, but reflects the enormous impact made within those years and the legacy that the Nazis have left, not just in Germany but in the world. Not surprisingly, then, there has been a great deal of interest in the beginnings of this party. Where did it come from? How was it able to rise from obscurity to such power in 14 years?

Key questions

- Who was Adolf Hitler?
- How did the Nazi Party begin?
- Why had the Nazi Party become so popular by 1930?
- Who joined the Nazi Party?
- Was there anything original about the Nazi Party?
- What did Hitler and the Nazis believe in?
- Was Hitler's rise to power inevitable?

Who was Adolf Hitler?

Adolf Hitler was born in an Austrian town close to the German border called Braunau am Inn. His father, Alois Hitler, was an illegitimate child whose own father is unknown to this day. Rumours that the father (and therefore Adolf Hitler's grandfather) was Jewish were circulating by the 1920s but there is little evidence to support this claim. Alois married his third wife, his niece Klara Pölzl, in 1885 and their fourth child, born in 1889, was the first to survive infancy. He was called Adolf.

Alois Hitler overcame his lowly origins to become a customs official in the Austrian civil service. His income provided for a comfortable life, although his personality did not. He was a domineering man, a distant and irritable father and a violent husband and was described by Hitler as someone he 'honoured' but did not love. By contrast, the young Hitler developed a strong attachment to his mother, leading one recent biographer to speculate that she 'may well... have been the only person he genuinely loved in his entire life.' (Kershaw, 1998).

Although Hitler enjoyed school for the first six years, his secondary education was less successful. He left at 16 in 1905 and fell into an idleness which was to characterize the next eight years. In 1907 he left for Vienna to pursue his artistic ambitions and took the entrance exam for the Academy of Fine Arts. Out of 113 candidates, only 28 succeeded and Hitler was not one of them. Later that year his beloved mother died and Hitler was left unsure what to do next. For the next five years, Hitler was in effect a drop-out, never doing a full day's work for a proper wage.

He remained in Vienna, sharing lodgings with a friend before a brief spell in a doss house when his money ran out. As Source 1 suggests, he was hardly a prepossessing figure at this point and there were few clues that he would make any sort of lasting mark during his lifetime. Throughout his time in Vienna his two passions were architecture and opera, especially Wagner. He read books and newspapers avidly and would rant endlessly about politics to his fellow lodgers in the Men's House where he spent his later Vienna years. It was, he later claimed, during this time that he developed his lasting hatred for Jews. It

The Kershaw biography mentioned in the next section is the best place to start for a detailed but very readable account of Hitler's life up to 1936. Shorter accounts are provided in *Hitler: Goebbels' Fate or Germany's Misfortune?* 1995 and *Wolff, Hitler, 1998*. Bullock's classic *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, 1952, is also well worth looking at.

Hitler's father changed his name from Schicklgruber (a peasant name) to Hitler in 1876. As Kershaw points out in his biography *Hitler: Hitler's 1889* 1996, this was fortunate for Hitler. 'Hiel Schicklgruber' would not have worked.



Hitler as a child.

Biographer Hamann has argued in her book *Hitler's Vienna* that there is no evidence to support the view that Hitler developed his anti-Semitism in Vienna. Instead, Hamann suggests, Hitler deliberately chose to spend time with Jews and did not develop his extreme views until he experienced the upheaval of post-war Bavaria.

was also the period that crystallized his fierce sense of nationalism. He was convinced that ethnic Germans in Austria should be ruled by Germans and not forced to live side by side with other, 'inferior', ethnic groups from the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Czechs and Serbs.

In 1913, Hitler fled to Munich in Germany to avoid conscription into the Austrian army. A few months later he was photographed by chance amongst an excited crowd gathered to hear the news of war against Russia. Hitler volunteered to fight in the German army and became a lance-corporal in the infantry. He was later to write in *Mein Kampf*: 'Overpowered by stormy enthusiasm, I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time... Although he received the Iron Cross for bravery, he was nevertheless turned down for promotion due to inadequate leadership qualities. Hitler was to describe his experiences in the war as the best in his life. Its end in 1918 aroused great bitterness in him and he maintained that the surrender was the work of 'criminals' rather than a genuine defeat.

After the war, Hitler became an 'instruction officer' in the army and set about instructing soldiers on the evils of socialism and democracy. His abilities as a speaker, no doubt developed during his lectures in the Men's House in Vienna, caught the attention of his superiors. In September 1919 he was ordered to investigate a newly formed nationalist-racist political group, the German Workers' Party.

How did the Nazi Party begin?

The German Workers' Party was founded in Munich in 1919 by a locksmith named Anton Drexler. It was one of over 70 right-wing political sects, and there was no reason at first to suppose that it would be any different from the rest. On the evening of 12 September 1919, Hitler attended his first meeting in a Munich beer-cellar. There could only have been around 20 people there and so it could hardly have been a very inspiring occasion. Nevertheless, Hitler joined the German Workers' Party, becoming its 55th new recruit, and the 7th member of the Party's committee. The very obscurity of the Party was in part its attraction for Hitler: here was a chance for him to make his mark. Hitler was put in charge of propaganda and he set about transforming the party into a mass movement. He was later to write in his autobiography *Mein Kampf*: 'To be a leader means to be able to move the masses' and certainly the membership of the Party did increase rapidly.

There was nothing particularly original about the Nazi Party. Both its nationalism and anti-Semitism built on trends dating from the end of the 1800s. What is more, Hitler's experiences in Vienna had provided him with three different models of political parties which were to shape the Nazi Party's image. (See margin note).

In 1920, the party changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party - NSDAP or Nazi for short - and outlined its programme in 'The Twenty-five Points' which Hitler played a key role in drawing up (Source 4). It was to remain the only official programme of the Nazi Party as Hitler subsequently resisted attempts to specify his party's policies in a way that could restrict his flexibility. The document combined extreme nationalism, racism and some socialist concepts.

In terms of nationalism, the unification of all ethnic Germans was a central aim, together with the demand for more land and territories and the abolition of the

And so it had all been in vain... Did all this happen only so that a gang of wretched criminals could lay hands on the Fatherland?... In these nights I heard grow in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

The influences of political parties in Vienna on the Nazi Party are easy to trace. Three parties had a particular impact:

- ☉ The Pan-German Nationalists combined extreme German nationalism with anti-Semitism which were to characterize Hitler's ideology.
- ☉ The Christian Socialists inspired Hitler by their political tactics. They succeeded in creating a mass following using propaganda and targeted those groups who were vulnerable and most likely to offer support.
- ☉ The Social Democrats, although detested by Hitler in terms of their ideology, again had a mass following and used propaganda effectively. They presented a very strong and uncompromising front and used intimidation.

Goebbels regarded the Twenty-five Points as an embarrassment, saying 'I had founded the Party, I wouldn't have laid down any programme at all!'

Source 4

Programme of the Twenty-five Points of the National Socialist German Workers' Party

1. We demand the union of all Germans to form a Great Germany on the basis of the right to self-determination.
2. We demand equal rights for Germans when dealing with other countries and the abolition of the Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain.
3. We demand land and territory (kolonies) to provide food and living space for our people.
4. Only those of German blood may be citizens of the state. No Jew may be a member of the nation.
5. Non-Germans live in Germany only as guests.
6. Only German citizens may vote or be given an official appointment.
7. The first duty of the state is to provide work for its citizens. Foreign nationals should be excluded from the state if it becomes impossible to feed everyone.
8. The immigration of non-Germans must be stopped.
9. Citizens of the state shall have equal rights.
10. The first duty of every citizen is to work with his mind or body. Each individual must work to the general good of the people.
11. Incomes that are not earned through work must be abolished.
12. No-one is to gain money from war; all war gains must be confiscated.
13. We demand that all businesses be nationalized.
14. We demand that the profits in major industrial enterprises are shared.
15. We demand a generous increase in old-age pensions.
16. We demand that large department stores are divided up and resold out cheaply to small trades people.

Think about it!

What does Source 4 tell us about the Nazis' policies on:

- ☉ social welfare
- ☉ Jews
- ☉ civil liberties
- ☉ economics
- ☉ foreign policy
- ☉ land
- ☉ government

Who do you think the Nazis were trying to appeal to here?

17. We demand land reform suitable for our national requirements.
18. We demand that those who work against the common interest should be punished with death, whatever their religion or race.
19. We demand that Roman law should be replaced by German common law.
20. Higher education should be available to all able and hardworking Germans. The concept of citizenship should be taught in schools from the very beginning. Gifted children of poor parents must be educated at the state's expense.
21. The nation's health will be improved by protecting mothers and infants and banning child labour. Gymnastics and sports to be made compulsory.
22. We demand the abolition of a paid army and the formation of a national army.
23. We demand the creation of a German national press. All newspaper editors and their assistants must be German citizens; non-German newspapers shall only be published with the permission of the state and any newspaper which tries to undermine the common welfare shall be banned.
24. We demand freedom for all religious faiths in the state, as long as they do not endanger the state. The party represents the point of view of Christianity and fights against the Jewish materialist spirit within and without.
25. We demand that the state has strong central powers. The government should have unquestioned authority over the entire Reich.

Treaty of Versailles. The notion of a race based on pure German blood was outlined and Jews were specifically singled out as outsiders, unable to be a 'member of the nation'. More socialist aims included the nationalization of industry, the sharing of profits and land reform. Hitler was never committed to these latter aims and many were dropped, such as land reform, when it became clear that they were scaring away potential supporters from the middle and upper classes.

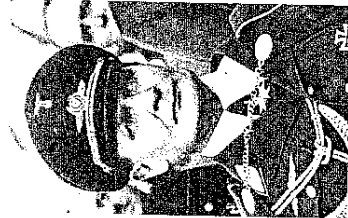
Who were the Nazis?

The party initially attracted young men, many of whom were war veterans, and was seen by many as a party of the left. Even by 1923 the Party membership included a disproportionately high number of manual workers, though this was to change in the second half of the decade. Like Hitler, many of the early leaders were of humble origin, with the exception of Hermann Goerring, a war hero with aristocratic connections through marriage. However, the Party did manage to attract the support of some wealthy and influential figures. Dietrich Eckhart, a well-known journalist and playwright, had a big influence on Hitler and people such as the Bechsteins, rich piano manufacturers, helped to finance the Party's activities, as well as giving Hitler a taste of the high life.

Who were the leading Nazis?

1904-1945 1897-1945

The 'intellectual' of the Nazi Party. Born in the Rhineland and the son of a manual worker, Goebbels was unable to fight in the First World War due to a crippled foot and permanent limp. He never recovered from this humiliation and was acutely aware of his short height (fellow Nazis called him the 'little mouse doctor') and physical deformity. He received a doctorate in 1921, having been taught by a Jewish professor, and joined the Nazi Party in 1922. He immediately used his journalistic talent to good effect, editing one of the Party's newspapers. Perhaps the most loyal of all Hitler's followers, he was rewarded for his devotion with the post of Gauleiter of Berlin in 1926 and Reich Propaganda Director in 1929. In 1933 he was appointed Minister of Enlightenment and Propaganda. This gave him immense control over Germany's media, culture and education. He was the master of modern political propaganda, adapting American advertising techniques that he had studied. Shortly after Hitler's own suicide in 1945, Goebbels poisoned his six children and his wife before committing suicide.



1897-1945

The 'extrovert' of the Nazi Party. Born in Bavaria and the son of a colonial official, Goering won fame and admiration for his achievements as a pilot during the First World War. The end of the war left him without purpose and in 1922 he joined the Nazi Party. By the following year he was in charge of the SA (Sturmroopers) and was severely wounded during the Munich Putsch (the Minister and Interior Minister for Prussia where he established the Gestapo and the first concentration camps. In 1935 he became Commander-in-Chief of the air force, by which time he was the most important man in the Third Reich after Hitler. In 1936 he took control of the Four Year Plan, with responsibility to prepare Germany economically for war. Goering was the most popular Nazi after Hitler. He was fat, charming and enjoyed the high life. His art collection was famous, created from the spoils of Jewish confiscations and conquered territories. His influence waned after 1940, however, and he was expelled from the Party in 1945. Goering was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg war crimes trial but committed suicide in his cell.

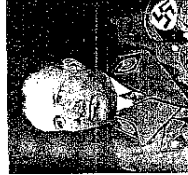
1906-1945

The 'sadist' of the Nazi Party. Born in Munich and the son of a secondary school teacher, Himmler served in the First World War from 1917 after which he became a chicken farmer in Bavaria. He joined the Nazi Party in 1923 and by 1929 was in charge of the SS (Hitler's private bodyguards and the elite branch of the SA) which rose from 300 members in 1929 to over 50,000 by 1933. By 1936, Himmler was in charge of the whole German police apparatus. In 1939, he became the Commissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood, which gave him ultimate control over the extermination campaign. It was his job to devise methods of mass murder. Himmler believed passionately in the racial doctrine of the Party. His gentle and harmless appearance concealed his sadism and craving for power. Despite this, he was unable to witness murder himself. He committed suicide after his arrest by British troops in 1945.



1889-1945

Born in Austria and the son of a German importer, Hess served in the same regiment as Hitler during the First World War and afterwards joined the *Freikorps*. He became Hitler's secretary in 1920. Imprisoned with Hitler after the failed *putsch*, he wrote out *Mein Kampf* at Hitler's dictation. In 1932 he became Deputy Party Leader and in 1933 was appointed Minister without Portfolio. In 1941 he made an extraordinary decision to fly single-handedly to Scotland, apparently to negotiate peace. He was imprisoned and spent the next 46 years in prison.



1894-1987

Born in central Germany and the son of cavalry sergeant, Bormann served in the First World War, joining the *Freikorps* in 1919. He joined the Nazi Party in 1925 and by 1933 became Chief-of-Staff and Secretary to Hess. His power grew rapidly and was increased by Hess' flight to Scotland in 1941, after which Bormann became the most powerful man in the Third Reich after Hitler. His fate at the end of the war remains a mystery. Either he was killed by a road bomb whilst escaping, or he succeeded in reaching South America.

1884-1942

Born in Saxony and the son of a middle-class musician who could well have been Jewish (a claim Heydrich fiercely denied), Heydrich was too young to fight in the First World War but joined the navy in 1922. He joined the Nazi Party and the SS in 1931 after involvement with the *Freikorps*. He became Himmler's deputy in 1933 and in 1939 was appointed head of the Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration. In 1941 he was given responsibility for the mass murder of Jews. He was assassinated by a member of the Czech resistance in 1942.



1884

Compare the backgrounds of these senior Nazis and note down any similarities. You may wish to use the following headings:

- Place and date of birth
- Family background
- Experience of war
- Experiences after the war

Compare your findings with others in the class. Together, prepare a short profile of the typical background of a senior member of the Nazi Party.

Note: You may like to then compare this profile with Hitler's own background.

1889-1945

Born in Munich and the son of a civil servant, Röhm was a professional soldier who fought in the First World War and who provided Hitler with useful army contacts in the Nazi Party's early years. After the war, Röhm was restless and looking for direction. He joined the *Freikorps* and was one of the early followers of Hitler and became a close friend. In 1930 he was put in charge of the SA which expanded to over two million members by the end of 1933. Röhm wanted to enhance the role of his organization and himself by merging the SA with the army. Hitler refused and ordered a purge of SA leaders including Röhm who was murdered in June 1934.



1891-1934

Born in Egypt and the son of a German importer, Hess served in the same regiment as Hitler during the First World War and afterwards joined the *Freikorps*. He became Hitler's secretary in 1920. Imprisoned with Hitler after the failed *putsch*, he wrote out *Mein Kampf* at Hitler's dictation. In 1932 he became Deputy Party Leader and in 1933 was appointed Minister without Portfolio. In 1941 he made an extraordinary decision to fly single-handedly to Scotland, apparently to negotiate peace. He was imprisoned and spent the next 46 years in prison.

How successful was the Nazi Party up to 1933?

In 1921, Hitler became the leader of the Nazis. He was hardly a unanimous choice and his appointment divided the Party. However, his political talents were too precious to lose, as were his contacts with the army. During 1920, Hitler had made over 30 speeches to audiences of up to 2000 people. By 1921, membership had risen to 3300. Hitler's abilities as an orator are legendary.

Source 2

My critical faculty was swept away...he was holding the masses, and me with them, under a hypnotic spell by the sheer force of his conviction...I do not know how to describe the emotions that swept over me as I heard this man...When he spoke of the disgrace of Germany, I felt ready to spring on any enemy. His appeal to German manhood was like a call to arms...I forgot everything but the man, then glancing around, I saw that his magnetism was holding these thousands as one. Of course, I was ripe for this experience. I was a man of thirty-two, weary with disgust and disillusionment, a wanderer seeking a cause, a patriot without a channel for his patriotism, a yearner after the heroic without a hero. The intense will of the man, the passion of his sincerity, seemed to flow from him into me. I experienced an exaltation that could be likened only to religious conversion.

The memories of Kurt Ludecke, one of Hitler's earliest followers

Source 5

There were tears in my eyes, my throat was all tight from crying. A liberating scream of the purest enthusiasm discharged the unbearable tension as the auditorium rocked with applause.

The memory of an aristocrat's first experience of Hitler speaking

Hitler cultivated an impression of a long-established and tightly organized party through the use of uniforms and symbols, such as the swastika, the Nazi flag (black swastika in a white circle on a red background - Hitler laboured over the design) and the raised arm salute. He also realized the potential value of a paramilitary wing which he could use to damage his opponents. In 1921, the *Sturmabteilung* (Stormtroopers), or SA, was founded and members quickly became known as *Brownshirts* because of the colour of their uniform. They were mainly ex-*Freikorps* members, unemployed youths or criminals. To give the group an air of respectability, it was claimed to be the 'Gymnastic and Sports Section' of the Party! Source 7 gives us an idea of who joined the SA.

Source 7

To the Hitler bands flock youths of the featherbrained, unbalanced type, similar to those involved in the Rathenau assassination; students, flotsam and jetsam of the classes that have lost their footing in the new Germany, having been deprived of economic security; clerks, mechanics, even plain hoodlums, such as could once be seen in the following of the Spartacists, purchasable for a few marks, a square meal and the prospect of a free fight with the odds on their side.

New York Times Current History, November 1923

As you can see the time was right for the formation of such a movement. Germany's situation was to the Nazis' advantage.

Nazi membership figures

1920	2,000
1921	3,300
1922	20,000
1923	55,000

Hitler's message

- Using Sources 5 and 6, what was it about Hitler that seemed to make him such a compelling speaker?
- According to Source 5, what attracted Ludecke to Hitler apart from Hitler himself?

Hitler's symbols



The swastika dates back 3000 years and was used to represent life, power, strength and good luck. German nationalists began to use it in the 1800s to suggest a long German history. The Nazis adopted it in 1920.

Do you wish to fight? To kill
To see streams of gold?
Great heaps of gold?
Herds of captive women?
Slaves?

Poem used by Goering when recruiting men for the SA

Source 3

Hitler von Kahr had spoken for half an hour. Then there was movement at the entrance as if people were wanting to push their way in...Eventually steel helmets came into sight. From this moment on, the view from my seat was rather obscured. People stood on chairs so that I didn't see Hitler until he had come fairly near along the main gangway, just before he turned to the platform. I saw him emerge between two armed soldiers in steel helmets who carried pistols next to their heads, pointing at the ceiling. They turned towards the platform. Hitler climbed on to a chair on my left. The hall was still restless, and then Hitler made a sign to the man on his right, who fired a shot at the ceiling. Thereupon Hitler called out (I cannot recollect the exact order of his words): 'The national revolution has broken out. The hall is surrounded! Maybe he mentioned the exact number, I am not sure.'

Account given by von Muller, an eye witness

Source 9

Source 9 is an artist's impression of the meeting in the beer hall in November 1923.

- Compare the painting with the eye-witness account above (Source 8). What are the differences and similarities?
- Which source do you consider to be most reliable about the events in the beer hall, the eye-witness account or the painting?

The Munich Beer Hall Putsch

By 1923, although membership was increasing, the Nazi Party had not succeeded in establishing itself outside Bavaria (in southern Germany). Hitler was becoming impatient. Hypnotisation and the invasion of the Ruhr in 1923 had weakened support for the Weimar government. What is more, the threat of ending the campaign of passive resistance in September filled nationalists with rage. Here was Hitler's opportunity to challenge the Weimar Republic.

Hitler was fortunate that the Bavarian state government - led by the ultra-conservative Gustav von Kahr - and the army in Bavaria were both sympathetic to the extreme right-wing cause. The Bavarian government declared a state of emergency after communists and socialists united in Thuringia and Saxony and formed paramilitary groups. Both Kahr and General von Lossow, Commander of the Bavarian military district, refused orders from Berlin to suppress the Nazi newspaper *Volksischer Beobachter*. They were now acting in defiance of the Weimar government. Perhaps not surprisingly, Hitler believed he would obtain support from the Bavarian government and army in an attempt to overthrow the government. Inspired by Mussolini's successful take-over in Italy in 1922, Hitler decided that the time was ripe, in the autumn of 1923, for an uprising. What followed was a disaster for the Nazis in which 16 Stormtroopers were killed and Hitler was sent to prison.

Hitler had overestimated Kahr's support for an uprising. The Weimar government had crushed the communist-socialist governments in Saxony and Thuringia and Kahr felt that he could no longer justify a march to Berlin. Hitler could not, crucially, rely on the total support of the Bavarian army. However, Hitler had gone too far, having already worked his supporters up to a fever pitch of excitement. He interrupted a public meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller - a large beer cellar in Munich - at which Kahr and Lossow were speaking to announce that 'the national revolution' had begun. Outside 600 armed members of the SA surrounded the building. Kahr was forced to promise Hitler his support, but this support was short-lived. The next day it became clear to Hitler that neither Kahr nor the army were going to support his march. The Bavarian police were sent to stop the few thousand supporters that had gathered and opened fire, killing 16 Nazis. Hitler, suffering from a dislocated shoulder after being thrown to the ground, was driven away. Two days later he and other Nazi leaders were arrested and accused of high treason. The Nazi Party was banned and Hitler was given the minimum sentence of five years imprisonment, showing the basic right-wing sympathy of the courts.

Source 8



The Nazi Party after 1924

A change in direction

Hitler was in prison for just nine months, during which time he lived in comfortable surroundings and was able to write his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*. He had plenty of time to reflect on the lessons he had learned from the failed *Putsch* and made important decisions about the future of the Nazi Party.

- ◉ *Führerprinzip* (violent) tactics would have to be abandoned and, instead, the Nazis would try to win electoral support.
- ◉ Strict organization of the Party was necessary, together with a wider geographical base (up to 1923, the Party's supporters were largely confined to Bavaria) and larger membership which would distinguish the Nazis from other nationalist groups.
- ◉ The Führer's will would need to dominate completely to enable the Nazis to appear united.

Winning elections

Source 11

When I resume active work it will be necessary to pursue a new policy. Instead of working to achieve power by armed conspiracy, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the Catholic and Marxist deputies, if outwitting them takes longer than shooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution!

Hitler's words to Kurt Luddeck when he visited Hitler in prison

The decision to pursue power legally was a turning point in the history of the Nazi Party. Although it took five years before the Nazis gained good results at the polls, the switch to electoral methods did pay off. However, it must never be forgotten that the Nazis were not actually voted into power as they never received a majority in a free general election. It was also the case that despite Hitler's 'magnificent' appeal, the Party was dependent on the right circumstances for success. Chapter 5 explained how the years 1924-1929 saw a relative improvement in Germany's fortunes. In these circumstances, most people were not desperate enough to cast their vote for such an extreme party.

The Nazis initially tried to win the support of industrial workers. They failed, mainly because the workers already had a choice of parties who claimed to represent them. At the beginning of 1928, the Nazis shifted their attention to the middle class and the rural population. Both groups felt that their interests were being squeezed by the Weimar Republic, and farmers were also badly affected by an agricultural depression. In 1928, although a mere 810,127 electors voted for the Nazis, this disguised the fact that more than 10% were voting for the Nazis in certain rural areas in the north-west.

The breakthrough came in 1930 when the Nazis became the second biggest party in the Reichstag with 107 seats. Not even Hitler had expected such a result! This followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929 which was to leave millions unemployed. The pattern observed by the Nazis in the rural areas spread to the cities. Electoral success was born out of desperate circumstances. That does not explain, however, why the Nazis benefited more than other extreme groups in the aftermath of the Crash. This is explored more fully in the next chapter.

Obedying the Führer

On Hitler's release from prison he found a party deeply divided both in terms of tactics and policy. There were also regional differences, especially between Catholic Bavarians and Protestant Prussians. He set about rebuilding the Party, which saw rapid increases in membership. Hitler was to be seen as the sole source of authority and he refused to share decision-making with anyone. He only intervened in Party disputes when they had reached crisis point, otherwise he remained aloof, an almost mystical figure. On 19 April 1926, Josef Goebbels wrote in his diary Adolf Hitler, I love you. In the same year, Hitler called a meeting of Party leaders at Bamberg to reassert his authority over those agitating for a new Party programme to replace the rather vague Twenty-Five Points. Hitler, not wanting to be restricted by another written document, emphasized the importance of the Twenty-Five Points and linked any rejection of it to a rejection of Hitler himself. Hitler's appeal was a success.

Source 12

By 1929, his [Hitler's] dominance in the movement was absolute, the 'idea' now as good as inseparable from the Leader. The Hitler cult had caught hold among the Party faithful in ways scarcely imaginable before 1923, and was now well on the way to elevating the Leader above the Party.

Kershaw, Hitler: 1889-1936, 1998

Organization and membership

The Party began to organize itself on an impressive scale. Germany was divided into *Gaue* or regions, in line with the 35 Reichstag electoral districts, and each was under the control of the *Gauleiter*. Each *Gaue* was then further subdivided into *Kreise*, under the control of a *Kreisleiter*. The *Kreise* were then divided into *Ortsgruppen*, each covering a town or a city and supervised by a *Ortsgruppenleiter*. The Nazis also organized interest groups such as the Hitler Youth (1926), the National Socialist Teachers' Association (1929) and the Office for Agriculture (1930) which helped to win further support for the Party. The SA was restructured and more highly trained, even receiving some training from the Reichswehr (army) by 1930. In 1926 the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) was formed as an elite group of bodyguards.

Document exercise: The impact of the Beer Hall Putsch

The failure of the Putsch

The police used rubber truncheons and rifle butts and tried to push back the crowd with rifles held horizontally. Their barricade had already been broken several times. Suddenly, a National Socialist fired a pistol at a police officer from close quarters. The shot went past his head and killed Sergeant Hallweg standing behind him. Even before it was possible to give an order, the comrades of the sergeant who had been shot opened fire as the Hitler for did, and a short gun battle ensued...After no more than thirty seconds the Hitler lot fled, some back to the Maximilienstrasse, some to the Odeonsplatz.

Extract from an official report prepared for the inquiry

11 What are the advantages and disadvantages to a political party of such a dominant leader?

Year	Membership figures
1925	27,000
1926	49,000
1927	72,000

1932 THE BEER HALL CONSPIRACY: THE TRIAL OF HITLER

I bear the responsibility all alone, but I declare one thing: I am no criminal because of that and I do not feel as if I would be a criminal. I cannot plead guilty, but I do confess the act. There is no such thing as high treason against the traitors of 1918. It is impossible that I should have committed high treason, for this cannot be implicit in the action of November 8th and 9th, but only in the intentions and the actions during all the previous months... I do not consider myself as a man who committed high treason, but as a German, who wanted the best for his people.

Extract from Hitler's speech at his trial following the failed Putsch

1918 AT THE BEER HALL

The trial received enormous publicity and Hitler's bravado enabled him to turn the ignominious (humiliating) failure of the Putsch into a considerable propaganda victory. For, while asserting that Kahr and the others had pursued a similar goal, he did not deny his own part – but claimed it was a patriotic act. He blamed the failure of the enterprise on the pusillanimity (indecisiveness) of the nationalist leaders. As a result of this stand, Hitler now became a hero to many anti-Semites in other parts of Germany who before had never heard of him. They saw him as the one man who had had the courage and energy to act. This ensured that when the Party was re-founded after his release, numerous new branches could be established outside Bavaria.

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1918-1945* Vol. 1, 1988

Examining the style of the sources

1 Comprehension in context

Using Source B and your knowledge, explain Hitler's reference to the 'traitors of 1918'.

2 Comparing the sources

To what extent and why do Sources A and B offer different interpretations of the Munich Putsch?

3 Assessing the sources

Source D was produced some time after 1923. Of what use is it in explaining the impact of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch on the Nazi Party?

4 Making judgements

'The Munich Beer Hall Putsch was a success for the Nazis'. Using the sources and your own knowledge, how far do you agree with this view?

What did the Nazis believe in?

The roots of Nazi ideology

Although Hitler was reluctant to commit his party to a programme which could restrict him, there were certain fundamental principles which formed the basis of Hitler's ideology. These principles – racial superiority, extreme nationalism and anti-communism – lay at the heart of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* or world view. They were not new, however; they had their roots in pre-war Germany. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there were two distinct but overlapping ideological responses to the rapid industrial change which followed unification.

• Anti-Semitism increased as the lower middle class – people such as artisans, shopkeepers and peasant farmers – felt threatened by changes such as mass production and urbanization. Many of those who seemed to pose the most immediate threat such as department store owners, bankers and cattle dealers happened to be Jews. Jews, whose persecution had a long history in Europe, became easy scapegoats for others' insecurities. Significantly, it was during this period that they were increasingly classed as a race rather than a religious or cultural group. It was impossible under this definition for Jews to claim to be both Jewish and German and therefore possible for others to class them as foreigners, even if Germany had been the home of their family for centuries.

• A more extreme form of nationalism emerged in the 1890s, led by the 'new Right' consisting of successful middle-class groups who felt excluded from Germany's ruling class. Organizations such as the Pan-German League were formed to promote their views. They believed that changes in society which industrialization had created – such as the growth of a more 'political' working class – were leading to instability and a lack of unity. In order to protect the German *Volk* (people) it was necessary, they argued, to unite the people behind a common cause: the greatness of the German state. This could be achieved firstly, through expansion and secondly, through attempts to keep the supposedly superior German race pure. Foreigners were not tolerated and as the first point above explains, this term now included Jews. The leader of the Pan-German League, Heinrich Class, acknowledged in 1918 'a satisfactory growth in the anti-Semitic mood which had already reached an enormous extent... Our task will be to bring this movement out on to the national political arena... for the Jews the struggle for existence has begun.'

It was significant that Hitler formed his political views in Austria. Unlike Germany, where Jews formed less than 1% of the population, the presence of Jews in Austria was more marked than in Germany. In addition, there were many more different nationalities living in Austria, most of whom were asserting their rights to greater independence. For German-speakers living in Austria, the claims for a single state to include all 'pure' Germans were expressed in the strongest terms.

In conclusion, the power of Hitler's ideology did not lie in its originality. Instead the power lay in its combination of different influences into a 'world view' and in the conviction with which it was held. After the trauma of losing the First World War and the problems experienced by Weimar, Hitler was offering an explanation of – and a solution to – Germany's problems.

Hitler believed that the Nazi Revolution would not be achieved until all German people shared his world view. Achieving power in 1933 was only the beginning.

So as it may be, *Volksisch* and anti-Semitic prejudices were far from uncommon in Austria before the First World War and certainly not the product of the deranged mind of an individual lunatic.

Goary, *Hitler and Nazism*, 1993

1932 THE MUNICH BEER HALL PUTSCH IS CELEBRATED IN 1942

You died
Fighting for our Reich
And had to die
So that we could
Live victoriously.

Your death
Was the movement's victory
And your heritage
Is to us eternal obligation!

From material prepared for the 1942 celebrations of the Beer Hall Putsch

Nazi ideology

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Central to Hitler's idea of the German nation was the idea of a community of people who shared a common race and who would work together as one for the good of each other. Hitler believed that all ethnic Germans should be united and hated the fact that Germans in Austria had to live alongside non-Germans. The concept of a German *Volksgemeinschaft* was important in drawing together different groups whose unity was undermined by rapid industrialization. By stressing the need to work together for the common good of the German people (*alle*) the rich and poor, rural and urban, Prussian or Bavarian, Germans would feel as though they all shared a common bond. This 'common good' would involve the promotion of a 'pure' race and the expansion of German boundaries.

HITLER'S 'WORLD VIEW'

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Hitler had visions of a Greater Germany - a Germany that would include all ethnic Germans and acquire the *Lebensraum* (living space) necessary for an expanding master race. This first stage was to abolish the Treaty of Versailles and reclaim the lost territories, followed by the inclusion of Austrian Germans, Sudeten Germans and Baltic Germans into the Reich. Thirdly, further expansion into Eastern Europe was indicated in *Mein Kampf* to provide *Lebensraum* and superpower status. Expansion into Russia would also serve the added bonus of destroying the centre of communism. Hitler regarded war as 'part of a natural, indeed self-evident pattern of thorough, well-secured, sustained national development'. It fitted in with his idea that everything was achieved through struggle.

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Hitler believed that there was a hierarchy of races and that the Aryan race (peoples of Northern Europe, defined in the nineteenth century by their common language, German) were at the top of this pyramid while non-Aryans, such as Slavs and Jews, were at the bottom. He combined this with a belief in Social Darwinism - a theory that only the fittest would survive in any struggle between the races. Hitler wanted to achieve racial purity in Germany - which was in fact entirely impossible given the mythical status of a 'pure Aryan' - and his main victims were Jews, who he defined as a racial and not a religious group. The exact origins of Hitler's fanatical anti-Semitism are unclear. Rumours that the source of his hatred was his own possible Jewish ancestry or the death of his mother at the hands of a Jewish doctor are without evidence. He claimed in *Mein Kampf* to experience a revelation on seeing a Jew in Vienna and asking himself 'Is this a German?'

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Hitler's ideology did not focus on Russian communism initially. He was, of course, highly suspicious of the Left in general and despised the democratic nature of the Weimar Republic. For him, socialism was about ensuring the unity of the people rather than about sharing power with them. He gradually, however, began to focus on the 'Jewishness' of communism, because communism was an international movement which sought to spread communism throughout the world. Hitler began to argue that it was part of a Jewish 'world conspiracy'. Communists were therefore part of the Jewish threat and had to be removed. This belief had a profound effect on Hitler's foreign policy. Instead of pursuing colonial expansion, he decided instead to pursue expansion into Russia. This would have the dual effect of destroying Jewish communism and gaining *Lebensraum*.

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

1. Draw four boxes onto a sheet of A4 and write inside each one the headings above. Now draw and label arrows between the boxes to show how they were connected. The labels should explain *how* they were connected. For example, 'Volksgemeinschaft' and 'A Master Race' were connected because only pure 'Aryans' were allowed to be members of Germany's 'people's community'.

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

The NSDAP is an organisation which does not recognise proletarians, does not recognise bourgeois, farmers, manual workers and so on; instead it is an organisation based in all regions of Germany, composed of all social groups. If you ask one of us, 'Young man, what are your bourgeois? Proletarian?', he will smile; 'I am a German! I fight in my brown shirt.' That is indicative of our significance; we do not aspire to be anything else, we are all fighting for the future of a people. We are all equal in our ranks.

A speech given by Hitler at an election meeting in Kiel, 1930

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

The main motivating forces of life are self-preservation and the safeguarding of future generations, and politics is none other than the struggle of peoples for their existence. This urge to live is universal and governs the whole nation. The urge to live must lead to conflict because it is insatiable, while the basis of life, territory, is limited. Thus brutality rather than humanity is the basis of life! Man has become master of the world through conflict and continual struggle... But mankind is not a uniform and equal mass. There are differences between races. The Earth has received its culture from elite peoples; what we see today is ultimately the result of the activity and the achievements of the Aryans.

Hitler in a speech in 1928

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Don't think that you can combat an illness without killing its causative organ, without destroying the bacillus (bacterial), and don't think that you can combat racial tuberculosis without seeing to it that the people is freed from the causative organ of racial tuberculosis. The impact of Jewry will never pass away, and the poisoning of the people will not end, as long as the causal agent, the Jew, is not removed from our midst.

Hitler's anti-Semitism in a speech of 1920

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Democracy, as practised in Western Europe today, is the forerunner of Marxism. In fact the latter would not be conceivable without the former. Democracy is the breeding-ground in which the bacilli of the Marxist world pest can grow and spread. By the introduction of parliamentarianism democracy produced an abortion of filth and fire; the creative fire of which, however, seems to have died out.

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

When home-going workers passed us by, Adolf would grip my arm and say, 'Did you hear, Gus? Czechs! Another time, we encountered some brickmakers speaking loudly in Italian, with florid gestures. 'There you have, your German Vienna', he cried, indignantly. This, too, was one of his oft-repeated phrases: 'German Vienna', but Adolf pronounced it with a bitter undertone. Was this Vienna, into which streamed from all sides, Czechs, Magyars, Croats, Poles, Italians, Slovaks, Ruthenians, and above all Gallician Jews, still indeed a German city?'

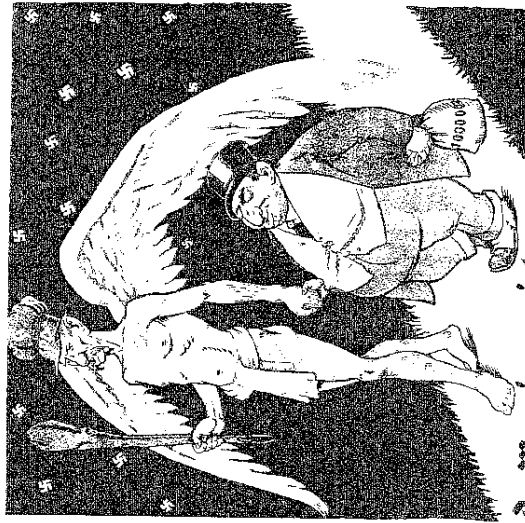
Kubizek, *Young Hitler. The Story of Our Friendship*, 1973

YOU'RE WORKING HARD!
YOU'RE DOING GREAT!

Germany has an annual increase in population of nearly 900,000. The difficulty of feeding this army of new citizens must increase from year to year and ultimately end in catastrophe, unless ways and means are found to forestall the danger of starvation and misery in time... when we speak of new land in Europe today we must principally bear in mind Russia... Destiny itself seems to wish to point the way for us here... And the end of the Jewish domination in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state.

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

Document exercise: Nazi ideology



This Nazi poster from 1932 shows the socialist SPD as communists and as the guardian angels of the rich Jewish capitalists.

Der Marxismus ist
der Schutengel
der Kapitalismus

Hitler faced the Jews as a

If the Jews were alone in this world, they would stifle in filth and offal; they would try to get ahead of one another in hate-filled struggle and exterminate one another, in so far as the absolute absence of all sense of self-sacrifice, expressing itself in their cowardice, did not turn battle into comedy here too...

...With satanic joy in his face, the black haired Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus scaling her from her people. With every means he tries to destroy the racial foundations of the people he has set out to subjugate. Just as he himself systematically ruins women and girls, he does not shrink back from pulling down the blood barriers for others, even on a large scale. It was and it is Jews who bring Negroes into the Rhineland always with the same secret thought and clear aim of ruining the hated white race by the necessarily resulting bastardisation...

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

Socialist ideology

We demand a land reform suitable to our national requirements, the passing of a law for the confiscation of land for communal purposes without compensation; the abolition of ground rent, and the prohibition of all speculation in land.

Point 17 in the Twenty-Five Points of 1920

Socialist ideology is modified

In view of the false interpretations on the part of our opponents of Point 17 of the Programme of the NSDAP, it is necessary to make the following statement:

Since the NSDAP accepts the principle of private property, it is self-evident that the phrase 'confiscation without compensation' refers simply to the creation of possible legal means for confiscation, when necessary, of land acquired illegally or not managed in the public interest. It is, therefore, aimed primarily against Jewish companies which speculate in land.

A 'clarification' of Point 17 of the Twenty-Five Points issued in 1928

How popular was Hitler and his party?

...modern research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that anti-Semitism was not an important factor in generating votes for the Nazis in the elections of 1930-1933 when they became a mass party...As William Sheridan Allen showed long ago in his classic study of the small town of Northam, Nazi propaganda deliberately played down the anti-Semitic aspects of the Party's ideology from 1928 onwards because they had been found to be unpopular with the electorate...it is necessary to recall that no more than 37.4 per cent of the voters ever supported the Nazis in a free election, and that even in the elections of March 1933, when faced with massive intimidation by the recently installed Nazi government, the Party still failed to win an overall majority.

Evans, *Rereading German History 1800-1996*, 1997

Examination-style questions

1 Comprehension in context

Using Sources A and B and your own knowledge, explain why Hitler considered Jews to be enemies of the state.

2 Comparing the sources

Explain how and why Sources C and D differ.

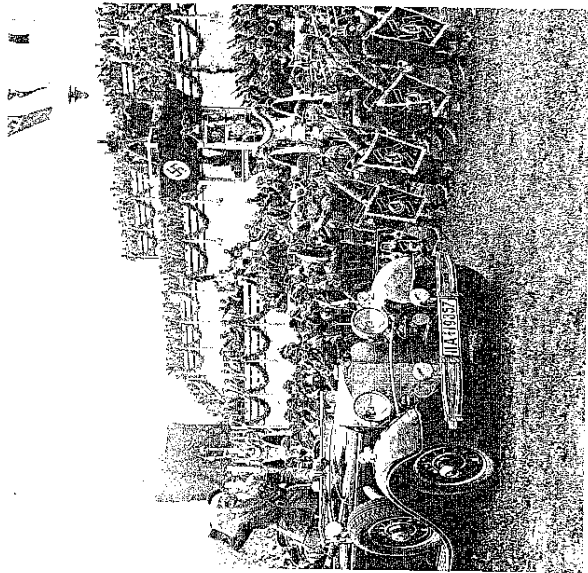
3 Assessing the sources

How adequately does Source E support its claim that anti-Semitism was not an important factor in generating votes for the Nazi Party?

4 Making judgements

Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain how important Nazi ideology was in the growing popularity of the Nazis after 1919.

Propaganda



Source 18 illustrates some of the ways in which the Nazis presented themselves publicly. Hitler devoted two chapters to propaganda in *Mein Kampf*. He saw propaganda as the form of communication best suited to the masses and therefore central in his bid to turn his party into a genuinely mass movement. He made little attempt to conceal the contempt he held towards his intended audience (Source 19). Keep the message simple, say it over and over again, and, if you are going to tell a lie, tell a really big lie. These were the central messages given to all Nazi propagandists.

The medium most favoured by Hitler was the spoken word and he used the new forms of transport – aeroplane and car – to his advantage, travelling all over Germany to deliver his speeches. We have already discussed his oratorical skills and although his critics pointed to his lack of an educated vocabulary, his extraordinary presence and ability to capture and hold attention was a key factor in the Nazis' success. None of the other opposition parties had such a charismatic leader. Other forms of propaganda used by Hitler and Goebbels (appointed Head of Party Propaganda in 1928) included posters and newspapers and new technology enabled them, during 1930, to make microphones and loudspeakers a standard feature at Nazi rallies. Goebbels made much use of *Der Angriff*, the newspaper he bought in 1927. In 1930, he wrote an article about the death of a young Nazi named Horst Wessel who was murdered by a communist. The real reason for the murder seems to have been an argument between the two men over the prostitute with whom Wessel lived, but Nazi propaganda made no mention of this. Instead, Wessel became a Nazi hero and a song that he had composed became the Nazi marching song.

Source 13

The 1934 Nuremberg Rally.

Think about

▶ How many different propaganda techniques can you find in Source 13?

Source 13

The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

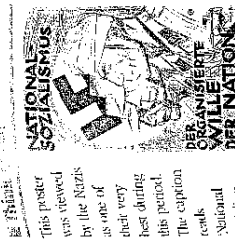
Source 20

It is 6.30 Sunday morning. He dies after a hard struggle. He stand by his bed two hours later, I can not believe that it is Horst Wessel... His mortal remains have given up struggle and conflict. Yet I can feel almost physically his spirit rise, to live on with us. He believed it, he knew it. He himself put it in words: He 'marches in spirit in our ranks'.

Joseph Goebbels
in *Der Angriff*, 1930

Think about

▶ Why do you think Goebbels decided to make Horst Wessel into a Nazi martyr?



This poster was viewed by the Nazis as one of their very best during the period. The caption reads: 'National Socialism: The Organized Will of the Nation'. Goebbels claimed that the artist had perfected the drawing of Nazi Stormtroopers.

▶ What messages do you think this poster was intended to put across?
▶ How effective a piece of propaganda is it in your opinion?

Source 21

1919 German Workers' Party founded in Munich.
1920 Renamed National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and nicknamed the Nazis. Twenty-Five Points written.
1921 Hitler becomes chairman. Nazi Stormtroopers founded.
1923 Attempted Putsch fails in Munich. Nazi Party banned.
1924 Hitler sentenced to five years for treason. Begins work on *Mein Kampf*. Hitler released from prison in December.

1925 Hitler begins to rebuild Party. Disappointing electoral result; some success in rural areas.
1926 Nazis join Nationalist Opposition against the Young Plan.

1931 Substantial gains in election. 1932 Agrarian League announces its support for the Party.

1932 Nazis become largest party in Reichstag, though lose 34 seats in November election.

1933 Hitler appointed Chancellor.

Was the rise of Hitler inevitable?

In 1941, one historian suggested that Nazism was 'a splendid consummation [fulfillment] of a century and a half of German thought'. Certainly, Nazism built on some well-established traditions in Germany, as we have already seen, such as anti-Semitism and nationalism. In 1912, the President of the nationalist Pan-German League, Heinrich Class, demanded the expulsion of all 'non-German aliens' from the Reich, the pursuit of an active and 'aggressive' foreign policy and an end to the Jews' status as German citizens. Such sentiments were to become familiar to followers of the Nazis. However, it is far too simplistic to see the rise of the Nazis as inevitable, as if they were somehow Germany's fate. Whilst it is true that Nazi ideology was largely unoriginal and based on ideas already current in right-wing political circles in Germany, such ideas were not the only ones to be found at that time, nor were they the exclusive preserve of the Germans. Hitler did not become Chancellor because it was the destiny of Germany for him to do so; rather it was due to the unique combination of a rare political gift and the right circumstances.

Activity

Write the years 1918–1933 down the margin of a sheet of paper, equally spaced. Using the timeline on this page and your knowledge of Germany up to 1930, summarize the main events within the Nazi Party and in Germany in two separate columns. Complete the 1930–1933 section after reading Chapter 7.

To what extent was the rise of the Nazi Party the result of circumstances at that time? Plan your answer first, using the following pieces of information:

- 1 Your completed timelines
- 2 The profiles of senior Nazis on pages 116–117
- 3 The influences on the Nazi Party, for example on page 123
- 4 Information about the organisation and tactics of the Nazi Party in this chapter
- 5 Election statistics on page 77

Conclusions

Adolf Hitler was in many ways the last person you might have expected to become such a powerful leader. His modest background and unpromising youth hardly created the impression of a man who would become the most notorious dictator the world has ever seen. Nor, in many ways, was the young Nazi Party any more promising. There was nothing particularly new in its ideology and at first it was a relatively small, local party based in Bavaria with an unknown as its leader. That the Nazi Party became the second biggest party in the Reichstag in 1930 (and the biggest by 1932) was due to two kinds of factors. The first was Hitler's own skills, namely public speaking, organization, propaganda and a change of tactics in 1925. Secondly, circumstances in Germany were to pave the way for Hitler's rise. The success of the Nazi Party was in inverse proportion to the success of Germany. Had the Weimar Republic continued its economic recovery in the 1920s and had Wall Street not crashed in 1929, the Nazi Party may well have remained a marginal party with little real influence. Hitler was not inevitable. His rise to power was the unique and unfortunate consequence of a combination of factors. Pre-war Germany was one of them and Hitler's own talents were another. But the final ingredient, circumstances in the 1920s, was the missing piece of the jigsaw which was to seal Germany's fate.

Chapter

The collapse of the Weimar Republic



SOURCE 1



SOURCE 2

Elite

Historians often write about the influence of the elite between 1932 and 1933. This elite consisted of the landed aristocrats (Junkers), many of whom had reached senior positions within the army, and also rich and successful industrialists. You will remember that after the 1918 revolution in Germany, not much changed beyond the Reichstag and head of state. The army was left unchanged and the landed elite was left in positions of influence. These men generally held right-wing views and opposed democracy. After all, they had nothing to gain from it as they had possessed power and influence before 1918. When Hindenburg became President in 1925, the elite saw its chance to return to authoritarian rule. After 1930, members of the elite such as Papen and Schleicher became increasingly influential by gaining the ear of the President.

The collapse of the American Stock Exchange affected Germany so badly because of the American loans she had received after 1924. After the Crash, these loans had to be repaid and no further loans were given.

Introduction

The Wall Street Crash, as Sources 1 and 2 suggest, hit Germany very badly. After a period of relative stability, Germany was once again thrown into turmoil and the Weimar Republic faced its biggest challenge yet. What it urgently needed to provide was strong, decisive government action which would address the immediate problem of unemployment and reassure the people that the matter was firmly under control. Unfortunately, this did not happen – but why not? The main political parties disagreed over what action to take, but their views were increasingly ignored by the government in any case. To some extent this was not surprising. Both the Nazis and the Communists' share of the vote was increasing and it was unlikely that such anti-Weimar parties would be welcomed into government. However, there was a move amongst the German elite to isolate all left-wing parties, including the SPD which remained the biggest political party until 1932. Quite what the right-wing members of this elite wanted is not clear. They certainly wanted to reduce the power of the Reichstag and the left-wing and return Germany to authoritarian rule. Some may have wished to see a return of the monarchy, although others simply wanted to see their own power increase under the favour of President Hindenburg. Whatever their motive, they played a crucial role in ending democracy in Weimar and the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

Key questions

- To what extent did the Wall Street Crash contribute to the fall of the Weimar Republic?
- When, why and how did democracy collapse?
- To what extent and why did the Nazis gain success between 1930 and 1932?
- Did Hitler get into power through the back door?
- At what point did the fall of Weimar become most likely?

The impact of the Wall Street Crash

Unemployment

The collapse of the American Stock Exchange in October 1929 had a disastrous effect on the German economy, which had never fully recovered from the battering of war and hyperinflation. In the winter of 1928–1929, unemployment had stood at 2.5 million. By the following winter that figure had risen to over 3 million. Registered unemployment eventually exceeded 6 million and it was estimated that around half the economically active population were without work in the winters of 1931–1932 and 1932–1933. Thousands of small family firms collapsed and smaller farms went bankrupt. Diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia reappeared, which had been more familiar during periods of wartime famine. Infant mortality increased. Those fortunate enough to be in work saw their incomes fall, and lived in constant fear of joining the massed ranks of the unemployed.

The 'Grand Coalition'

In these circumstances the critical weaknesses of the Weimar political system became more apparent. In 1928, Hermann Müller, a Social Democrat, was appointed Chancellor of the 'Grand Coalition', representing five political parties ranging from the left (SPD) to the moderate right (DVP). This range of political opinion did not make decision-making easy and the economic crisis highlighted their differences. The fundamental problem facing the government was a deficit in the Reich budget. The government was spending more than it was receiving. This was not helped by the inadequacy of the unemployment

scheme which was unable to pay out enough benefits to the growing number of the unemployed. The government was therefore forced to make contributions to the scheme which made the budget deficit worse. The parties began to split along class lines over this issue. The SPD wanted to raise the level of contributions to the scheme whilst protecting the workers and unemployed as far as possible. The right-wing parties, such as the DVP, wanted to lighten the tax burden and reduce the value of unemployment benefits. The result was political deadlock. Parties refused to co-operate with each other to tackle the economic crisis effectively.

Müller was unable to muster enough support in the Reichstag to pass laws and consequently turned to Hindenburg for help. He wanted Hindenburg to grant him the use of Article 48 so that the support of the Reichstag was unnecessary. Hindenburg refused, no doubt partly because Müller belonged to the SPD and therefore represented the left-wing which Hindenburg distrusted. Müller was left with no other option than to resign, which he did in March 1930.

Nationalist opposition

Meanwhile, the government was facing further problems from the right. In 1929, an opportunity arose for the right-wing parties to unite against the Young Plan (see page 101). Although Germany stood to gain from it, the Young Plan was denounced by the DNPV and the Nazis as yet another example of foreign powers dictating Germany's fortunes. The two parties joined together in calling for a plebiscite (popular vote) and proposed a Freedom Law which required the government to end all co-operation with international powers over the Rhineland occupation and to reject any obligations which arose from the Versailles Treaty.

The plebiscite was a failure as only 13.8 per cent of the electorate voted in support of the law, but the Nazis

gained greater political respect and financial backing from their association with the DNPV, as well as free publicity in Hugenberg's newspaper. A stream of vicious anti-Weimar propaganda was unleashed by the Nazis and, during 1929, the Party did well in local elections, an ominous sign of things to come.

Frauen i

Willkommen im Hause der Nationalen Deutschen Frauenvereine



Denkmal für die Frauenvereine

Adolf Hitler

See page 76 for a reminder of the terms of Article 48.

Biography Hugenberg

Alfred Hugenberg was born in 1865 in Hanover. Before the First World War, he was a civil servant, banker and successful businessman. After the war, he became a Reichstag deputy representing the right-wing DNPV. He also made his fortune by taking over newspaper, bourses and film companies. In 1929, he joined with Hitler to oppose the Young Plan. Hitler gained from Hugenberg's support, not least by having access to Hugenberg's newspapers for his propaganda. In 1933, Hugenberg was appointed Minister for Economics and Food, hoping to gain further influence and power. He was disappointed however, especially when the DNPV did badly in the election of March 1933. He resigned and played no further part in politics.

Summary 2

A Nazi appeal to women voters in 1932. It reminds them of the millions of unemployed men and children without a future, and asks them to 'save our German families' by voting for Adolf Hitler.

The collapse of democracy

The key players

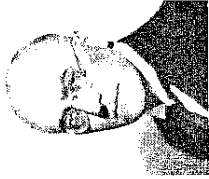
President Paul von Hindenburg 1847–1934

A hero of the First World War, Hindenburg was made supreme military commander in 1916. After the war he retired, but was persuaded in 1925 to stand as the presidential candidate of a right-wing coalition. He succeeded, to the dismay of the German left-wing parties and former allied states within Europe, all of whom feared a return to authoritarian rule. In fact, Hindenburg spent the first five years acting within the limits of the Weimar Constitution. From 1930, however, he was increasingly influenced by aristocratic army officers who wished to weaken the new Republic and gain more power for themselves. Hindenburg was getting old. It was said that no-one dared leave a sandwich paper near him in case he mistook it for an official paper and signed it. Although he distrusted Hitler, he was persuaded to appoint him Chancellor in 1933.



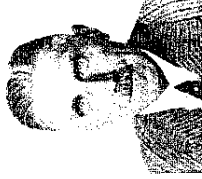
Heinrich Brüning 1885–1970

A member of the Centre Party and a Reichstag deputy from 1924–1933, Brüning became the leader of the Centre Party's Reichstag deputies by 1929. Having caught the attention of Hindenburg, Brüning was appointed Chancellor in 1930 but his two years in office were not happy ones. In attempting to keep the left-wing out of government he found himself unable to get laws passed through the Reichstag. He became the first Chancellor routinely to use Article 48 in order to bypass the Reichstag. His memoirs revealed his intention to reform the Constitution and restore the monarchy. He also failed to resolve the economic crisis, earning him the nickname the 'Hunger Chancellor'. He was forced to resign in 1932 and eventually emigrated to America.



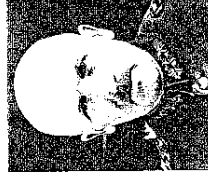
Franz von Papen 1879–1969

Papen was born to a wealthy noble family and joined the army. He became a captain of the General Staff in 1913 and became famous for his incompetent secret service activities in Washington. After the war Papen entered politics, representing the extreme right-wing of the Centre Party. He never achieved a place in the Reichstag but did represent the interests of the landed aristocrats in the Prussian Landtag (state parliament). After supporting Hindenburg in the presidential election of 1932, he was appointed Chancellor in May 1932. This was surprising given his lack of experience and general credibility. Papen failed to gain support in the Reichstag, was dismissed within months and was replaced by Schleicher. As revenge, Papen persuaded Hindenburg to sack Schleicher and appoint Hitler as Chancellor with himself as Vice-Chancellor.



Kurt von Schleicher 1882–1934

It was another aristocratic army man, von Schleicher, who was stage-managing the events between 1930 and 1932. Schleicher was born to an old Prussian military family and joined Hindenburg's old regiment in 1903. He became a close friend of Hindenburg's son, Oskar. During the 1920s he achieved success within the Defence Ministry where he combined interests in politics and the army. From this powerful position he could pursue his own personal ambition. He gained the ear of Hindenburg and persuaded him to appoint both Brüning and Papen. He became Defence Minister under Papen and in December 1932 replaced Papen as Chancellor. His attempt to gain support in the Reichstag backfired, providing Papen with an opportunity for revenge. He was forced to resign within two months. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1934.



Brüning as Chancellor

Following Müller's resignation in March 1930, Heinrich Brüning was appointed Chancellor. This was the first occasion when Hindenburg was heavily influenced by von Schleicher in his choice of minister. Schleicher encouraged the creation of a cabinet which excluded the SPD, despite the fact that it remained the largest party in the Reichstag. This was the first step towards eliminating the left wing from German politics. The problem was that it left Brüning with inadequate support in the Reichstag and, therefore, unable to pass laws. Brüning, as we know from his memoirs, supported a return to a more authoritarian style of government and was content to bypass the Reichstag completely by using Article 48 to enforce laws by Presidential Decree.

Source 3

The Cabinet has been formed for the purpose of resolving as quickly as possible those problems that are widely regarded as crucial to the survival of the Reich. This will be the final attempt to resolve these problems through this Reichstag...The government is able and determined to employ every constitutional means at its disposal to achieve its ends.

Governmental declaration by Chancellor Brüning, 1 April 1930

The response of the major political parties to Brüning's government was a clear sign that he would face a deadlock in the Reichstag.

Source 4

SPD
The Chancellor wants to put his programme into effect through this, I think you must agree, rather money collection of cabinet members... he is clearly flirting with Article 48...a beginning leading to the establishment of a dictatorship...
From a Reichstag speech, 2 April 1930

KPD
We Communists call on the working masses to vigorously oppose this middle-class capitalist dictatorship... government that will rob the masses and enrich the property owning classes. We demand the resignation of this government.
From a Reichstag speech, 2 April 1930

DNVP

The serious differences of opinion over foreign affairs, as well as over internal matters and economic policies, which existed between the DNVP and the Müller government continue to characterize our relationship with the new government.
From a Reichstag speech, 3 April 1930

NSDAP

No-one...has dared to point out the real cause of all our misery: the Dawes and Young Plans...Mr Brüning should not take shelter behind the world economic crisis. What has caused our misery is the ineffectiveness of German politics over the last 12 years...
From a Reichstag speech, 18 July 1930

Laws passed by the Reichstag

1930	98
1931	34
1932	5
Emergency decrees	
1930	5
1931	44
1932	66

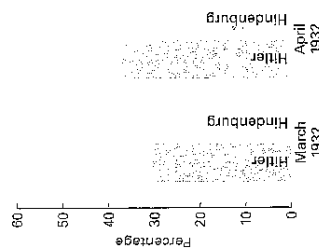
Source 5

- Study the results in Source 6.
- What were the major changes between the two elections?
 - How do you think the 1930 election result might have changed Weimar politics?
 - Was the 1930 election result good or bad for Brüning?

Source 6

- Can you explain why some historians see 1930 as the date when democracy in Germany collapsed?

The results of the two Presidential elections of 1932.



The first crisis occurred in July 1930, when the Reichstag rejected part of Brüning's finance bill which was intended to balance the budget. Brüning used Article 48 to bypass the Reichstag, the first time that such a step had been taken after a bill had already been defeated. (Ebert had used Article 48 to enforce laws in times of emergency when there was no time to call the Reichstag). The Reichstag passed a motion demanding that the decree be withdrawn and Brüning's response was to dissolve (close down) the Reichstag and call a new election. This was an extremely risky strategy given the Nazi successes in recent local elections. If Brüning had not called for new elections, then the Nazis would not have had the opportunity to increase their number of seats from 12 to 107. Under the Weimar Constitution, there was no need for another election until 1932. If the Nazis had still only had 12 seats by 1932, rather than 107, then the history of Germany might look rather different.

The election of 1930

Source 7

Party	Election Result in 1928		Election Result in 1930	
	Number of seats	Percentage of votes	Number of seats	Percentage of votes
NSDAP	12	2.6	107	18.3
DNVP	73	14.2	41	7.0
Z	62	15.1	68	14.8
SPD	153	29.8	143	24.5
KPD	54	10.6	77	13.1

The most significant feature about the 1930 election was the growth of the two extreme parties, the KPD and the Nazis. Both benefited from the electorate's impatience with the government's slow response to the economic crisis. Brüning now faced opposition from at least 64 per cent of the Reichstag deputies. Not only were the two extreme parties withholding support, but the DNVP was also refusing to work with Brüning and the SPD remained outside the government. It was inconceivable that Brüning could look to the Reichstag for any support in these circumstances. Luckily for Brüning, however, the SPD decided to swallow its pride and 'tolerate' Brüning's government even though it was excluded from government. It supported Brüning for the simple reason that if his government fell, it might, given the election results, be replaced with a Nazi-nationalist government which would be much worse. Despite this support, Brüning continued to rely on Article 48 to pass laws.

The Presidential election

In April 1932, President Hindenburg was re-elected for a second term. His main rivals were Hitler and Thalmann, leader of the KPD. In the first round, Hindenburg polled 49 per cent of the votes, just failing to secure an overall majority. The failure of the left to agree a joint candidate created the bizarre situation whereby socialists and Centre Party supporters voted for the right-wing Hindenburg simply to keep Hitler out. Hitler, incidentally, did very well in the election, a further sign of his growing prestige and growing popularity.

Why did Brüning fail?

Brüning was nicknamed the 'Hunger Chancellor' thanks to an unpopular economic policy. In an attempt to curb public spending and inflation, a series

of decrees was issued in December 1931 which reduced wages and public salaries to the level of 1927. In some cases, pensions and benefits fell by 9 per cent. Welfare payments had been reduced and around a third of the unemployed received nothing at all, despite an unemployment figure exceeding 6 million by February 1932. Those lucky enough to be in work faced a falling standard of living and, by the end of 1932, suicide rates in Germany were considerably higher than in the USA, France or Britain. It was, therefore, very serious indeed that Brüning offered no sign of relief to the German people.

Hindenburg's confidence in Brüning was decreasing, not least because Schleicher (see page 133) was urging him to create an even more right-wing government.

Schleicher was increasingly of the opinion that the Nazis had to be included in the government if it was to have support at all in the Reichstag and he began secret meetings and negotiations with Hitler, Brüning, Hindenburg, withdrew his permission for the use of Article 48 and Brüning was forced to resign in May 1932. He apparently retired to bed for days, exhausted and suffering from shock at his treatment.

Did Hitler become Chancellor through the back door?

The Cabinet of Barons

Brüning was replaced as Chancellor by the aristocratic Papen (see page 135) with Schleicher as his Defence Minister. None of the members of Papen's rather aristocratic cabinet – nicknamed the 'Cabinet of Barons' – were members of the Reichstag and most had no ties to political parties. Democracy was by now fading fast. Papen's aim was to continue Brüning's policy of ruling by decree, but his position became even more difficult after the election of July 1932. The Nazis achieved their best result so far, becoming the biggest party in the Reichstag with 230 seats, although still without an overall majority. The two parties whose aim it was to destroy the Weimar Republic – the Nazis and the KPD – now controlled more than half the seats between them. This was catastrophic for the survival of democracy.

BRÜNING'S 7

Hurra, Hurra! Der Brüning-Weihnachtsmann ist da!



Source 7 is a photomontage made by John Heartfield in 1930. The title reads 'Hip, Hip, Hurry! Father Christmas Brüning is Here! Study the photomontage carefully. Can you find any symbols? Why do you think Brüning is described as Father Christmas? What does this tell you about Heartfield's views?

Heartfield was born in Berlin in 1891. He used his photomontage techniques to attack the Third Reich, mainly in the *AIZ (Workers' Illustrated)*, a communist journal. He fled to Prague in 1933 and only returned to Germany in 1950.

During Papen's brief spell as Chancellor he attempted to undermine the left by, amongst other things, illegally removing the Prussian government which was led by the SPD.

Despite the lifting of the ban on the SA and SS which Brüning had imposed in April 1932, Hitler refused to work with the Papen government, claiming that with such an election result he should, by rights, be Chancellor himself. In his memoirs, Papen wrote of a meeting he had with Hitler in August 1932. He described Hitler as 'a very different man from the one I had met two months earlier. The modest air of defiance had gone, and I was faced by a demanding politician who had just won a resounding electoral success'. By now, it was clear to Papen that the Nazis had to be brought into the government, but he was determined that it should not be wholly on Hitler's terms. Papen urged Hitler to join in a coalition with the DNVP – but Hitler refused, insisting that he be appointed Chancellor or nothing.

In September, the Reichstag passed an overwhelming vote of no confidence in Papen (512 votes to 42) and the election in November brought no further prospects of support for the government. The Nazis, although they lost 34 seats, remained the largest party by some distance. Papen was prepared to dissolve the Reichstag permanently at this stage and, if necessary, use the army to crush opposition. However, Schleicher persuaded President Hindenburg that this would end in civil war and was himself appointed Chancellor in place of Papen on 2 December 1932. Papen was furious and spent much of the next few weeks plotting his revenge.

Schleicher as Chancellor

Schleicher adopted a very risky strategy. He could see that the attempts by Brüning and Papen to rule without the Reichstag had been unsuccessful. In order to make his Chancellorship more successful he wanted to gain more support from the Reichstag and be seen as the man who managed to unite politicians. However, he was deeply suspicious of Hitler and ruled out any deal with the Nazis as a whole. He therefore took a new approach. Firstly, he attempted to split the Nazis by appealing to the more socialist wing of the party led by Gregor Strasser, who was offered the Vice-Chancellorship. Secondly, he tried to gain some support from the left by offering concessions to the trade unions. However, neither strategy worked. The attempt to lure Strasser and his followers away from the Nazis failed due to Hitler's intervention, and the trade unions were too suspicious of Schleicher's motives to offer him support. Not only that, but powerful industrialists and landowners were alarmed at Schleicher's tactics and began to contemplate a toleration of the Nazis as the lesser of two evils.

Papen, aware of Schleicher's failure, seized his chance for revenge. He decided that a government led by Hitler with him as Vice-Chancellor was his best option. This would guarantee him huge support in the Reichstag and he gambled on the fact that a minority of Nazis in the cabinet would be easily controlled. On 4 January, Papen and Hitler moved towards an agreement. Hindenburg needed some persuasion, but pressure from both Papen and his own son, Oskar, finally convinced him. They shared Papen's view that the Nazis could be 'tamed' and saw the Nazis' drop in electoral support in November as a sign that their support was falling. Hindenburg refused Schleicher's request to dissolve the Reichstag and Schleicher resigned on 28 January. Two days later, Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint Hitler as Chancellor and a cabinet was formed consisting of three Nazis and nine other conservatives, including Papen as Vice-Chancellor.

Election Results: July and November 1932

Party	July 1932		Nov 1932	
	Seats	% of vote	Seats	% of vote
NSDAP	230	37.3	196	33.1
DNVP	37	5.9	52	8.8
DVP	7	1.2	11	1.9
BVP	20	15.9	18	15.0
DDP	4	1.0	2	1.0
SPD	133	21.6	121	20.4
KPD	69	14.3	100	16.9

BRÜNING'S 7

September 1932: The Reichstag passes a vote of no confidence in Papen. Either he has to go, or Germany could face dangerous instability.

December 1932: Schleicher appointed Chancellor. Papen is furious.

January 1933: Papen strikes a deal with the Nazis which Hindenburg accepts. Hitler is appointed Chancellor with Papen as Vice-Chancellor.

Activity

This chapter has so far presented you with a lot of complex information. You now need to review it to make sure you are clear about what happened and why.

Read from 'Brüning as Chancellor' on pages 134 to the bottom of page 137. Make a note of the key events and their consequences using a table like the one below. The timeline should also help you. The table has been started for you.

EVENT

CONSEQUENCE

March 1930: Müller resigns as Chancellor

Brüning becomes Chancellor

July 1930: Reichstag rejects finance bill

Brüning uses Article 48 to enforce the bill

- Now go through your table and highlight the six events which you think were most important in the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Be prepared to defend your choice to others in a class discussion.
- Your final task is to write an answer to the question: 'Why did democracy collapse in Germany between 1930 and 1933?' Use the statements below to structure your work. Explain to what extent you agree or disagree with each one.
 - The main reason why democracy collapsed was because of powers granted to the President by the Weimar Constitution
 - Brüning should not be blamed for the collapse of democracy
 - Hitler's appointment as Chancellor was more down to luck than skill

Document Exercise: Who was responsible for Hitler's appointment as Chancellor?

The role of the Weimar Republic in Hitler's appointment

I was guest of honour at a dinner given by the Berlin Herrenklub... (and) one of the guests was Schroeder, the Cologne banker. As far as I could make out, he seemed to be of the opinion that the government was still under an obligation to reach some accommodation with Hitler. When he suggested that it might still be possible to make a personal approach to Hitler, I agreed. Schroeder rang me up to ask whether I would be free to meet Hitler during the next few days. I told him that I was going to Berlin, via Düsseldorf, on January 4, and could stop at Cologne on the way if he wished... I thought there was still a possibility of persuading Hitler to join the Schleicher government. I had not the slightest intention of causing Schleicher difficulties...

Extracts from the memoirs of Franz von Papen, 1952

1928

June: Hermann Müller appointed Chancellor of the Grand Coalition

1929

June: Publication of the Young Plan
July: Nazis and DNVP unite in opposition to the Young Plan

1930

October: Death of Stresemann
October: US Stock Market crashes

1930

March: Müller resigns and Brüning appointed Chancellor

1930

July: Reichstag dissolved after Brüning uses Article 48

1930

September: Huge Nazi gains in election

1932

February: Unemployment exceeds 6 million

1932

April: Hindenburg re-elected as President

1932

May: Brüning resigns and Papen appointed Chancellor

1932

July: Nazis become the largest party in the Reichstag after election

1932

September: Reichstag passes a vote of no confidence in Papen

1932

November: Nazis lose 34 seats in the election but remain the largest party in the Reichstag

1932

December: Papen resigns and Schleicher appointed Chancellor

1933

January: Secret meeting of Papen and Hitler

1933

January: Schleicher resigns and Hitler is appointed Chancellor

Papen's appointment as Chancellor

On 4 January 1933 Hitler, Papen, Hess, Himmler and Kerppler arrived at my house in Cologne... The negotiations took place exclusively between Hitler and Papen... Papen went on to say that he thought it best to form a government in which the conservative and nationalist elements that had supported him were represented together with the Nazis. He suggested that this new government should, if possible, be led by Hitler and himself together... This meeting between Hitler and Papen on 4 January 1933 in my house in Cologne was arranged by me after Papen had asked me for it on about 10 December 1932.

From the account given by Schroeder at the Nuremberg Tribunal after the war

Papen's contribution to the situation

In the latter part of January, Papen played an increasingly important role in the house of the Reich President, but despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler Chancellor. He wanted to have Papen as Chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition, Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were again missed, a revolt of the National Socialists and civil war were likely.

From the account given by Otto Meissner, State Secretary in Hindenburg's office, to the Nuremberg Tribunal

Papen's role in Hitler's appointment

I have never seen Hitler in such a state; I proposed to him and Coccing that I should see Papen alone that evening and explain the whole situation to him. In the evening I saw Papen and convinced him eventually that the only thing that made sense was Hitler's Chancellorship, and that he must do what he can to bring this about. Papen declared that... he was now absolutely in favour of Hitler becoming Chancellor; this was the decisive change in Papen's attitude.

From the personal notes of Joachim von Ribbentrop, a wealthy member of the Nazi Party since 1931

Examination-style questions

1 Comprehension and context

Study Source B. From this source and your own knowledge, explain why negotiations were taking place between Papen and Hitler.

2 Comparing the sources

Study Sources A and B. To what extent and why do the two sources differ in their account of the 4 January meeting?

3 Assessing the sources

Study Source D. How useful is this source as evidence about the role Papen played in Hitler's appointment?

4 Making judgements

Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain who you feel was most responsible for the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

Why did the Weimar Republic collapse?

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We have already considered whether the Weimar Republic was 'doomed from the start' or not (see page 91). The evidence suggests that this is too simplistic a view. After all, there was at least some recovery between 1924 and 1929. However, the fact remains that the Weimar Republic eventually collapsed in 1933. It could even be argued that democracy ended in 1930, when Brüning began to use Article 48 to bypass the Reichstag. Historians have argued about when the collapse of Weimar became most likely (they tend to avoid the term 'inevitable') with some suggesting 1930 or later and others tracing Weimar's fall back to the 1920s. This section provides you with different historians' views and an opportunity to decide for yourself when and why Weimar's fate was sealed.

Read Sources 8-15 carefully. Some of them are complicated and may need rereading several times. Then copy out and complete the chart below.

Name of historian	Does the historian suggest a date at which the fall of the Weimar Republic became most likely? If so, which date does he or she choose?	What does the historian feel are the key reasons for the fall of the Weimar Republic?

Is there any agreement amongst the historians about when and why Weimar's future collapse became most likely? Can you suggest any reasons why historians differ on this issue?

Read the following quotation. To what extent do you agree with what Kolb is saying?

What made Hitler possible? Was the Nazi 'seizure of power' inevitable in the circumstances that prevailed? Every discussion of the collapse of Weimar circles round these questions, which have received very different answers from researchers up to the present. Certainly, the monocausal (single cause) explanations which at first prevailed...are by now discredited, as all such simplistic accounts have proved inadequate. Historians today at least agree the collapse of the Republic and the Nazi 'seizure of power' can only be plausibly explained in terms of a very complex range of causes.

Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 1988

Structured essay question:

The Weimar Republic collapsed for a variety of reasons, including:

- The Weimar Constitution
- The Wall Street Crash
- The popularity of the Nazis
- Weimar's infatuation

Explain how any two of these factors contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Compare the importance of at least three of these factors as contributions to the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

34

...the political development that culminated in the overthrowing of the Republic by National Socialism was by no means inevitable. In 1923, in similar circumstances, the onslaught of the radical enemy had been successfully repulsed (overcome). The fact that the crisis of 1929-1933 took a different course cannot be explained by economic factors alone, nor can it be looked upon as a consequence of democracy, for Hitler after all did not come to power via a parliamentary majority. Under the prevailing conditions the political activities of an influential group of critics and enemies of the Republic took on a major importance. Beginning with the well intentioned though mistaken policies of Brüning, Germany became the stage on which a procession of ambitious and misguided men sought to make history, from Schleicher and Papen to Hindenburg.

Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, 1969

Economic constraints, both domestic and international, greatly limited the possibilities for positive political action - regardless of whether or not the actors involved had any correct thoughts. This is not to throw the idea of human agency out the window when discussing why democratic politics collapsed in Weimar Germany, but it is to put the actions of those involved into perspective.

Bessell in *Weimar - Why did German Democracy Fail?* ed. Ker Shaw, 1990

34

...the survival chances of the Weimar Democracy might be regarded as fairly poor by the end of 1929, very low by the end of 1930, remote by the middle of 1931 and as good as zero by spring 1932.

Ker Shaw, *Weimar - Why did German Democracy Fail?*, 1990

The promise [by the Nazis] of a new, national community, which would make Germany great again...proved a powerful vision to large numbers of desperate, frightened Germans, for whom Weimar democracy had meant only national humiliation, economic disaster, social conflicts and personal uncertainty. Recognising the force of such a mass movement, and recognising their own lack of a popular base, the nationalist, industrial, agrarian and military elites thought they could 'harness' 'time' and use this movement to give their own schemes for the destruction of democracy a legitimacy (lawfulness) which they could not on their own achieve. Hitler did not need to 'seize' power; the old elites simply opened the door and welcomed him in...In this unique combination of circumstances, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany.

Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 1990

Yet the Weimar Republic survived these early crises when the problems of defeat and reparations were at their most urgent. In fact, coalition governments held together in the mid-twenties in Germany when it came to dealing with the problems associated with the Treaty of Versailles. It was a very different issue which sabotaged coalition government once and for all, namely the issue of the level of unemployment benefits and how one was to fund them.

Geary in *Weimar - Why did German Democracy Fail?* ed. Ker Shaw, 1990

The disintegration of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism were two distinct if obviously overlapping historical processes. By 1932, the collapse of Weimar had become inevitable; Hitler's triumph had not.

Stern, *The Failure of Liberalism*, 1972

Why was the Nazi Party so successful, 1930-1932?

Winning elections

Although the Nazi Party never achieved a majority in the Reichstag and was not technically voted into power, it was the extraordinary success of the Nazis at the polls which made them an extremely useful addition to the government. In 1930, they gained a bigger increase in votes than any party in the whole of German history. Learning from the disappointing results of 1928, Hitler paid more attention to winning the middle-class and farming votes and less attention to socialist or anti-Semitic policies. The Nazis, together with the KPD, were the main beneficiaries of the government's failure to address the economic crisis effectively. The Nazis were particularly attractive to those who had lost faith in the Weimar Republic, longed for strong leadership and feared communism. The Nazis prided themselves on presenting the most consistent and effective opposition to communism, a stance which won them a great deal of support from the middle class. Running alongside all of this were Goebbels' propaganda campaigns.

Why did the Nazis achieve power and not the communists?

The economic crisis following the Wall Street Crash could, in theory, have strengthened the communists more than the Nazis. Certainly, unemployed workers were more likely to vote for the KPD than the Nazi Party and the depression could have further undermined confidence in the capitalist system. However, from the very beginning of the Weimar Republic, the communists were weakened by a lack of mass support, the absence of a charismatic leader and a lack of co-operation with the SPD. Furthermore, the increasing influence of Russia on the policies of the KPD did little to endear it to the German people. Although its strength in the Reichstag increased between 1928 and 1932, the KPD continued to suffer from an absence of broad-based support such as that enjoyed by the Nazis. What support they did have came mainly from the weakest section of the working class and even here, they were in competition with the SPD.

Ironically, the growing strength of the communists helped rather than hindered the Nazis. Fear of communism drove many people into the Nazi camp, not least members of the elite for whom co-operation with the Nazis was at least preferable to a growth in the power of the left. This is the final, compelling reason why the Nazis succeeded where the communists failed. The right-wing German elite would have done almost anything to keep the communists out.

Who voted for the Nazis?

Historians are in agreement that the group most likely to support the Nazis by the beginning of the 1930s was the *mitelstand* or lower middle class who felt that their interests were being squeezed between big business on the one hand and the rise of communism on the other. There has been a more recent debate, however, about the extent of working-class support for the party. As you will see from the evidence on the next few pages, what characterized the Nazi Party's supporters more than anything was their diversity. They were young and old, rich and poor, Protestant and Catholic. However, some groups of people were more likely to vote for the Nazis than others.

Historical debate

Source 14

The mass support of the Nazis in 1932 came from those who had voted in 1928 for the middle-class parties, like the People's Party, the Democrats, and the Economic Party, whose combined vote of 5,582,500 in 1928 had sunk to 954,700 in 1932; from the Nationalist Party, which had lost a million and a half votes; from young people, many of whom without jobs, voting for the first time; and from those who had not voted before, but had been stired by events and by propaganda to come to the polls this time.

Bullock, *Hitler A Study in Tyranny*, 1952

Source 15

This first mass layer of (middle class) Nazi followers was reinforced by the equally uprooted unemployed, comprising more than one-fifth of the labour force and representing the political driftwood of the late Weimar Republic.

Neumann, *Modern Political Parties*, 1956

Source 16

The NSDAP did not succeed in making inroads among the workers and the trade unions. Despite all efforts of the 'left' wing, the NSDAP claim to being a 'socialist workers' party' remained a propaganda facade. Compared with the early days of the party... the newly formed NSDAP had, sociologically speaking, turned into a middle-class right-wing party without any ties to organized labour... the membership of the NSDAP was composed of the lower middle class, of merchants, artisans, white-collar workers, military adventurers, and youthful romantic activists.

Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, 1969

Source 17

Although the NSDAP claimed to be a 'workers' party' in its very title... the nucleus of the membership of the Nazi Party was drawn from the *Mittelstand*... However, though never a workers' party as such, the Nazi Party did mobilise an increasingly sizeable membership of blue-collar workers during the 1920s, and by the early 1930s blue collar workers accounted for around 40% of the Party's total membership, making the NSDAP an important force in the political mobilisation of the working-class.

Muhlbacher 'A Workers' Party or a Party without Workers?' in Fischer (ed.), *The Rise of Nazism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany*, 1966

Source 18

The Nazi Party was without doubt a *Volkspartei* (people's party): recruiting its members and its voters across a broad range of social groups, from both sexes and from the older generation... Being Catholic, unemployed or living in a large town significantly reduced the likelihood of voters to opt for Hitler... Conversely, being Protestant in rural Germany greatly increased such a propensity, as did the absence of strong loyalties.

Gearty, 'Who Voted for the Nazis?' in *History Today*, October 1998

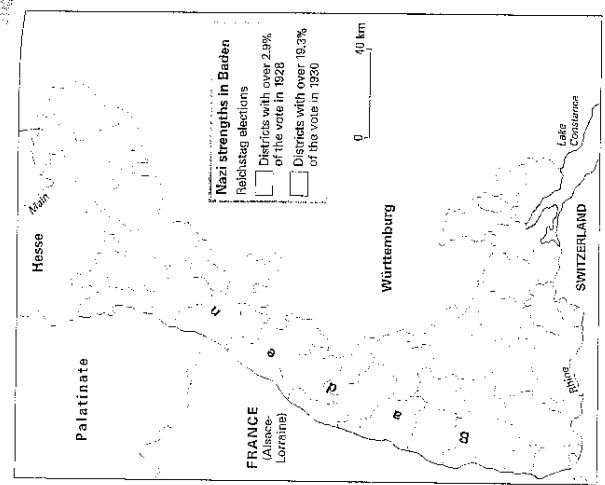
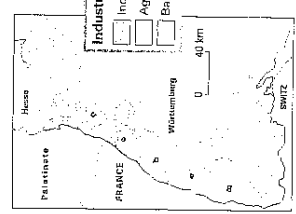
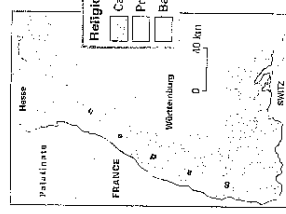
Activity

- 1 List all the types of people that these historians believed were most likely to vote for the Nazis.
- 2 How far do the historians agree with each other about Nazi supporters? Give examples of where they agree and disagree.
- 3 Can you suggest any reasons for the areas of disagreement between historians on this issue? (You may find this question easier to answer after completing the activity on the next page.)

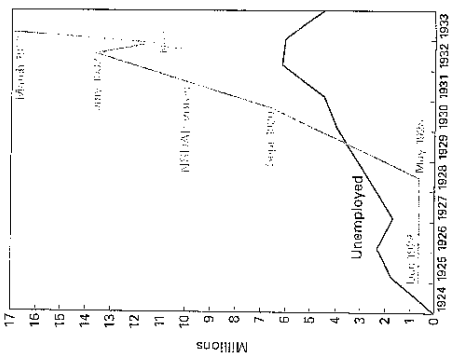
KPD seats in the Reichstag

1928	54
1930	77
1932 (July)	89
1932 (Nov)	100

Who supported the Nazis?



SPAIN, 1928-1933



SPAIN, 1928-1933

	1928	1930	1932 (July)	1933 (Nov.)
Religious denomination				
Catholic	30	20	17	24
Other	70	80	83	76
Community size				
0-5,000	39	41	45	47
5,000-20,000	14	13	13	12
20,000-100,000	16	15	13	13
More than 100,000	31	31	29	28
Social class				
Working class	40	40	39	40
New middle class	23	21	19	18
Old middle class	37	39	42	42



* People who joined the Nazi Party between February 1925 and January 1933 and were still members in 1934.

SPAIN, 1928-1933

	1920	1924	1928	1930	1932 (July)	1932 (Nov.)
NSDAP	-	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.3	33.1
DNP	14.9	20.5	14.2	7.0	5.9	8.8
DVP	13.9	10.1	8.7	4.5	1.2	1.9
ZBVP	17.9	17.3	15.1	14.8	15.0	14.1
DDP	8.3	6.3	4.9	3.8	1.0	1.0
SPD	21.6	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4
USPD	17.9	0.3	0.1	-	-	-
KPD	2.1	9.0	10.6	13.1	14.3	16.9
Turnout	79.1	78.8	75.6	81.9	84.0	88.5

SPAIN, 1928-1933

SPAIN, 1928-1933

Make sure you have completed the activity on page 143. Copy and complete the following chart:

Type of person identified as most likely to vote Nazi (in the extracts on page 143)	Evidence which supports this view	Evidence which does not support this view	Limitations of the evidence

Using your completed chart, what conclusions can you reach about the types of people who were most likely to support the Nazis after 1928?

Why do you think these types of people supported the Nazis? (You may wish to draw on material from Chapter 6 in this answer)

For inclusion into your key skills portfolio, you should produce an extended analysis of this issue. To support your analysis, you should select and download two 1933 election posters from the Internet to illustrate the messages and potential appeal of Nazi propaganda. See page 177 for a suggested website.

Did big business support the Nazis?

After the war some left-wing historians claimed that the Nazis got into power because of their support from big business. It is true that the links established with Hugenberg in 1929 provided the Nazis with a source of industrial funds and that Hitler went out of his way to woo industrial leaders. In January 1932 he delivered a two-and-a-half hour speech to members of the Industry Club in Düsseldorf at the invitation of Fritz Thyssen, a steel magnate who was a member and financial supporter of the Nazis. Although the speech received 'tumultuous' applause, further financial support was slow to appear. Until 1933, the Nazis gained support from only a handful of German industrialists - Thyssen was the most significant, giving 1 million marks to the Party. Even the petition sent by leading industrialists to Hindenburg in November 1932, asking him to appoint Hitler as Chancellor, does not confirm that the rise of the Nazis was the result of this support. In fact, many big industrialists who became active supporters of the Nazis did so only after Hitler's appointment in January 1933.

Document exercise: Big business and the Nazis

Annual accounts of an east Prussian branch of the Party in 1931

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
I Subscriptions			
a) Adoption Dues	100.00	Adoption Dues	104.50
b) Monthly Dues	337.90	Monthly Dues	343.55
c) Publicity Fees	45.90	Publicity Fees	-
d) Documentation Fees	-	Documentation Fees	-
e) SA Insurance Dues	132.30	SA Insurance Dues	170.40
f) Extraordinary Dues	-	Extraordinary Dues	-
II Donations			
a) Voluntary and from Collections	1620.68	II Administrative Expenses	-
		a) Town Group	299.37
		b) District Leader	108.20
		c) SA Lieutenant & Colonel	61.40
III Propaganda			
a) Sale of Admission Tickets to Meetings	1203.65	III Propaganda	1352.10
b) Donations to the Fighting Fund, resp. Meetings	754.05	a) Small Ads, Leaflets	-
		Speakers' Fees	-
		b) Travel, local SA	413.25
		c) Travel, outside SA	88.00
		d) Rent for Rooms	196.30
		e) Donations to Gau resp. Elections	200.00
IV General			
	475.95	IV Extraordinary Expenses	-
		a) For local SA	771.96
		b) For Hitler Youth	22.20
		c) Cover for Damages at Meeting	102.45
		V. General	298.50
Totals	4670.43		4532.18

Source 10B

Hitler tries to win support from industrialists, 1932

...our situation in the world...is but the result of our own underestimate of German strength. Only when we have once more changed this fatal valuation of ourselves can Germany take advantage of the political possibilities which, if we look far enough into the future, can place German life once more upon a natural and secure basis - and that means either new living space and the development of a great internal market or protection of German economic life against the world. The labour resources of our people, the capacities we have them already; no one can deny that we are industrious. But we must first refashion the political pre-conditions: without that, industry...and economy are of no avail...

Baynes (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, 1932*

Source 10C

A major factor in Hitler's views

Hitler's contacts with leaders of business, industry and agriculture had meanwhile deepened without most of them being persuaded that what the solution needed was a Nazi dictatorship. In 1931 the links with Hugenberg had been renewed in the 'Harzburg Front', named after a meeting of nationalist organisations at Bad Harzburg in Lower Saxony...In January 1932 Hitler addressed the influential Düsseldorf Industrial Club, winning some support but leaving many still unconvinced that he was their man.

Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1991



The poster says 'The meaning of the Hitler saying "Millions stand behind me".'

Source 10D

Examining the poster-style

1 Comprehension in context

Study Source A. What can it tell us about the sources of Nazi funding in 1932?

2 Comparing the sources

How far and for what reasons do Sources C and D put forward different views about the extent of industrial support for the Nazis before 1932?

3 Assessing the sources

How could a historian make maximum use out of Source D as evidence about Germany in 1932?

4 Making judgements

Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain how important you think industrial support was to Nazi success, 1930-1932.

Conclusions

- The Wall Street Crash was a key factor in the fall of the Weimar Republic
- Democracy in Germany effectively ended in 1930 with the frequent use of Article 48
- The Nazi Party grew considerably in strength between 1930 and 1932 for a number of reasons. These included the economic crisis, fear of communism, the weakness of other radical parties and the tactics and strengths of the Nazi Party itself.
- Hitler did get into power through the 'back door', although success in elections made this possible
- There are a number of points at which the fall of Weimar became most likely. The decision is yours.