



Members of the SA during a training March outside Munich in 1923

Fact

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

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

After 1924, the Nazi Party changed tactics, tightening party discipline and contesting Reichstag elections. Hitler exerted the *Führerprinzip* (see pages 74–75), demanding obedience because 'he knew best'. The SS (*Schutzstaffel*) was set up in 1925–26 as Hitler's personal bodyguard and the SA was refounded in 1926, with its distinctive brown uniforms.

New party organisations were also created, for women, students, young people and teachers. These helped the party to direct its appeal to a wide spectrum of society and to make more people and institutions aware of Nazism. Although the relative prosperity of 1925–29 did not help, Nazis pursued some energetic recruitment, concentrating on the middle class and the farmers of northern Germany who did not benefit from Weimar's 'golden years'. This yielded some success, although the results of the elections of May 1928 were disappointing – the Nazis won only 12 seats (2.6% of the vote).

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

SOURCE B

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

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

How far did the circumstances of 1929–33 open the way for Hitler's rise to power?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fact

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

Fact

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

Fact

In the first round of the presidential elections, in March 1932, Hitler won 30.2% of the total votes cast and forced a second ballot. He visited 21 different towns by plane in a week and increased his share of the vote in the second round in April to 36.7%.

SOURCE C

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

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

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

Activity

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

Another Reichstag election, in November 1932, saw Nazi support decline to 196 seats. This suggested that the Nazis' electoral fortunes had peaked. Joseph Goebbels, director of propaganda from 1929, commented, 'This year has brought us eternal ill luck. The past was sad, and the future looks dark and gloomy; all chances and hopes have quite disappeared.' Furthermore, the KPD, which had won 89 seats in July, increased their vote by 17% to obtain 100 seats in November. However, it was to the Nazis' advantage that the communists refused to cooperate with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (who had 121 seats) and that the KPD's electoral victories and huge presence in the streets had the effect of frightening the conservative élite and encouraging them to turn to Hitler.

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

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

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

Question

What were the long-term and short-term factors that led to Hitler becoming chancellor in January 1933?

Fact

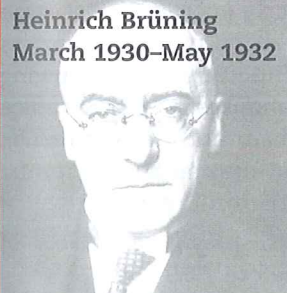


On 27 February 1933, the Reichstag building was burnt down. The Nazis claimed this was the work of a Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, acting on behalf of the KPD. However, there is no reliable evidence to prove this was the case. There has been speculation that Hitler or Goering and the SA provoked this incident as an excuse to act against their opponents. Almost 50 years later, the West German government pardoned van der Lubbe.

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

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

On 5 March 1933, the Nazis gained 43.9% of the total votes cast. While impressive, this left Hitler reliant on other parties to obtain the two-thirds majority needed to change the constitution. The conservative DNVP, which won 8%, offered support, but a deal had to be struck with the Catholic Centre Party, which had won 11.2%. This committed Nazism to protect the Church (see page 107). The emergency decree was also used to expel all communists from the Reichstag.

The end of Weimar democracy

Chancellors	Developments
 <p>Heinrich Brüning March 1930–May 1932</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No majority in the Reichstag; relied on president's emergency decrees Nazis became the second largest party with 18.3% of the vote in elections of September 1930 Government seemed weak and unable to control street violence although SA was banned in April 1932 Economic depression continued; proposed agrarian reforms angered the powerful Prussian landowners (Junkers) and Hindenburg; Brüning resigned
 <p>Franz von Papen June 1932–November 1932</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little Reichstag support and government formed from outside the Reichstag Tried to gain Nazi support by lifting ban on SA (June 1932) – violence grew Relied on presidential decrees and ended democratic government in Prussia Nazis became largest party (37.3% of the vote) in July 1932; with communists, held over half the Reichstag seats Nazis won 33.1% of the vote and communists 16.9% in November 1932; von Papen resigned
 <p>Kurt von Schleicher December 1932–January 1933</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss Brüning and von Papen but reluctant to be chancellor Tried to ally with Gregor Strasser and 'socialist' Nazis, but Strasser refused Relied on presidential decrees Von Papen schemed against von Schleicher to get Hitler made chancellor with von Papen as vice chancellor; von Schleicher dismissed

As the SA and SS whipped up support in the localities, in a piece of cleverly timed propaganda President Hindenburg was persuaded to stand alongside Hitler, in full military dress, at a ceremony of national reconciliation in Potsdam on 21 March 1933. Consequently, on 23 March, the Enabling Act was passed with only 94 SPD members voting against it. This was to provide the basis for Hitler's dictatorship. It virtually destroyed the power of the Reichstag by allowing the chancellor to issue laws without consultation for a period of four years.

Question

What was the significance of the Enabling Act?

Gleichschaltung This refers to a co-ordination process whereby all German institutions were to conform to Nazi ideals.

Historical debate

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

Theory of knowledge

Historical determinism

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

It took Hitler just four months after the Enabling Act was passed to set up a single-party state. He was able to combine his legal powers and the threat of force to remove or Nazify those groups or institutions that might limit his power in a process known as **Gleichschaltung**. The constitution of 1919 was never formally abandoned and the Reichstag survived, but in the first six months of 1933, what lingering democracy there had been was destroyed. For further information on how Hitler consolidated his position, see Unit 3.

End of unit activities

- 1 Make a diagram to illustrate why Hitler became chancellor of Germany in January 1933, using the following layout.

Long term	Short term	Catalyst	Specific event(s)

- 2 Find out more about those who voted for the Nazi Party in 1930–32. Research the level of support for the Nazis, explaining which aspects of Nazism each group found attractive and arrange your points under the following headings: working class; lower middle class (shopkeepers and office workers); upper middle class (businessmen, bankers and professionals); the élite (aristocracy, army officers, members of government); Protestants/Catholics; northern Germans/southern Germans; others.
- 3 Make a Powerpoint® presentation for your class displaying a variety of election posters used by the Nazis to win support before 1933.
- 4 Make a spider diagram to illustrate why parliamentary government collapsed in Germany in the years 1930–33.
- 5 Divide into two groups. One group should seek to support the view that Hitler's rise to power was inevitable in the context of Germany in 1918–33; the other should seek to support the view that there was nothing inevitable about the Nazis' rise (considering, for example, that the Weimar Republic could have survived or that power might equally well have gone to the communists). Each group should present its findings for a class debate.
- 6 What was the personal contribution of Adolf Hitler to the rise of Nazism? Make a four-column chart, with the headings, 'Personality', 'Leadership qualities', 'Communication skills' and 'Political strategy'. Under each heading, try to record as many points and examples as you can to support the importance of this attribute.

2 Ideology and the nature of the state

Key questions

- To what extent was Nazi ideology rooted in the past?
- What did Hitler himself contribute to Nazi ideology?
- How important was the role of ideology in Nazi Germany?

Overview

- Many of the elements that made up Nazi ideology were already to be found in 19th- and early 20th-century thought – for example, the belief in the superiority of the Aryan race, anti-Semitism, the cult of the leader or *Führerprinzip*, and the concept of the survival of the fittest, known as Social Darwinism.
- Hitler brought his own belief in German nationalism to the NSDAP and drew on the discontent in post-war Germany to establish a new doctrine of Nazism. In 1920, his 25-point programme set out the principles of nationalism, racialism, anti-Semitism and *Volksgemeinschaft* (community). In the 1920s and 1930s, there was an increasing emphasis on anti-communism, anti-feminism, the need to prepare for war to combat communism and obtain *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east, and on the aims of achieving racial unity, the elimination of the Jews and total authoritarian control.
- Ideology remained fluid throughout the 12 years of Nazi rule and was adapted according to circumstances. However, it was used to justify policies that seemed to make little practical sense, such as the murder of millions of Jews at a time when Germany was suffering an acute labour shortage.

Timeline

- 1908 Hitler begins to develop his ideas in Vienna
- 1919 Weimar Republic is established; Treaty of Versailles is signed, which influenced Hitler's thinking
- 1920 25-point programme is introduced reconciling nationalism and socialism
- 1924 Hitler writes his semi-autobiographical *Mein Kampf* while in Landsberg Fortress
- 1933 Hitler becomes chancellor and is in a position to put ideology into practice
- 1942 final details of the Holocaust are established



A poster showing Nazi anti-Marxism and anti-Semitism; a Marxist 'angel' is walking hand-in-hand with a wealthy Jewish businessman and the text says: 'Marxism is the guardian angel of capitalism. Vote National Socialist.'