

3.2 Why was Hitler able to dominate Germany by 1934?

Topic Summary



In 1919 Hitler became one of the earliest members of the DAP, an extreme nationalist party which the following year became the NSDAP (Nazis). Hitler soon emerged as one of the Nazi Party leaders. The Nazis had many extreme ideas, but anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) was one of the most important. During the 1920s the Nazis did not get much support. In 1923 Hitler tried to seize power in the Munich putsch, but he was arrested and imprisoned, and the Nazi Party was banned temporarily. His big chance came with the Great Depression which hit Germany at the end of 1929. Millions lost their jobs. The politicians of the Weimar Republic couldn't agree on what to do. In their desperation, people turned to extremists like the Nazis and communists. By 1932 support for the Nazis had grown so much that they had become the largest party in the Reichstag. In January 1933 President Hindenburg was persuaded to invite Hitler to become chancellor. New elections were announced. Hitler launched a terror campaign against his opponents. The elections gave Hitler the result he needed. With his allies he had enough votes to pass the Enabling Law in 1933, which gave him sweeping powers. Hitler was now dictator of Germany. The next year, in the Night of the Long Knives, Hitler turned on his opponents inside the Nazi Party. When Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler took over his powers. He was now Führer (leader) of Germany.

What do I Need to Know?



You will need to know about the early years of the Nazi Party, its ideas, and why initially it failed to win support. You should understand how the impact of the Depression benefited extremist parties in Germany, and how Hitler became chancellor at Hindenburg's invitation in January 1933. You must be able to explain how the Nazis won the election of March 1933, passed the Enabling Law, and established a dictatorship. You should understand the significance of the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, and know how Hitler was able to take total power after Hindenburg's death.

Key Topics

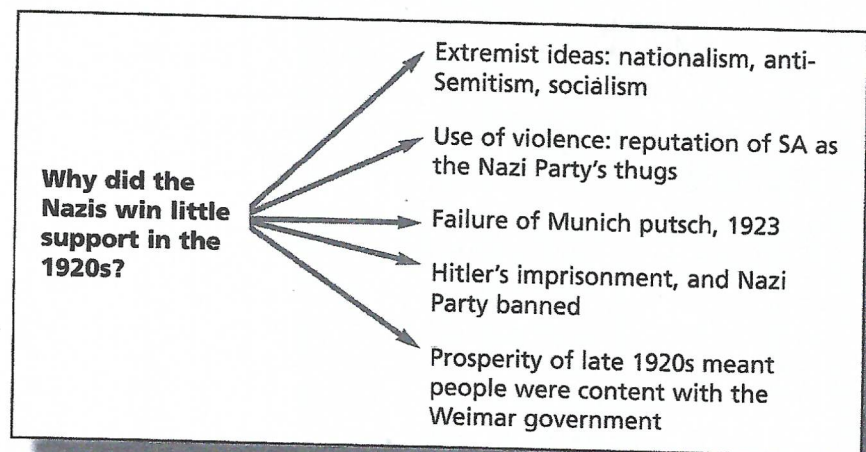


What did the Nazi Party stand for in the 1920s?

- In 1919 Hitler joined the DAP (German Workers' Party). This was an extreme nationalist party. His talent for public speaking ensured that he soon became one of its leaders.

- He was involved in writing DAP's 25-point programme. As well as many other ideas, DAP demanded the union of all Germans, living space for the German people, and profit sharing for workers in all large companies. At this early stage the party had some socialist ideas, but it got rid of these later. One thing it never changed was its anti-Semitism.
- In 1920 the party was renamed the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party, or 'Nazis'). The Nazis set up a paramilitary organisation known as the 'Stormtroopers' (the SA), and used the swastika as their party badge. The SA became notorious for their violence against the Nazis' opponents.
- The Nazis attracted support from many unemployed soldiers and others who were bitter about the outcome of the First World War. By 1923 Hitler thought he had enough support to seize power, but the Munich putsch was a failure. Hitler was arrested and put in prison until December 1924. He used his time in prison to write *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'). The Nazis were banned, and though the ban was lifted by 1925, for the rest of the 1920s they made only modest progress. Their annual Nuremberg national party rallies started in 1927. The apparent recovery of the Weimar Republic meant people had little time for extreme parties. In the 1928 election, the Nazis won only 12 Reichstag seats.

Summary Box 1



Why was Hitler able to become Chancellor by 1933?

- In October 1929, Stresemann died, and the Wall Street Crash in the US sparked off the Great Depression. US loans to Germany stopped and German industry collapsed. Millions were made unemployed. Desperate people turned to extremist parties for help. Support for the Nazis rapidly increased.
- The Weimar politicians could not cope with the effects of the Depression. No one party had enough support in the Reichstag to form a strong government. From 1930 President Hindenburg ruled by decree, and appointed his own chancellors. Between 1930 and 1932 Heinrich Brüning of the Centre Party was chancellor.

- As a result of the July 1932 elections the Nazis became the largest party in the Reichstag with 230 seats. Although this fell to 196 seats in the November 1932 elections, the Nazis still had more seats than any other party. However, this was still nowhere near enough seats to form a government on their own.
- Hindenburg was surrounded by a small group of conservative advisers who plotted against each other for power. One of them, von Papen, thought he could use Hitler to make himself more powerful. He persuaded Hindenburg to invite Hitler to become chancellor, but of a coalition government with only three Nazis in it. Von Papen would be vice-chancellor.
- Hindenburg reluctantly agreed, and on 30 January 1933 Hitler became chancellor.
- New elections were called for in March 1933. The election campaign gave Hitler ample opportunity to win full control. He banned the Communist Party and shut down their newspapers. He used the SA to intimidate political opponents. On 27 February 1933 the Reichstag building was destroyed by fire. A communist, van der Lubbe, was found inside the burning building and was blamed for the fire. Hitler used the fire to intensify anti-communist hysteria. Hindenburg passed an emergency decree allowing Hitler to arrest communist leaders, and ban his opponents from holding political meetings.
- The election results were good for Hitler. The Nazis won 288 seats out of 647. By banning the 81 communist deputies, and by promising the Centre Party not to harm the Catholic Church, Hitler with his allies had enough votes to pass the Enabling Law, which gave him power to make laws without referring to the Reichstag.
- The Enabling Law of March 1933 made Hitler dictator over Germany. In July he banned all other political parties.
- The only significant threats to Hitler now came from within the Nazi Party. The SA had become a major problem. Röhm, leader of the SA, had left-wing views which would offend the businessmen that Hitler now wanted to work with. Röhm also wanted to merge the SA into the German army, but Hitler feared this would lose him the army's support.
- On 30 June 1934 Hitler ordered his elite bodyguard (the SS) to arrest and murder the leaders of the SA. Hundreds of SA members and others of Hitler's opponents such as Schleicher, the ex-chancellor, were killed. Hitler pretended that Röhm was planning a revolution to justify his actions. In reality, Röhm's 'crime' was to be a potential rival to Hitler.
- On 2 August 1934 Hindenburg died. His death allowed Hitler to declare himself Führer (leader) of Germany. The army was made to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Hitler had achieved total power.

Summary Box 2

Hitler's steps to power, 1929-34

- Impact of the Great Depression: millions unemployed, extremist parties gain support
- Weimar democracy collapses, Hindenburg rules by decree
- Nazis become largest party in Reichstag, 1932
- Von Papen persuades Hindenburg to make Hitler chancellor, January 1933
- Hitler uses election campaign and Reichstag fire to crush communists
- March 1933 elections: Hitler wins enough seats to pass Enabling Law. Germany becomes a dictatorship
- June 1934, Night of the Long Knives: Hitler moves against SA, and has opponents murdered
- August 1934: Hindenburg's death. Hitler becomes Führer

What do I Know?



What was the importance of:

- the SA
- the Reichstag fire
- the Enabling Law
- the Night of the Long Knives?

- 1 How many points were there in the 1920 programme of the German Workers' Party?
- 2 What new name did the German Workers' Party adopt in 1920?
- 3 Give another name for the 'Stormtroopers'.
- 4 Name the book that Hitler wrote whilst in prison.
- 5 From 1927, where did the Nazis hold their national party rallies?
- 6 Which prominent German politician died in October 1929?
- 7 Who was chancellor between 1930 and 1932?
- 8 Who persuaded Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor?
- 9 How many Nazis were in Hitler's first Cabinet?
- 10 Who was blamed for the Reichstag Fire?
- 11 Which law passed in March 1933 gave Hitler the power of a dictator?
- 12 Which party supported this law when Hitler promised not to harm the Catholic Church?
- 13 Who was leader of the SA?
- 14 Which former chancellor was murdered in the Night of the Long Knives?
- 15 Whose death in August 1934 enabled Hitler to take the title of Führer?

My score ...

**Exam Type
Question**



The Optional Depth Studies are tested in Section C of Paper 1. On your chosen Depth Study you will have to answer two questions. The first will be a compulsory source-based question. There will be three sources and three sub-questions to answer. The second question will be structured, also consisting of three parts (worth 4, 6 and 10 marks for each part). There will be two of these structured questions, and you choose one.

Here is an example of a structured question on Hitler's rise to power.

- (a) Describe the main ideas that the Nazi Party stood for in the 1920s. **(4 marks)**
- (b) Explain why the Nazi Party attracted little support during the 1920s. **(6 marks)**
- (c) Explain how the following together contributed to Hitler becoming chancellor in January 1933:
 - (i) the impact of the Great Depression;
 - (ii) increasing Nazi support in elections, 1930-2;
 - (iii) political intrigues involving Hindenburg. **(10 marks)**

Have a go yourself at parts (a) and (c) - here are a couple of students' answers to part (b).