

The Weimar Republic, Hitler's Rise to Power and Nazi Germany

HTAV Student Lectures
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Nazi propaganda poster titled "Long live Germany" (undated).

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1. THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

Focus question: despite some success, why did the Weimar Republic fail?

a. Formation and the years of crisis (1918-1923)

The Weimar republic came about post-WWI as a result of military defeat and a dual revolution from above and below (see pages 152-154 of the reading). The first four to five of the republic was marked by political instability and economic turmoil. Key dates/events during this period include:

- Military government hands power to a civilian government (October 1918)
- The revolution from below: mutinies, violent uprisings, declarations of independence, abdications and an armistice (late 1918-early 1919)
- Formation of a Constituent Assembly (January 1919) and the promulgation of a constitution (August 1919) which included Article 48. A period of political instability, largely due to a coalition government being in place, followed
- The signing of the Treaty of Versailles (June 1919): the “noose around Germany’s neck”
- Inflation (1921-1922) and hyperinflation (1923). Prior to the total collapse of the German Mark in November 1923, 4.2 trillion German Marks was worth one US dollar.
- Failed Beer Hall Putsch (November 1923)

b. Success and the Weimar renaissance (1923-1929)

Under the leadership of Stresemann the following six years of the republic were remarkably successful considering the difficulties Germany had recently encountered. This period was characterised by increased economic prosperity, decreased civil disturbances, increased political stability, a flourishing cultural life and an acceptance (to a certain extent) of Versailles by the German leadership. Key dates/events during this period include:

- A re-issuing of German currency (1924), the beginning of the Dawes Plan (1924) whereby massive US investment flowed into German industry and a rescheduling of reparation payments
- Foreign policy improvements, including: treaties with Russia (1922 and 1926), the Locarno pact (1925), joining the League of Nations (1926) and signing the Kellogg-Briand pact (1928)
- Beginnings of the Young Plan (August 1929) which reduced reparations to one third of what they had been
- Stresemann's death (October 1929)

c. Collapse (1929-1933)

Party Representation in the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic						
Party	May 1928	Sept. 1930	July 1932	Nov. 1932	Mar. 1933	Nov. 1933
National Socialist (Nazi)	12	108	230	196	288	661
German National Peoples	78	41	37	51	52	
German Peoples	45	30	7	11	2	
Economic	23	23	2	1		
Catholic Center	61	68	75	70	74	
Bavarian Peoples	17	19	22	20	18	
State (Democrats)	25	15	4	2	5	
Social Democrat (Socialist)	153	143	133	121	120	
Communist	54	77	89	100	81	
Other Parties	23	53	9	12	7	
Totals	491	577	608	584	647	661

Reichstag composition in the last years of the Weimar Republic.

The US stock market crashed (October 1929) triggering a world-wide depression, which was felt acutely in Germany mainly due to the republic's reliance on foreign investment (US). Once investment was pulled out a downward economic spiral resulted. This led to increased political instability and allowed extremism to take root and eventually flourish. Key dates/events during this period include:

- Rapid increase in un-employment (see figures at the bottom of page 156 of reading)
- Collapse of banking and insurance companies, the reduction of industrial output by upwards of 50% and foreign trade decreasing by two thirds between 1929 and 1932
- The collapse of the coalition government (March 1930) and the activation of Article 48 by President Hindenburg allowing Chancellor Brüning to govern with a minority government until May 1932
- This political instability allowed the Nazis and (to a lesser extent) the Communists to gain a political foothold and leverage the dire economic conditions and political instability to their advantage (note the significant increase in votes gained by the Nazi party in the September 1930 elections)
- There is no definitive date or act to end the Weimar republic, although certainly many of the republic's democratic principles were stripped away by Hitler in early-mid 1933.



Nazi Poster (undated): "Against Corruption / Vote for National Socialists / Hitler Movement!"

- d. Sample essay questions (IB Papers 2 or 3) on the Weimar Republic

Analyse the political developments and external relations of Weimar Germany between 1919 and 1933. (May 2003)

“Unwanted and unloved”. How far do you agree with this assessment of the Weimar Republic in Germany between 1918 and 1933? (Nov 2004)

Assess the strength of Weimar Germany between 1919 and 1932. (May 2005)

Note the theme that runs through these questions: strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar Republic and how these weaknesses led to the eventual downfall of the Weimar Republic.

Sample Markscheme

“Unwanted and unloved.” How far do agree with this assessment of the Weimar Republic in Germany between 1918 and 1933?

The questions asks candidates to discuss the formation of the Weimar Republic to see whether it was “unwanted” and then to discuss its policies up to 1933 to see if it was “unloved”. Naturally any answer to these questions will depend on the perspective of the person making the analysis and the time period which is under discussion. The Weimar Republic was a democratic state which was popular among some groups, but not socialist enough for others, and among monarchists/aristocrats it would have been unpopular. By 1924 the situation in Germany was improving. But, by 1929 after the Wall Street Crash, a constitutional crisis occurred leading to a drift to the right and Hitler’s accession to power. Candidates should not just focus on Versailles and Hitler.

[0 to 7 marks] maximum for uncritical accounts of the Weimar Republic.

[8 to 10 marks] for some mention of events/policies but only passing connection between these and the demands of the question.

[11 to 13 marks] for answers that include a more detailed account of events/policies with an explicit attempt at analysis which will be rather superficial.

[14 to 16 marks] for details linked to the question through a clear line of argument. The analysis will be more fully developed.

[17+ marks] for answers that carefully select those events/policies which show that the Weimar Republic was/was not “unwanted” or “unloved” and which provide a clear analysis of the relationship between them.

2. HITLER'S RISE

Focus question: how did Hitler rise to power (January 1933)
and consolidate his power (August 1934)?

a. Background

Key dates/events that are part of the background to Hitler's rise to power:

- Hitler joins the German Worker's Party (1919)
- Beer Hall Putsch (November 1923)
- Prison and Mein Kampf (1924)
- Reorganisation of Nazi Party (mid-late 1920s)
- Depression/Wall Street Crash (October 1929)

b. Rise

Key dates/events that are part of the background to Hitler's rise to power:

- Elections of September 1930 (107 seats won)
- Elections of July 1932 (230 seats won)
- Elections of November 1932 (196 seats won)
- Installed as Chancellor (January 31, 1933)

Date	% of vote	Seats in Reichstag
May 1924	6.5	32
December 1924	3.0	14
May 1928	2.6	12
September 1930	18.3	107
July 1932	37.4	230
November 1932	33.1	196
March 1933	43.9	288



Nazi election poster (1932): "We laborers have awoken!
We vote for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis)!"

c. Consolidation

Key dates/events that are part of the background to Hitler's rise to power:

- Gleichschaltung (January 1933-August 1934)
- The Reichstag Fire (February 1933)
- Elections of March 1933 (288 seats won)
- The passing of the Enabling Act (March 1933)
- All other political parties illegal (July 1933)
- The Night of the Long Knives (June-July 1934)
- Death of Hindenburg, ascension to Fuhrer (combination of Chancellor and President), oath of loyalty from army (August 1934)

d. So why did Hitler come to power?

Hitler was able to come to power due to a combination of events and circumstances. Pages 159-169 of the reading provide an excellent perspective on Hitler's rise that breaks the reasons into three categories/stages:

- The disintegration of the Weimar republic
- Nazism emerging as a dynamic movement which gained substantial support from areas of the electorate disillusioned with Weimar
- The conservative right allowing Nazism to exploit the flawed political structure of Weimar

Historian Alan Bullock believes Hitler was able to come to power due to the following (this is very much a simplified version of Bullock's thesis):

- Disunity of Hitler's opponents
- Hitler's luck and his abilities/skills
- Put into power by backstage intrigue
- The lack of lament over the final collapse of the Weimar Republic.

- e. Sample essay questions (IB Papers 2 or 3) on
Hitler's rise to power

Evaluate the importance of ideology in the policies of two of the following rulers of SPS:
Castro, Hitler, Lenin, Nyerere. (May 2004)

"Fascism's rise to power in Italy and Germany in the inter-war years largely resulted from the consequences of the First World War." To what extent do you agree with this verdict?
(November 2004)

Note: often Paper 2 will feature an open RISE SPS question. For example: "Analyse the methods used and the conditions which helped in the rise to power of one Single Party State leader". (May 2007)

Sample Mark schemes

Analyse the methods used and the conditions which helped in the rise to power of *one* ruler of a single-party state.

This question requires candidates to select one single-party state, and first establish and analyse the methods used by the aspiring leader to obtain power. Methods could include: choice and use of an ideology; how support both inside the country, and from foreign sources, was obtained; the appeal of the leader; propaganda; whether legal or violent methods were used. Candidates must also consider how the conditions in the chosen country were ripe for a new regime, for example a lost war, poor economy, weak government *etc.*

[0 to 7 marks] for inadequate/general material.

[8 to 10 marks] for narrative with implicit methods and conditions.

[11 to 13 marks] for more exact focus and explicit assessment of methods and conditions.

[14 to 16 marks] for structure, focus on methods and conditions, and analysis.

[17+ marks] for an extra quality such as different interpretations.

Evaluate the importance of ideology in the policies of *two* of the following rulers of single-party states: Castro; Hitler; Lenin; Nyerere.

Candidates need to select two from the list of four, and discuss the role of ideology – as a positive or negative force in the policies they implemented during their rule. It should be determined if the ideology associated with the rulers chosen was one already in existence or one which originated with the ruler. Did the ruler believe in it or was he just using it? How precisely did he follow it? The two selected rulers can be linked together in one essay or treated separately. Castro was originally a revolutionary socialist, then a Communist. Hitler can be called a fascist and/or a Nazi. Lenin was a Marxist or Marxist Leninist. Nyerere was an African nationalist and a socialist.

[7 marks] and under if there is no attention to ideology.

[8 to 10 marks] for a narrative or descriptive essay with implicit importance.

[11 to 13 marks] for explicit evaluation of importance.

[14 to 16 marks] for balance and focus on importance.

[17+ marks] for different interpretations and understanding of the different ideologies.

N.B. If only one ruler is addressed mark out of [12].

3. NAZI GERMANY

Focus question: what were the main features of Nazi Germany (January 1933-May 1945)?

a. Political Rule

Party and State

- Germany legally a SPS by July 1933.
- Confusion (deliberate or otherwise) existed regarding the relationship between Party and State.
- Some reforms made: all civil servants had to Nazi Party members, gauleiters replacing state (local) government, although the Party remained un-unified (it was rather a mass of specialist organisations)
- The Nazi Party never became the all-pervasive dominating instrument (such as the Bolshevik Party of the USSR)

Role of Hitler

- Theoretically Hitler's power was absolute.
- Constitutionally he was Commander-in-Chief of all armed services.
- However Hitler's interest in governmental administration was somewhat limited (some highlight his indecisiveness, his lack of work ethic and his ability to become distracted).
- Propaganda versus reality!

Police State

- The SS became a mainstay of the Third Reich.
- Played a key role in the Night of the Long Knives.
- Led by Himmler.
- Progressed to become a pervasive unit, playing roles in: all security matters, concentration camps, the formation of elite military units (Waffen SS) and racial issues.
- Played a key role in the preservation of the Third Reich and became influential in economic and military matters.

Propaganda

- Goebbels played a significant role in the maintenance of the Third Reich through the immense propaganda machine he led.
- Media (radio and press) largely controlled by the Nazi Party.
- By 1939 Germany had the highest national figure of radio ownership (approx. 70%) and broadcasting in public places also occurred.

- Nazi influence also extended (via the Reich Chamber of Culture) into film, music, literature and art (success of this is questionable however).
- National holidays declared to commemorate days in the Nazi calendar.
- Cult of Hitler cultivated via salute, rallies, military uniform etc.

The Army

- The oath of allegiance to Hitler taken by the army in August of 1934 bound the army to the Nazi Party and ensured the army's continued support (which is a key necessity of a SPS).
- From 1938 any independence the army might have had was taken away with the dismissal of the War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Army.
- Army leaders, conditioned by traits of loyalty, obedience and patriotism, purposefully or not, ensured that the army was a mainstay of the Third Reich, particularly in its pre-1938 years.

b. Economic Rule

In 1932 the Nazi Party developed a number of approaches to the economy:

- i) Autarky: economic self sufficiency to create an economic power.
- ii) Deficit financing (spending, job creation, stimulated economy).
- iii) Wehrwirtschaft: gearing economy to total war.

However by 1933 no clear economic plan emerged and Hitler had little interest in understanding economics. Hence Nazi economic policy tended to be inconsistent, pragmatic and evolving out of demands rather than through careful planning.

Early economic policy

- Schacht guided Nazi policy towards employment schemes (largely through building of public works), subsidising private industry and increasing rearmament.
- Inflation was controlled through price and wage fixing, yet a balance of payments problem emerged in 1934.
- In response the New Plan introduced and Schacht given free reign. By 1935 Germany had a trade surplus, unemployment was declining and industrial output had doubled since 1933.

Mid economic policy

- Despite these successes balance of payments remained a problem in 1936, so in response Goring's Four Year Plan was introduced and the role of Schacht diminished. The FYP featured:
 - i) Increase in agricultural production
 - ii) Retraining key sectors of the labour force
 - iii) Government regulation of all imports and exports
 - iv) Self sufficiency in raw materials
- Success of plan was mixed.

Late economic policy

- By 1938 Germany was far from possessing a war economy (despite industrial production increasing 105% since 1933).
- Focus shifts to the extent to which military strategy and economic policy were linked.
- Later policy (Speer) relaxed Nazi control over business, but some control was maintained through Central Planning Board and numerous committees.

Summary

- Nazi's did not establish a central command of the economy (polycracy). Rather business interests and private enterprise were viewed sympathetically by the Nazi regime (particularly prior to 1938).

c. Social Rule

Views

- National Socialism was an ideology to transform German society (Volksgemeinschaft-people's community).
- However difficult to clarify how Nazi society was intended to be structured as inconsistencies and contradictions exist in theory and in practice/reality.

Material Conditions

- Economic success helped maintain regime.
- Urban working class enjoyed higher standard of living, despite lack of union presence, slightly longer working hours and slightly better wages.
- Rural workers suffered from intrusion (Reich Food Estate) and severe shortages of labour.
- Small businesses suffered due to the gains and preference given to large businesses (in particular in regards to rearmament).

Anti-Semitism

- A consistent theme throughout Hitler's reign.
- A response to intellectual developments and sociological conditions.
- Jews identified as scapegoats.
- Gradual persecution from the Nazi Party (1933: boycotts through to the "final solution" in 1942-1945)
- The Holocaust was the culmination of Nazi anti-Semitism.

Education and youth

- Recognised as an important element in the maintenance of the Third Reich. Through indoctrination.
- State education came under the control (in 1934) of Reich Ministry of Education and Science. Teachers were "reconditioned", curricula altered and elite schools were created.
- However the creation and growth of the Hitler Youth was the most effective method of indoctrination.
- However it is difficult to accurately gauge the effectiveness of intervention in education and of the Hitler Youth.

Religion

- Christianity and Nazism are the antithesis of each other!
- Relationship between church and Nazi's initially conciliatory.
- Nazi policy torn between suppression (and potential alienation of the population) and limited persecution (churches could become too independent).
- Post 1935 a Ministry of Church Affairs began to attack the church.
- Nazi's attempted to replace Christianity with German Faith Movement.
- Church was "severely handicapped but not destroyed" under Hitler.

Women and family

- Nazis opposed to the social and economic emancipation of women.
- Expanding population desired.
- However war demands forced a contradiction between theory and practice.

Culture

- Reich Chamber of Culture (and its seven sub-chambers), established in 1933, was supervised by Propaganda Ministry. Culture was to become another means of achieving censorship and indoctrination.
- Key themes included: anti-Semitism, militarism, nationalism, supremacy of the Aryan race, cult of the Fuhrer, neo-paganism.
- Nazi's failed to create a unique Nazi cultural identity, despite appearances (12 years too short!).

d. Foreign Policy

Historical debate concerning Hitler's foreign policy can generally be categorised into various schools of thought: 1. Hitler was systematic in his policy from the outset of his political career, 2. Nazi policy evolved through internal demands and wishes which had no one goal, 3. Hitler stumbled through various conquests and never wished for a global war, rather a local one (he was reactionary and exploitive), 4. Nazi foreign policy was closely linked with economic desires: Goring's FYP (the need for war joined with the need for economic strength), 5. Nazi foreign policy was a natural progression/evolution of earlier Prussian/German militarism.

a. 1933-1937

i) Beginnings

- Germany withdraws from League of Nations.
- Non-aggression pact with Poland.
- Return of the Saarland.

ii) Breaking free from Versailles

- Luftwaffe, conscription and peace time army.
- Naval Agreement.
- Re-occupation of the Rhineland and its significance.
- Rapprochement with Italy (Rome-Berlin Axis, 1936).

iii) Plans for war?

- Goring's Four Year Plan (see Economy).
- Pact with Great Britain?
- Inactivity of 1937.
- Hossbach Conference.

b. 1938-1939

i) Anschluss

- How Hitler formed a union with Austria in March 1938.
- French/British response.

ii) Czechoslovakia

- Occupation of the Sudetenland.
- Munich Agreement.
- March 1939 occupation/annexation of the rest of Czechoslovakia.

iii) Poland

- Pact of Steel.
- Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.
- Attack on Poland.
- War.

e. Sample essay questions (IB Papers 2 or 3) on Nazi Germany

For what reasons and with what results did two of the following have an impact on world affairs: Castro, Hitler, Stalin? (November 2001)

Compare and contrast the domestic policies of Hitler and Stalin. (May 2002)

Compare and contrast the influence outside their own countries of Hitler and Mao. (May 2005)

"In reality Hitler and the Nazi Party were far less totalitarian than is commonly believed." By referring to events in Germany between 1933-1945 comment on the truth of this statement. (November 2000)

Examine the effects of Nazi Germany on either one Scandinavian country or on one east or central European country (excluding the USSR and Germany). (May 2001)

"The key factor was their control of the media." How far does this statement explain the success of Mussolini and Hitler in retaining power in Italy and Germany respectively? (November 2001)

In what ways did Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany differ ideologically? (November 2002)

Evaluate Hitler's social, economic and religious policies between 1933 and 1939. (May 2003)

"Hitler's control and organisation of the Nazi State was less effective than is commonly believed." To what extent do you agree with this statement? (November 2003)

Analyse the impact of Hitler either on Finland or on one Scandinavian country between 1933 and 1945. (May 2004)

Compare and contrast the foreign policies of Hitler and Mussolini up to 1940. (November 2004)

Compare and contrast totalitarian rule in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy up to 1939. (May 2005)

Evaluate Hitler's social, economic and religious policies between 1933 and 1939.

There are three areas to examine here, social, economic and religious, and an assessment of their impact, strengths and weaknesses could be given. Better candidates should realize that what appeared to be successful to-and-for-Hitler, was not so for the German people. Social policies could include education, health, the Hitler Youth, League of German Maidens, and perhaps propaganda and the control of cultural activities. All social policies were directed towards obtaining and keeping support for Hitler, and producing a fit Aryan nation, ready to fight. It was successful in its object as far as Hitler was concerned, for most of the people and most of the time. Similarly Hitler's economic policies were designed with the same object, support and war. Trade Unions were abolished, "big business" directed where possible (not as much as Hitler would have liked), public works undertaken, autarky and protective tariffs introduced, and unemployment decreased. On the surface Hitler was successful. He also tried to manipulate religion, he made a concordat with the Pope, and sought to make the Lutheran Church subservient to the State. This caused a split into the Reich Church and the Confessional Church. As realization of Hitler's true aims emerged, opposition within the Churches increased, but many Christians supported Hitler's regime, because he said he supported family values and opposed Communism. Hitler's persecution of Jews could be made relevant in any of the above categories.

[0 to 7 marks] for short general answers.

[8 to 10 marks] for descriptions of some social economic and religious measures with implicit evaluation.

[11 to 13 marks] for more specific detail and evaluation.

[14 to 16+ marks] for balanced answers that evaluate the three areas.

"Hitler's control and organization of the Nazi State was less effective than is commonly believed." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

This question is focused directly on the structuralist claims of Mommsen who argues that the statement is accurate. Candidates should be able to discuss to what extent this is the case by referring to Hitler's Third Reich between 1933 and 1945. Specific examples should be given to support or refute the statement and these may refer to any aspect of Hitler's policies. Weaker candidates who are not aware of Mommsen's claims will dismiss the statement, but more able candidates should be able to debate the issue.

[0 to 7 marks] for answers which list events/policies but without understanding the question.

[8 to 10 marks] for responses which begin to identify the structure and organization of the Nazi state.

[11 to 13 marks] for essays which begin to explore the effectiveness of this structure and organization.

[14 to 16 marks] for answers which require a deeper analysis of this effectiveness with relevant supporting evidence.

[17+ marks] for essays which demonstrate cause-effect at a sophisticated level, and may show evidence of outside reading.