Germany under Adolf Hitler, 1933–45

In the years 1933–45, Adolf Hitler created the Third Reich, a German state based on the ideas that he had promoted as leader of the Nazi Party since the 1920s. Using authoritarian methods, the Nazi Party and government under Hitler sought to develop Germany as an economically self-sufficient nation, free of all Jewish influences and intent on restoring the pride lost by its defeat in the First World War of 1914–18. This chapter examines the following key questions:

- What circumstances favoured the rise of Hitler?
- How did Hitler impose his authority on Germany?
- What impact did the Nazi regime have on the lives of the German people?
- How far did Hitler achieve a totalitarian state?

1 Hitler's rise to power, 1919–33

Key question: What circumstances favoured the rise of Hitler?

Germany after 1918

What problems did its defeat in 1918 leave Germany?

Germany emerged from the First World War a defeated and embittered nation. For many Germans, the humiliation they felt at having lost the war was intensified by the anger they felt towards their political leaders who had allowed it to happen. Most Germans had enthusiastically welcomed the outbreak of war in 1914 as an opportunity for them to prove the strength of their young nation by a great victory over their European rivals. Tragically for them, no such victory occurred. After four years of exhausting struggle, an impoverished Germany was forced to admit defeat in 1918. The losses and suffering of four long years of war had been in vain. The anger this created was intensified by the terms imposed on Germany by the victors under the Treaty of Versailles signed in June 1919.

The main terms of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919

- Loss of territories in Europe to France and Poland, depriving Germany of 4 million people.
- Loss of Germany's overseas colonies.
- German army limited to 100,000.
- Germany obliged to pay heavy financial reparations for war damage.
- Germany had to accept a war-guilt clause, declaring it responsible for starting the war.

? Study Source A. What territories in Europe did Germany lose in the Treaty of Versailles?

SOURCE A

Map of Germany after the Versailles settlement, 1919.

KEY TERM

Diktat An imposed settlement.

Reich The German word for 'empire'. There were three Germanic empires, the First (962–1806), the Second (1871–1918) and the Third (1933–45).

Weimar A country town chosen as the new capital and seat of government of Germany in 1919 instead of troubled Berlin.

What the Germans also resented was that the Versailles Treaty was a ***diktat***. The German delegation was not allowed to discuss the terms; it was simply told to agree to them or suffer continued occupation and a renewal of the war.

Factors creating post-war instability

Resentment at the imposed peace settlement, combined with the shock of military defeat and the conviction that the nation had been betrayed from within by corrupt and craven politicians, created post-war political instability in Germany. The situation was made worse by economic problems created by crippling war debts, the burden of having to pay reparations, and high unemployment.

Such factors made post-war Germany a volatile place. Resentment was widespread and deeply felt. Violence was a constant presence as parties of the Right and Left struggled to exploit the situation. Street fights between contending factions became commonplace. In such an atmosphere revolution seemed increasingly likely.

The Weimar Republic

Germany's defeat in war destroyed the Second **Reich**. The Kaiser (emperor) abdicated and the imperial government resigned, to be replaced by the **Weimar** republic which in 1919 adopted a new constitution with:

- a President as head of state, to be elected every seven years, given power to rule by decree in a time of national emergency

- a Chancellor, appointed by the President, to be head of government
- an elected Reichstag in which seats would be allocated to parties by **PR**.

Despite its democratic appearance, the constitution proved to have two serious weaknesses:

- The right of the President to rule by decree in times of crisis gave him potentially dictatorial powers.
- The spreading of seats across as many parties as possible through PR had the effect of making it very difficult for a single party to form a majority government. Unstable coalitions became the norm.

Consequently, from its beginning, the Weimar government lacked the confidence of the German people. This was clear from the series of violent challenges to it from both Left and Right. German communists, inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917 (see page 18), tried to achieve a similar revolution in Germany, only to be crushed by the ***freikorps***, a loose organization of soldiers returning from the war who held strong nationalist feelings and who were sharply opposed to the communists.

KEY TERM

PR Proportional representation, the allocation of seats according to the number of votes cast for each party.

Freikorps German paramilitary units of demobbed soldiers.

Soviet An attempted recreation of the type of workers' council which Lenin's communists had established in Russia.

The emergence of Adolf Hitler

Why did Hitler become an extreme nationalist?

Before 1918, Adolf Hitler, an Austrian by birth, had displayed no particular political gifts. Having gone to Vienna in 1907 at the age of eighteen with the aim of training as an artist, he had failed the art college entrance exam. For the next seven years he did little. He became a drifter, staying in cheap hostels and living off a small inherited income. Hitler later claimed that it was during his Vienna years that he developed the political ideas that became the basis of his subsequent politics. In *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'), an autobiographical account written in 1924, he defined these as German nationalism and hatred of Jews. However, research has shown that *Mein Kampf* is unreliable. It is true that he had developed a genuine attachment to Germany, but there is no evidence that Hitler had strong anti-Semitic ideas in Vienna. Moreover, during the 1914–18 war, as a serving soldier in a German regiment, he had raised no objections to serving with Jewish comrades or being commanded by Jewish officers.

Hitler's political ideas

Hitler's thoughts did not turn towards active politics until Germany's defeat in 1918. The picture that emerges from the evidence is of a Hitler made bitterly angry by Germany's capitulation, but uncertain how to respond. His uncertainty made him susceptible to extremist ideas. He was willing to contemplate revolution as a way of achieving German recovery but not sure whether the revolution should come from the Left or Right. His initial decision was to support the communists when they seized power in Munich in April 1919 and established a revolutionary **Soviet**.

However, when, after a few weeks, the Soviet was bloodily suppressed, Hitler quickly switched from Left- to Right-wing socialism. Pushing him in

KEY TERM

White *émigrés* Tsarist supporters who had fled to Germany from Russia after the Russian Revolution.

NSDAP National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party).

Volk The nation as a community of racially pure Germans.

SA *Sturmabteilung* ('storm troopers'): Hitler's paramilitary force.

this direction were the contacts he made in 1919 with influential nationalist groups in Munich. The nationalists had acted as hosts to a number of **White *émigrés*** who had settled in Munich. Rabidly anti-Semitic, the *émigrés* drew on their first-hand knowledge of Lenin's regime (see page 20) to explain Germany's current crisis in simple terms. It was, they argued, the product of a Jewish–Bolshevik plot to undermine German culture and society. The argument appealed to the nationalists' sense of victimhood. Hitler found it convincing and swiftly adopted it as an expression of his political thinking.

Hitler's targets

To advance his views, Hitler began to make speeches to political gatherings in Munich and southern Germany. Favourite venues were beer halls and bars where raucous political debate was a traditional activity. Hitler excelled in such surroundings. He discovered in himself a particular talent for public speaking. He played on the prejudices of his audience by denouncing those Germans who had betrayed Germany at the end of the First World War. Developing the notions to which the White *émigrés* had introduced him, he identified particular targets:

- the politicians who had accepted Germany's defeat in 1918
- communists
- Jews who, in league with communists, were engaged in a worldwide conspiracy to destroy international finance as a first step to Jewish global domination.

What were the aims of the Nazi Party under Hitler?

The Nazi Party

Given Hitler's views, it was unsurprising that he found himself attracted to the Munich-based German Workers' Party (DAP) whose ultra-nationalism matched the ideas he had begun to develop. Having joined the young party, which renamed itself the Nazi Party in 1920, Hitler very quickly rose to become its leader a year later.

National Socialism (Nazism)

The change of the party's name from DAP to National Socialist German Workers' Party (**NSDAP** or Nazi) was accompanied by the issuing of a new party programme, which Hitler helped to draft. The extreme nationalist character of the programme was evident in its key demands, which were:

- the union of all Germans in a greater Germany
- the revocation of the Treaty of Versailles
- the gaining of territories to accommodate German's surplus population
- the restriction of state citizenship to those of German blood
- Jews to be denied membership of the ***Volk***.

The SA

In the tough world of the German streets in the 1920s, it was essential for a party to have physical force at its disposal. To meet this need, Hitler established the **SA** as his strong-arm guards. Under the leadership of Ernst

Röhm, the SA recruited its members from the large number of rootless, unemployed young men who were to be found in most of Germany's cities in the 1920s. Wearing brown shirt uniforms, the SA members felt a keen sense of brotherhood as they were directed by their leaders to attack communists and Jews. Their aggressive marches, their singing and their torchlight processions terrified opponents into silence and advertised Nazism to the German people.

November 8 / November 9

The Munich *Putsch*, 1923

In November 1923, Hitler believed that the Nazis were strong enough to seize power. He took his cue from the **hyper-inflation** that had begun earlier in the year as a consequence of the French occupation of the Ruhr, which denied Germany access to its most economically productive region. Between January and October 1923, the value of the German mark fell from 7,590 per US dollar to 4,200,000,000,000. Attempting to exploit the unrest this upheaval created, Hitler and General Ludendorff, a former head of the German army in the First World War and now a leading Nazi Party member, attempted to seize power in Munich in an armed rising. However, when the Nazis marched on the government offices, the Bavarian police fired on the marchers, who scattered in disorder. Hitler was arrested, tried for treason and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

The authorities, embarrassed by rumours that a number of officials had been implicated in the ***putsch*** and sympathetic towards Hitler's basic nationalism, decided not to treat him too severely, as his release after less than a year made clear. Hitler had behaved arrogantly during the trial, an indication that he did not regard the *putsch* as a failure: it had provided the opportunity to spread Nazi propaganda and he vowed that his time would come again. The *putsch* quickly became a piece of Nazi lore, celebrated annually as 'Martyrs' Day' in honour of the sixteen marchers who had been killed in the rising.

KEY TERM

Hyper-inflation Very rapid and destructive fall in the purchasing value of money, causing a rapid drop in the value of the currency and a sharp rise in prices.

Putsch An armed rising.

Aryan A person of Caucasian race; as understood by Hitler, the ideal racial type that was superior to all others.

Mein Kampf

Hitler used his time in prison to write *Mein Kampf*, a mixture of autobiography and ideology. The book was not so much a plan of action as an emotional appeal to the German people to identify their enemies and then follow the Nazis in destroying them. The text expressed his main political ideas, including:

- the conviction that politics was dialectical – a bitter struggle between irreconcilable opposites
- unshakable belief in Germany's destiny as a great **Aryan** nation to destroy Jewry and seize the Slav lands of the east
- a passionate hatred of communism
- belief in the power of the state as the central social organization
- the conviction that women were subordinate to men and should not engage in politics.

? According to Source B, what were the main features of National Socialism as defined by Hitler?

SOURCE B

Excerpt from *Hitler* by Michael Lynch, published by Routledge, UK, 2013, p. 62.

Many historians have come to regard it [Mein Kampf] *as the nearest we have to a definitive analysis of National Socialism whose essential features were: an unshakable belief in Germany's role as a great Aryan nation destined to save itself and the world, the rejection of the crippling Versailles Treaty that had been imposed on Germany, and a burning hatred of Jews and Communists, who were joined in an enterprise to destroy German identity and culture.*

Hitler's change of strategy

When Hitler came out of prison in 1924 he was resolved upon a new strategy. While still relying on violent tactics in the streets to silence opposition, he would present the Nazi movement to the voters as a constitutional party, bent on winning power democratically. Although he despised democracy as a feeble process, he was prepared for expedient reasons to use Weimar's electoral system.

? According to Hitler in Source C, what new strategy had he decided to adopt?

SOURCE C

A comment by Hitler to one of the Nazi Party's financial backers in 1924, quoted in *I Knew Hitler* by Kurt Lüdecke, published by Jarrolds Publishers Ltd, UK, 1938, p. 234.

Instead of working to achieve power by an armed coup we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the Catholic and Marxist deputies. If out-voting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own constitution! Any lawful process is slow. Sooner or later we will have a majority, and after that – Germany.

Hitler's power struggle within the party, 1925–30

Hitler's change of approach upset those in the Nazi Party who wanted to continue with the previous uncompromisingly tough methods. Factions developed and Hitler found himself involved in a power struggle within the Nazi Party. His major opponents were the brothers, Otto and Gregor Strasser, who led a minority group who believed that Nazism should be much more socialist in its approach and should openly oppose capitalism. The Strassers attacked the big German industrialists and argued that the Nazis should develop closer relations with the anti-capitalist Soviet Union. Hitler, however, was anxious to enlist the support of the leading industrialists in Germany and believed that the Strassers' ideas would undermine the NSDAP.

The leadership question

A series of fierce disputes followed. Beneath the disagreements about policy, there was a more fundamental issue: Hitler's leadership. Otto Strasser

criticized Hitler for attempting to make himself more important than the Nazi Party itself: 'A leader must serve the Idea. To this alone can we devote ourselves entirely, since it is eternal whereas the Leader passes and makes mistakes.' Hitler responded by asserting that the leader defined the movement. He spoke bitterly of Strasser's 'revolting democracy', explaining: 'For us the Leader is the Idea, and each party member has to obey only the Leader.'

The leader is the Idea and each member has to obey the leader.

Nazism → Hitlerism

In July 1930, Otto Strasser attempted to split the NSDAP and weaken Hitler by resigning from the party and establishing his own organization, the Union of Revolutionary Socialists. However, only 25 other Nazis joined him and these did not even include his brother, Gregor, who remained loyal to Hitler. Otto Strasser's desperate move had failed and he left Germany. He continued to attack Hitler from afar, but his influence rapidly decreased and what little support he had had dwindled.

What Strasser had unwittingly done by his challenge to Hitler was to hand him a victory within the Nazi Party that put his leadership of it beyond doubt. Hitler now personified the Nazi Party. Nazism was Hitlerism.

The influence of the Great Depression

Remarkable though Hitler's personal powers were, he and his party would have made little progress in attracting popular support had not Germany in the late 1920s entered a period of economic crisis. During the 1920s the German economy recovered well from its post-war difficulties; having survived the hyper-inflation of 1923, its industrial output grew considerably and the number of unemployed workers fell. In the improved economic climate, the Nazis had made little progress. A German commentator remarked: 'If the sun shines once more on the German economy, Hitler's voters will melt away like snow.'

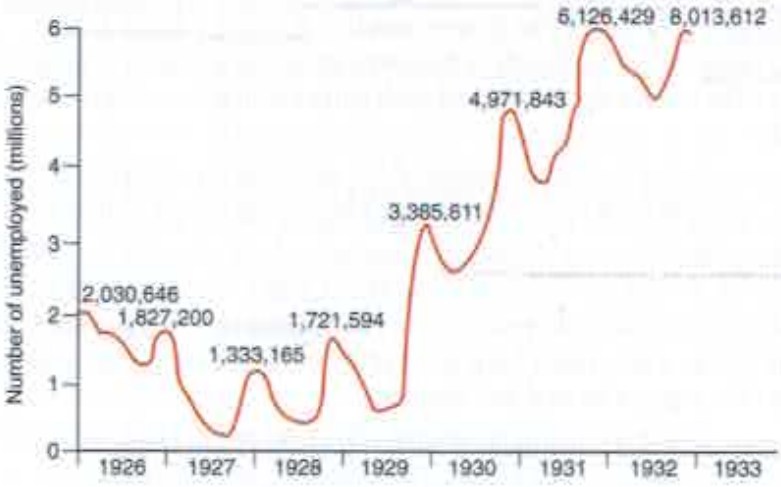
However, by 1930, Germany had begun to feel the full effects of the Great Depression. Workers were laid off, shops and businesses closed, and banks collapsed. The Weimar government had no answer. Indeed, the protective policies it adopted, such as restricting foreign imports, led to retaliation by other countries and produced higher unemployment in Germany.

It was this harsh reality that gave the Nazis a new relevance and saved them from being an impotent, fringe party. As Source E (page 74) shows, the Nazi Party's early record in the elections to the Reichstag was unimpressive. It was not until 1930 that its percentage of the vote reached double figures. The reason for that increase in support was that, by that date, the Nazis were able to exploit the economic difficulties that had begun to threaten Germany's stability.

? Study Source D. What information does it provide regarding unemployment in Germany between 1926 and 1933?

SOURCE D

Graph showing German unemployment figures, 1926–33.



? In what ways do the data in Source D help to explain the performance of the Nazis as recorded in Source E?

SOURCE E

The Reichstag election results, 1924–32, showing the relative performance of three main parties: NSDAP, Communists (KPD) and Socialists (SPD).

Elections	May 1924	Dec 1924	May 1928	Sep 1930	Jul 1932	Nov 1932
Seats						
NSDAP	32	14	12	107	230	196
KPD	62	45	54	77	89	100
SPD	100	131	153	143	133	121
% of vote						
NSDAP	6.6	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.4	33.1
KPD	12.6	9.0	10.6	13.1	14.6	16.9
SPD	20.5	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4

KEY TERM

Lower middle class
Shopkeepers, traders, professional people, etc.

Support for Hitler and the Nazis

It was the **lower middle class**, traditionally regarded as the respectable, dependable element in German society, who felt most threatened by the economic collapse. Believing that their security and livelihood were at risk, they turned away from the ineffectual Weimar system with its weak political parties and towards the Nazis. This class provided the backbone of Nazi support.

A number of other factors came together in the early 1930s to make the Nazis the most appealing of the parties to the German electorate:

- The Weimar Republic was increasingly judged to be incapable of dealing with Germany's political and economic problems.

- Defectors from the ineffectual moderate parties turned to the extremist parties.
- The intense nationalism of the Nazi Party proved of greater attraction than the pro-Soviet bias of the **KPD**.
- The other political parties represented sectional interests and lacked the wide appeal of the Nazis who claimed to be a genuinely national party.
- Many patriotic Germans turned towards Nazism as the great protector of the nation against the menace of communism.
- Younger voters were drawn to Hitler's populist image as someone who understood their needs.
- The unemployed saw hope in the Nazi promises of salvation. A typical unemployed labourer remarked, 'I had lost all I possessed through bad economic conditions. And so, early in 1930, I joined the Nazi Party.'
- The *Landbund*, representing the landowner class, pledged its support for the Nazis in 1931 after Hitler's promise that he would protect them from the land-grabbing communists.
- German industrialists, disillusioned with Weimar's economic failures, dropped their earlier objections to the Nazi movement.
- Hitler's passionate support for the millions of Germans who, under the Treaty of Versailles, had been placed under foreign governments appealed to all those Germans who felt that the Weimar Republic had failed to defend German interests abroad.

KEY TERM

KPD *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (German Communist Party).

Hitler's path to the Chancellorship

By what steps did Hitler attain the Chancellorship in 1933?

Between 1930 and 1933 the political situation worked greatly to Hitler's advantage. Party politics ceased to function in any meaningful sense. Since none of the parties had a majority in the Reichstag, governments were necessarily coalitions incapable of exercising real authority. This made them reliant on President Hindenburg to put their policies into effect by issuing emergency decrees.

The coalitions, 1930–33

Between 1930 and 1933 Germany was led by three successive coalition governments:

- March 1930 – May 1932 led by Heinrich Brüning
- May 1932 – December 1932 led by Franz von Papen
- December 1932 – January 1933 led by Kurt von Schleicher.

Brüning and von Papen both belonged to the Catholic Centre Party and their cabinets were made up largely of members of Right-wing and nationalist parties. Hitler was invited to join the coalitions in a minor role but he preferred to bide his time. Hitler was also under pressure from within his own party. Some Nazis, led by Gregor Strasser, the most prominent

socialist-minded member in the party, grew impatient and urged Hitler to exploit the unstable political situation by directing the SA to overthrow the government and take power by force.

Hitler rejected the notion. He believed that if he waited upon events they would eventually unfold in his favour legally. He judged that as leader of the largest party he could not be ignored. And so it proved. The conservative Hindenburg, who disliked Hitler only slightly less than he did the Communist Party, reluctantly asked him to serve as Vice-Chancellor under von Papen. Again Hitler refused. He wanted the Chancellorship and calculated that as leader of the largest single party that prize could not long be denied him.

The presidential elections, 1932

Hitler considerably strengthened his hand in 1932 by standing against Hindenburg in the presidential election of that year. He did not expect victory; his aim was to measure his popularity. Since the first election did not give Hindenburg outright victory, a second election was held. The results were highly satisfying for Hitler. Rounded to the nearest thousand they were:

	Hindenburg	Hitler
March 1932	18,000,000	11,000,000
April 1932	19,000,000	13,000,000

Reichstag elections, 1932

Further encouragement came in the Reichstag election of July 1932: the Nazis doubled their previous vote and won twice as many seats. However, just how closely tied Nazi support was to the economic situation was revealed by the election returns of November 1932, when an improvement in conditions saw a swing of over 4 per cent away from the NSDAP and a loss of 34 seats.

Hitler becomes Chancellor

Yet this proved only a minor setback; the fact remained that the Nazis were still the largest party. When General von Schleicher, frustrated by his failure to form a workable coalition, asked Hindenburg to give him the authority to impose military rule on Germany, the President refused. Eventually at the end of January 1933, after being assured by Franz von Papen, the acting Chancellor, that Hitler would be far less dangerous in office than out, Hindenburg formally appointed Hitler as Chancellor. Hitler's combination of patience and opportunism had outmanoeuvred a set of conservative politicians who had mistakenly thought they could render him harmless by inviting him into office.

Explaining Hitler's success

- One of the extraordinary aspects of Hitler's success in gaining the Chancellorship was how ill-defined his stated objectives had been: Nazi propaganda (see page 95) had been directed towards attacking political opponents, rather than developing a clearly defined Nazi programme.
- Hitler calculated that for the electorate it was more important that it knew what the Nazis were against than what they were for. Exploiting people's fears of communists and Jews brought more votes than presenting a detailed set of measured Nazi policies.
- There was no contemporary German politician capable of matching Hitler's determination and political ability.
- Hitler was the beneficiary of what would now be called a protest vote: Richard J. Evans, a celebrated historian of the Nazi movement, uses the term 'protest vote' as a way of explaining why the German electorate were attracted by Hitler and the Nazis.

SOURCE F

Excerpt from *The Coming of the Third Reich* by Richard J. Evans, published by Allen Lane, UK, 2003, p. 448.

[T]he Nazi vote was above all a protest vote; and, after 1928, Hitler … and the Party leadership recognized this implicitly by removing most of their specific policies, in so far as they had any, from the limelight, and concentrating on a vague, emotional appeal that emphasized little more than the Party's youth and dynamism, its determination to destroy the Weimar Republic, the Communist Party and the Social Democrats, and its belief that only through the unity of all social classes could Germany be reborn.

According to Source F, what were the key aspects of the Nazi protest vote?

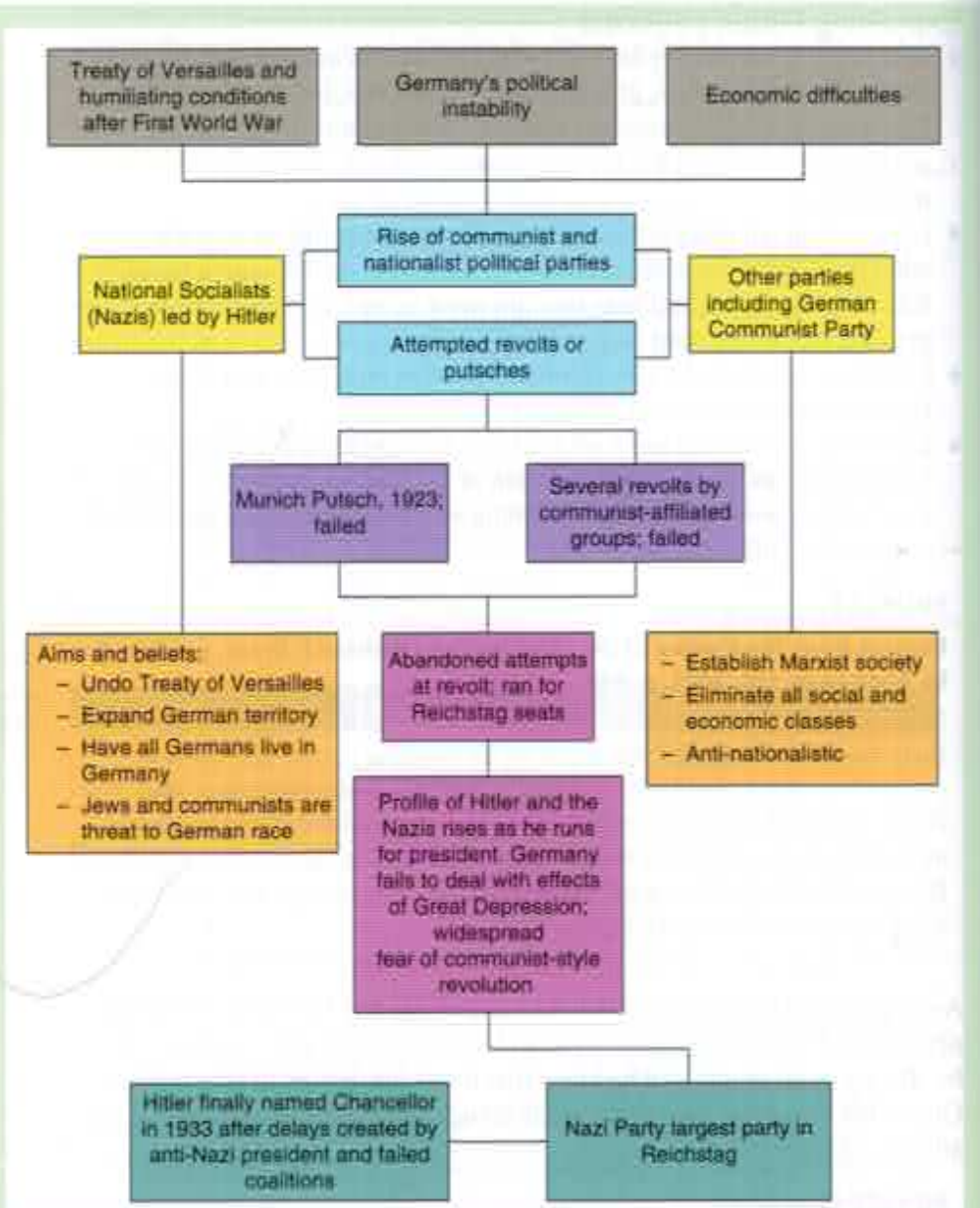
Another remarkable aspect of Hitler's success was that he somehow looked upon himself as above the politics in which he was engaged. He appeared to be waiting upon events as if he knew that it was his destiny to take power. One of his Nazi associates, Ernst Hanfstaengl, commenting on Hitler's attitude, observed:

SOURCE G

Excerpt from *Hitler: The Missing Years* by Ernst Hanfstaengl, published by Arcade Publishing, USA, 1994 edition (first published 1957), p. 81.

He did not concern himself with the day-to-day kaleidoscope of the political scene. He was not looking for alliances or coalitions or temporary tactical advantage. He wanted power, supreme and complete, and was convinced that if he talked often enough and aroused the masses sufficiently, he must in due course be swept into office.

According to Source G, why was Hitler so confident of eventually gaining power?



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Hitler's rise to power, 1919–33

2 Hitler's establishment of an authoritarian state

Key question: How did Hitler impose his authority on Germany?

Von Papen's boast that Hitler as Chancellor would effectively be under the control of the other parties in the government proved hopelessly ill-judged. Within two months of becoming Chancellor, Hitler had largely removed the constitutional limits to his authority. Two connected events formed the prelude to this: the burning of the Reichstag building and Nazi success in what was to prove the last Reichstag election.

Hitler was concerned to consolidate his authority by apparently constitutional means. He wanted the Reichstag to pass an **Enabling Bill** giving him personal power. To that end, he persuaded Hindenburg to call an election in March. Piers Brendon, a modern scholar, aptly notes: 'To consolidate his position as Chancellor Hitler insisted on holding a democratic election to end democracy.'

KEY TERM

Enabling Bill A measure which granted the German Chancellor the power to govern by personal decree without reference to the Reichstag.

Führer The 'leader', used informally from 1924 to refer to Hitler and adopted in 1934 as his formal title.

The structuring of Hitler's power, 1933–34

By what steps did Hitler create his power base?

The Reichstag fire, February 1933

In February 1933, a Dutch communist set fire to the Reichstag building in Berlin. It was a lone action but the Nazis immediately denounced it as part of a large-scale communist plot. Watching the fire on the night of 27 February, Hitler exclaimed: 'It is the work of the Reds [communists]. We must crush these murderous pests with an iron fist.' Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, and his team immediately picked up the ***Führer***'s cue. Skilfully using the charged atmosphere that the fire had created in the run-up to the Reichstag elections in March, they mounted an aggressive campaign, asserting that only a strong Nazi government led by Hitler could save Germany from communist revolution. On the streets, the SA terrorized the other parties into virtual silence. The principal target was the KPD, whose leaders were arrested, whose personnel were physically and openly attacked, and whose offices were vandalized.

The Reichstag election, March 1933

Since, under the Weimar constitution, a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag was necessary for the Enabling Bill to be passed, it was essential that the elections return a Reichstag dominated by the NSDAP. Hitler needed to prevent KPD and SPD deputies being returned to the new Reichstag in anything like their previous numbers. The persuasive and aggressive election campaign proved highly successful. The NSDAP's share of the vote increased from 33 per cent to 44 per cent and its number of seats rose from 196 to 288. The Nazis now had far more popular support than any other party.

? Review the data in Source H. What do they suggest about the importance of the centre parties, Zentrum and DNVP?

SOURCE H

Reichstag election results, March 1933.

Party	Number of votes	% of vote	Seats
NSDAP (Nazis)	17.3 million	43.9	288
Socialists (SPD)	7.5 million	18.3	120
Communists (KDP)	4.8 million	12.3	81
Catholic Centre Party (Zentrum)	4.4 million	11.2	74
National People's Party (DNVP)	3.1 million	8	52
Bavarian People's Party	1.1 million	2.7	18
Others	1.2 million	3	14

Negotiations

However, since the Nazis did not have an overall majority, the question now was whether the Reichstag would give Hitler the two-thirds majority required to push through an Enabling Bill. The centre parties were crucial: he still needed Zentrum and the DNVP to vote with the Nazis. In discussions with the respective leaders of these parties, Ludwig Kaas and Alfred Hugenberg, Hitler adopted a conciliatory approach, expressing regret at the violence surrounding the elections and suggesting that it had occurred against his wishes. He assured Kaas that Catholic interests would be protected in Nazi-ruled Germany. His assurances convinced the leaders. When the Enabling Bill was presented in the Reichstag, the Zentrum and DNVP deputies voted in its favour. It was passed by 441 votes to 94.

The Enabling Act, March 1933

The Enabling Act allowed Hitler to govern as Chancellor without reference to the Reichstag. In effect, the Reichstag had voted away its power. There was now no constitutional restriction on his personal authority or that of the party he led. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had insisted that 'one person must have absolute authority and bear all responsibility'. It was, he said, a basic principle of Nazism. He was now free to turn principle into practice.

Gleichschaltung, 1933–34

Within a year Hitler had used the powers that the Enabling Act granted him to implement a programme which turned Germany into a one-party state. In a process known as ***Gleichschaltung*** he had:

- brought the parliaments in all the individual German states under total Nazi control
- outlawed all political parties other than the NSDAP
- destroyed the trade unions as an independent force
- subordinated the legal system to Nazi control
- begun the process of removing Jews from all public offices
- coerced the Churches into accepting the Nazi regime.

KEY TERM

Gleichschaltung
Consolidation of authority.

Crushing opposition – the Night of the Long Knives, June 1934

To forestall any challenge to *Gleichschaltung* from within his own party, Hitler launched a violent purge in the summer of 1934. In what was later called 'the Night of the Long Knives', he had Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA, arrested and shot. Thousands of others were rounded up and executed. Hitler claimed that Röhm was preparing a *putsch* against him. Röhm's real intentions are unclear, but rather than wait for him to act, a group of army generals concocted a fake order, which made it appear he had instructed his SA forces to prepare for a strike against Hitler and the army. The army's behaviour was significant. In the new Germany, the military was eager to assert its authority over its chief rivals, the SA, by backing Hitler.

The SA had played a key role in the rise of Nazism, but Hitler now had no more use for it. Röhm had been a socialist revolutionary. He wanted the workers and soldiers to run society and he thought that Hitler shared his desire to break the old German privileged society by force. But Hitler, having come to power by legal means, wished to consolidate his position by winning over, not destroying, the traditional ruling classes in Germany. The SA was not immediately disbanded, but its place was usurped by a more powerful body, the **SS**.

Hitler becomes President, August 1934

In August 1934, following the death of Hindenburg, Hitler added the presidency to his Chancellorship. His supreme power was recognized in his adoption of the title *Führer* (leader), which from then on was the formal way he was addressed. Two weeks later, in a plebiscite asking the people whether they approved Hitler's extension of power, 30 million Germans – 92 per cent of the electorate – voted yes.

KEY TERM

SS Nazi *Schutzstaffeln* (protective squads).

Gauleiters Local Nazi Party secretaries who played a vital role in enforcing Nazi rule in the regions.

The main instruments of Nazi control

What organizations enabled the Nazis to exercise authority under Hitler?

In order to consolidate Hitler's grip upon Germany a number of key organizations were either created or modified in such a way as to make them instruments of Nazi control. Chief among these were the SS, the army and the ***gauleiters***.

The SS

The SS began as Hitler's personal bodyguard in Munich in 1924. He encouraged the setting up of similar protective squads to guard Nazi officials elsewhere. In 1929 Heinrich Himmler took over the co-ordinating of these squads. He saw them as a means of developing a powerful control system within the Nazi Party and eventually within Germany itself. The destruction of Röhm and the SA opened the way for the SS to become an elite body answerable only to Adolf Hitler. It was basically a civilian police network run on military lines, enforcing the law while itself operating outside the law. Himmler's success in this merits the description of the Third Reich as an 'SS state'.

KEY TERM

Concentration camps Originally detention centres where anti-Nazis were held, they developed into a widespread prison network which became notorious for the barbarity with which inmates were treated.

Death's Head Division A unit which took its name from the skull and crossbones emblem its members wore on their caps.

Gestapo *Geheime Staatspolizei*, special state police in Germany and German-occupied Europe.

Wehrmacht (previously the ***Reichswehr***) The German armed services, comprising the army, navy and air force, though the term was often used simply to describe the army.

One of the first tasks the SS undertook was the running of the **concentration camps**. A centralized system was created which enforced a standard pattern of brutality in accordance with the guiding principle, 'tolerance is weakness'. A special SS **Death's Head Division** was set up to guard the camps.

SS ideology

By 1936, Himmler had succeeded in bringing the police forces of all the German states under SS authority (see diagram). He declared that there were four fundamental principles to which the SS was committed, which were:

- the protection of Germany from racial corruption
- the cultivation of a fighting spirit among its members
- loyalty to the German state
- absolute obedience to the orders of the *Führer*.

Extent of SS authority

The Gestapo

The **Gestapo**, which was a special arm of the SS, developed into a nationwide organization dedicated to exposing and removing 'enemies of the state'. The civilian police force was subject to its authority, and there was no legal restriction on its powers of arrest or its methods of interrogation. This meant it could detain anyone on suspicion. Torture became standard practice. Since it operated outside the ordinary court system, it had no obligation to apply the normal rules of evidence.

Given its unlimited powers of arrest and interrogation, the Gestapo was arguably the most fearful aspect of the Nazi regime for ordinary Germans. Yet the remarkable fact was that the Gestapo depended on the support of the people at large. It simply was not big enough to have imposed itself without the co-operation of the German public. It acquired much of its knowledge not from its own investigation but from information provided by ordinary citizens who were prepared to inform on their neighbours and workmates.

The army

It is essential for any authoritarian regime, whether of the Left or Right, to have the support of the army. Without this, its power is fragile. Given German history with its strong military tradition and Hitler's notion that the army had been betrayed by the politicians at the end of the First World War, it was to be expected that he would lay stress on the role of the ***Wehrmacht*** in the creation of the Third Reich.

The army oath

Hitler regarded military strength as an expression of German greatness, which was why he had been appalled by the betrayal of the army by the politicians in accepting the **armistice** in 1918. He wanted a powerful army in Nazi Germany, but he did not want it to be an independent organization capable of challenging his authority. One of his shrewdest moves soon after coming to power was to make the army feel that it had a special relationship with him as leader of the nation. He did this by making the oath that the officers and men took a declaration of 'unconditional loyalty to the person of the *Führer*'. From now on the loyalty of the military was to Hitler personally, not simply to him as head of state. The army welcomed this because, although it was now tied to Hitler, it had also made itself independent of the Nazi Party. General Werner von Blomberg pledged the army to Hitler's service in these words: 'The *Wehrmacht*, as the sole armed force of the entire nation, while remaining apart from the conflicts of internal politics, will express its gratitude by its devotion and fidelity.'

Army scandals

Despite such avowals, Hitler was concerned that as long as the army remained politically independent it represented a source of potential opposition. Conscious that the army leaders, who came mainly from the Prussian aristocracy, tended to regard him as an Austrian upstart who had never risen above the rank of private, he was eager to achieve complete control of the military. His opportunity came in 1938 in the form of two separate sex scandals.

The first involved Blomberg, recently appointed Hitler's first Field Marshal, whose newly-married wife was rumoured to be a former prostitute. The second involved Verner von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German army, who was accused of consorting with a male prostitute. Eager to assert the primacy of the Nazi Party and the SS over the army, Himmler and **Hermann Goering** exploited the scandals to suggest that the *Wehrmacht* was corrupt at the very top and could no longer be trusted. Hitler dismissed both Blomberg and Fritsch and took the title of Commander-in-Chief for himself. Nor was it merely a courtesy title: from now on Hitler was the active commander of Germany's armed forces. It consolidated and increased the power he held.

KEY TERM

Armistice An agreement between the warring sides to cease fighting in order to prepare the way for a formal peace treaty.

Hermann Goering A member of the Nazi Party since its earliest days, he was one of Hitler's most important ministers. At the time of the army scandals in 1938, Goering was chief of the *Luftwaffe* (German air force) and responsible for the Third Reich's economic programme.

The structure and organization of government

How did the structure of the Third Reich enhance Hitler's personal authority?

In theory, the structure of the Third Reich was a balance between the German state and the Nazi Party. However, the theory did not fit the practice. In reality, all the key posts in the state organizations were held by Nazis. Thus the lines between state and party power were blurred.

Party organizations	State organizations
SS	Government ministries
Gestapo	Chancellery (civil service)
Gauleiters	Regional governments
	Courts

Nazi Party and state organizations

Organizations and institutions overlapped, which resulted in confusion and rivalry. Odd though it may seem, Hitler welcomed the confusion since it meant that he became the one fixed point in the system. It emphasized the personal nature of Nazi rule. It was he, Adolf Hitler, who gave definition and purpose to it all. Otto Dietrich, Hitler's press officer, described the rivalry which Hitler encouraged (see Source I).

SOURCE I

Excerpt from *The Hitler I Knew* by Otto Dietrich, published by Methuen, London, 1957, p. 117.

In the sphere of culture Goebbels and ***Rosenberg*** *quarrelled incessantly; in art Goering and Goebbels were rivals ... In the party organization* ***Ley*** *and* ***Bormann*** *had the same radius of activities; in Party education Rosenberg and Ley were in competition. In the armed forces the interests of army, Waffen-SS (SS-in-arms) and air force field divisions were inextricably set up for these organizations side by side.*

In this way Hitler had at his disposal two or three 'chiefs' in every field, each with an extensive apparatus. He could ensure the execution of his plans by playing one man off against another ... His method systematically disorganized the objective authority of the higher departments of government – so that he could push the authority of his own will to the point of despotic tyranny.

? According to Source I, why did Hitler allow rivalry to operate between various organizations?

KEY TERM

Alfred Rosenberg The Nazi Party's leading race theorist.

Robert Ley Director of the German Labour Front.

Martin Bormann Nazi Party Secretary.

'Working towards the *Führer*'

It is significant that after coming to power Hitler did not set about creating a whole new governmental and legal system. Provided they expressed loyalty and were not Jewish, most institutions and the civil servants who ran them were left in place. When he wanted something particular doing, he would set up agencies or bodies with special powers and give them the right to act on their own jurisdiction. An expression came into common use among administrators in Nazi Germany: 'working towards the *Führer*'. It referred to the practice of ministers and senior officials making a judgement from Hitler's statements as to what policies he wanted them to follow and then producing practical ways of implementing them.

As for the actual business of government, it was not something that especially interested Hitler. With the exception of his management of the Second World War, he certainly did not engage in it on a daily basis. He preferred to leave the work to the ministers he appointed. This gave them

considerable personal power and room for initiative which often led to fierce rivalry between them, rivalry that he actually encouraged since it prevented opposition factions being formed.

Opposition to Hitler

Why was opposition to Hitler so unsuccessful?

There was no consistent, organized resistance movement in Hitler's Germany. It had been possible to oppose the Nazis before they came to power; it was not so after. When moves were made against Hitler, they were invariably desperate, doomed affairs. The isolated cases of individual or group resistance that did occur usually coincided with times of uncertainty, as in 1939 when a number of Germans doubted the wisdom of going to war, and in the period 1942–45 when Germany began to suffer serious military reverses. However, it is noticeable that between 1939 and 1942, when Hitler was making Germany master of Europe, opposition became dormant. What all this suggests is that opposition was rarely a matter of moral objection to Nazism. It was at its weakest when Germany was doing well under Hitler and at its strongest when his foreign wars appeared to be putting Germany at risk.

Of the different forms of resistance that can be measured, the three main types that stand out are:

- the Left, made up of communists and socialists
- the Right, made up of traditionalists and conservatives
- the young.

Interestingly, the main opposition to Hitler in Germany came from the political Right rather than the Left.

The key moments and main phases of the Second World War, 1939–45

1939	German seizure of Poland
	Britain and France declare war on Germany
1940	German invasion of Denmark and Norway
	German seizure of Holland and Belgium
	Fall of France
	Italy enters war as ally of Germany
	German aerial attack on Britain
	North Africa campaigns
1941	German invasion of USSR
	USA declares war on Japan
	Germany declares war on USA
1942	War in Western Desert
	Beginning of Battle of Stalingrad
	Allied victory at El Alamein
1943	German surrender at Stalingrad
	German defeat at Kursk
	Mussolini overthrown: Italy switches to the Allied side
1944	Allied landings at Normandy open a second front in western Europe
	Failure of July Bomb Plot to kill Hitler
	Battle of the Bulge
1945	Soviet forces take Berlin
	Hitler prefers to see the Third Reich destroyed rather than surrender
	Hitler commits suicide
	Germany signs unconditional surrender

Opposition from the Left

The socialists and communists in Germany did not try to organize a broad resistance to Nazism, something that can be explained by the severity with which they were suppressed. Hitler was as savage in his hatred of communists as he was of Jews. Beginning in 1933, some 1,000 SDP members and 150,000 KPD members were held in concentration camps. By 1935, what remained of the Communist Party had been driven underground.

KEY TERM

Nazi–Soviet Pact A ten-year non-aggression agreement between the Third Reich and the USSR.

Schwartz Kapelle The 'Black Organization', a Gestapo designation for those on the political Right who were suspected of being anti-Hitler.

The signing of the **Nazi–Soviet Pact** in August 1939 saw some easing of the persecution. But after the war with the Soviet Union began in June 1941, German communists again became targets. Those who were not arrested remained quiet, intent simply on surviving. A complaint made after the war was that the German working classes had been reluctant to confront Nazism. But this overlooked just how restricted the workers had been. The trade unions had been destroyed in the *Gleichschaltung* and their place taken by the Labour Front (see page 101). Over 2,000 workers were executed for belonging to illegal labour organizations and another 52,000 imprisoned.

Opposition from the Right (*Schwartz Kapelle*)

The ***Schwartz Kapelle*** was never a specific body. Indeed, it was only in the loosest sense an organization at all. The one point linking those included under the title was their dislike of Hitler's leadership. Among them were aristocratic Germans whose distaste for Hitler as a vulgar upstart deepened into hatred as his war policies appeared to be taking Germany towards destruction. Prominent among this type were General Beck, a Prussian officer, who resigned as Chief of the General Staff in protest against Germany's seizure of Czechoslovakia in 1939, and Helmut von Moltke, a landed aristocrat.

It was Moltke who founded the Kreisau Circle, a gathering of those concerned at the direction Germany was heading under Nazism. The Circle was not an organized conspiracy since its members could not agree on what action should be taken. Ethical qualms prevented the majority of them from contemplating Hitler's assassination. However, by 1944, there were Germans who considered that the killing of Hitler was the only option left to them if their country was to be saved morally and militarily. One such was Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, the organizer of the July Bomb Plot in 1944.

The July Bomb Plot, 1944

After 1939 there were some fifteen attempts to kill Hitler. Most of these were individual actions by people who never got close enough to their target to be a real danger. The more serious attempts always came from within the army. This was because it was among the military that the greatest dissatisfaction with Hitler was to be found, especially after the war began to go against Germany. There was also the simple fact that military personnel had closer access to the *Führer* than any other group of Germans. It was this that gave Stauffenberg, who as a colonel personally attended the *Führer*'s regular

strategy meetings at his headquarters in East Prussia, the hope that he could blow up Hitler with a planted bomb. The aim was then to establish a government of generals and leading civilians ready to make peace with the Allies. The plan came near to succeeding. The bomb exploded but, despite being injured, Hitler survived. Survival strengthened Hitler's belief that **providence** was on his side. The plot fell apart. The ring leaders, including Stauffenberg, were quickly rounded up and executed after a series of **show trials**. There was no further attempt from within the military to remove Hitler.

Opposition from the young

The White Rose Group

In 1942, five students and one staff member at Munich University were drawn together by their disgust at the increasing brutality of the Nazi regime in Germany and **occupied Europe**. The key players were a brother and sister, Hans and Sophie Scholl, who enlisted the help of a professor known to be critical of the Nazi regime. They secretly produced and distributed a set of leaflets, entitled the **White Rose**, which called attention to the inhuman acts being committed in Germany's name.

They managed to avoid detection for over a year, but they were always at risk. In 1943, two weeks after the German defeat at the **Battle of Stalingrad**, the White Rose distributed leaflets which bitterly condemned Hitler for 'senselessly and irresponsibly' sending Germany's young men to their death. It proved to be the group's last protest. A university porter exposed them to the authorities. Within five weeks, all six had been arrested, tried and guillotined. The university staff and students joined in praising the porter for his patriotic action.

The fate of the White Rose illustrates the main weakness of all the opposition groups. Short of assassinating the Nazi leaders, which was so desperate a notion that it was usually rejected on practical, if not moral, grounds, there was little that could be done to organize effective opposition.

Edelweiss

One set of German resisters with strong Catholic associations was the group of young people who took the Edelweiss flower as their badge. The flower, which grows in profusion in Bavaria in southern Germany, symbolized the group's wish to promote lasting German values in the face of the amoral doctrines of Nazism. As an organization, Edelweiss spread to many parts of Germany. Reacting against this, the Gestapo, which claimed that some sections of the Hitler Youth (see page 99) had been infiltrated by the movement, was ferocious in hunting down Edelweiss members. In Cologne in 1944, twelve youngsters known to belong to Edelweiss were hanged in public. As with all the resistance movements, Edelweiss is remembered for the heroism of its members rather than for any great influence it had on the German people.

KEY TERM

Providence The notion that fate is predetermined by the force of history.

Show trial Special public court hearings, meant as propaganda exercises, in which the accused were paraded as enemies of the people.

Occupied Europe The areas overrun by German forces between 1939 and 1942 which were then placed under German administration and control.

White Rose A group opposed to the Nazis, named after the flower as a symbol of peace.

Battle of Stalingrad A savage six-month battle on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1942–43, which ended with a humiliating defeat for the German armies at the hands of the Soviet forces.

Swingjugend (swinging youth)

A group that deserves mention in the list of those who declined to accept Nazism is the *Swingjugend*. These were young people with a passion for American jazz. They were never formally a resistance movement and, indeed, made a point of being non-political, but they were social non-conformists. Their behaviour and appearance did not fit the Nazi image of responsible and serious German youth. Their long hair, unconventional clothes, and taste for loud music led to their being described as 'deviants'. They were constantly harried by the authorities. A 'swing festival' in Hamburg in 1940, attended by hundreds of young people, was broken up by the police. The organizers were arrested; one of the charges against them was that they had encouraged 'jitterbugging'. The light-hearted non-conformity of *Swingjugend* stood in marked contrast to the dour and deadly seriousness of Nazism.

Why resistance failed

The failure of all the movements against Hitler indicates the near-impossibility of destroying a totalitarian system from inside. Hitler's genuine popularity with the people lasted at least until 1942, and, even after the war started to go badly, those who began to lose faith in the *Führer* rarely turned against him openly. His shrewd decision to take power by legal means had profound repercussions. Any challenge to him was illegal; conspirators against him always had to act outside the law. This made them appear traitors in the eyes of the German people. Bound by their oath of loyalty to Hitler personally, the army generals were reduced to impotence. Unless they were prepared to break their code of honour, and few of them were, they could not move against their leader.

What attitude did the Churches take towards Nazi Germany?

Religious opposition

Individual responses

It would be reasonable to expect that, since Nazism in theory and practice raised so many moral questions, the Christian Churches would have been foremost in resisting it. There were certainly many individual churchmen who questioned Nazi policies. Outstanding examples include the following:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant pastor, attacked the Nazi cult of violence and intimidation. His opposition to Hitler eventually led to his arrest after the July Bomb Plot, although as a pacifist he had avoided involvement in the planned assassination. He was executed four weeks before the close of the war.
- Clemens von Galen, the Catholic Archbishop of Münster, was a constant thorn in Hitler's side. In sermons and writings, he condemned the Third Reich's racial laws, and denounced the sterilization programme as contrary to the will of God (see page 106). Hitler feared that removing him might provoke a major Catholic reaction – an interesting example of his awareness of German sensitivities. However, in the aftermath of the July Bomb Plot, von Galen was sent to a concentration camp.
- Martin Niemöller was a Protestant theologian who defied the Nazis by setting up the **Confessional Church**. On Hitler's personal orders, Niemöller was arrested in 1938 and spent seven years in concentration camps.

KEY TERM

Confessional Church
Established by Martin Niemöller in 1934 as a protest against the Nazi takeover of the Lutheran Church.

- Bernhard Lichtenberg, a Jesuit priest, took up the cause of the Jews and denounced their persecution. He also condemned the euthanasia programme (see page 104). He was arrested in 1941 and died in prison in Berlin in 1943.

There were hundreds of other lesser known clergy who risked their freedom to speak out against Nazism. In **Dachau**, a special block was built for clergy who had opposed the regime. In its time it held over 400 Catholic priests and 40 Protestant pastors.

KEY TERM

Dachau Germany's first concentration camp, opened in 1933.

Anschluss The re-incorporation of Austria into the Third Reich in 1938.

Attitude of the Churches

In contrast to the actions of such individual clerics, neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Churches, apart from Niemöller's Confessional Church, formally challenged or resisted the Nazi regime. One reason is that, on certain major issues, Church and State were in accord: for example, the desirability of an ordered society and the need to fight what the Catholic Church called 'godless communism'. This is a controversial area. It has been suggested that the Churches' apparent reticence was a subtle form of resistance. By appearing to co-operate with the regime, the Churches were able to maintain an influence on Nazi policies that led on many occasions to their being modified or withdrawn, an example being Hitler's abandonment of the T4 euthanasia programme (see page 104). Had the Churches chosen to condemn Nazism, it would have polarized the situation and made things impossible for those who were both believers and loyal Germans.

However, it should also be noted that Church dignitaries often showed an eagerness to support the Nazi regime which went beyond mere diplomatic courtesy. When, for example, Hitler drove triumphantly into Austria in March 1938 to celebrate the ***Anschluss***, the Catholic bishops of Austria praised the Nazi takeover, thanking God that 'through the actions of the National Socialist Movement the danger of godless Bolshevism would be fended off'.

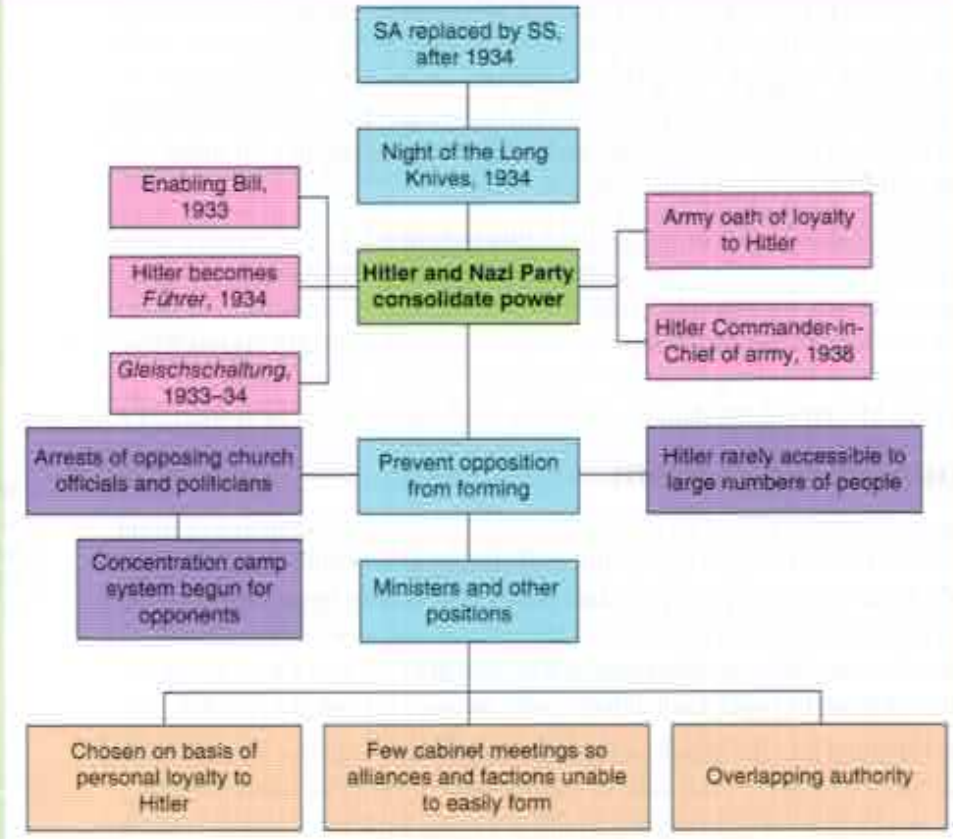
Support for Nazism

Why were so many Germans prepared to support Hitler and the Nazis?

Nazi propaganda played an important role in promoting the image of Adolf Hitler as a great German leader. But indoctrination was only one part of the story. Many Germans protected their position in society by joining or supporting the Nazi Party. They saw that their chances of preferment or promotion would be greatly enhanced by backing the Nazi Party. It was bureaucrats acting out of self-interest who allowed Nazism to flourish.

This extended into the classroom and the lecture hall; teachers and academics were quick to join the Nazi side. In the first year of Hitler's Chancellorship, the Nazi Party grew from some 2.5 million to over 4 million. Nazism became all-embracing – even apparently non-political groups like gardening clubs, choral societies and sports organizations chose to affiliate to the Nazi Party. This was not coercion from the top; it was done willingly by ordinary, respectable Germans. A striking fact is that most of those who might be regarded as the natural leaders of society – teachers, doctors, professors, priests and pastors – were among the strongest supporters of Hitler's Nazi regime. It was not surprising that where they led, most Germans followed.

Many Germans regarded Hitler as a saviour. As one German journalist put it: 'Adolf Hitler – the living incarnation of the nation's yearning.' His great conquests as a war leader between 1939 and 1942 raised his prestige in Germany to unprecedented heights. The British historian, A.J.P. Taylor, remarked that Hitler was the most popular leader of any European country in modern Europe and that it was 'silly to claim otherwise'. Resistance to the Nazis in power was minimal. It was only from 1942 onwards, after things began to go badly militarily, that opposition became at all significant. Nazism answered to the aspirations and needs of the great majority of German people. They took pride in a leader and a regime that elevated their nation's standing. It must be stressed that when Nazi Germany did finally collapse it was not because its people rose up and rejected the regime. Nazism was broken by force of Allied arms, not by internal resistance.



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Hitler's establishment of an authoritarian state

3 Hitler's domestic policies and their impact, 1933–45

Key question: What impact did the Nazi regime have on the lives of the German people?

Until the war intervened, the Third Reich's economic policies undoubtedly proved beneficial for most Germans. This was particularly true in regard to the fall in unemployment. However, with the coming of the war in 1939, economic and social polices had to be adjusted, with the consequence that hardship and restrictions spread.

Hitler's economic policies

What were Hitler's main economic aims?

The 1930s were a period of international recovery from economic depression, and Germany shared in that recovery. This gave Hitler a reputation for having created a powerful industry, which had ended unemployment and restored Germany's pride in itself. But while it is true that Germany did perform well down to 1939, Hitler's aim was not economic growth for its own sake. He was less concerned with improving the living standards of the people than with creating a strong industrial economy that would provide the sinews of war.

Hitler was not an economic planner. He left that to his economics ministers. However, he did demand that they prepare Germany for rearmament. The development of the German economy under Hitler, therefore, is a story of a series of strategies followed by a succession of ministers, trying in often quite different ways to meet Hitler's wishes. There was no single, consistent Nazi economic programme or master plan.

The policies of Hjalmar Schacht (1934–37)

In 1934, Hitler appointed Hjalmar Schacht as his Economics Minister. Schacht had shown great skill as a financier during the Weimar Republic, one of his major achievements having been the stabilizing of the German currency and the ending of the catastrophic inflation that had struck Germany in 1923. He never became a Nazi Party member but he admired Hitler who, he believed, could make Germany powerful again. Schacht remarked, 'I desire a great and strong Germany and to achieve it I would enter an alliance with the devil.' That was why Schacht had urged major industrial companies, such as Krupp Steel and I.G. Farben (the chemical giant), to support the Nazis in the elections of the early 1930s. He had also urged Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor.

His programme for the recovery of the Germany economy was complex in detail but simple in its basic aim – financial and economic growth.

- Using his many contacts among the big bankers and industrialists, Schacht established the 'Organization of Industry'. This was a body made up of business guilds, employers' associations and finance houses.

- So successful was the Organization in promoting trade and industry that a number of countries began to advance loans to Germany. This was a remarkable achievement for a country which since 1918 had struggled desperately to raise capital for itself.
- Schacht also approved of taxation as a way of increasing state funds. However, he insisted on two things: tax should be fairly assessed so that it would not be a burden and disincentive to private industry, and the revenue that it raised should be reinvested by the government in productive ways.

The New Plan, 1934

With the aim of ending the high unemployment that had blighted Germany during the Great Depression, Schacht introduced 'the New Plan'. This was a programme which built on some of the measures introduced under the Weimar government. Among the Plan's proposal were:

- schemes for creating employment through public works projects, such as road repairs, forest clearing and planting, and the building of new hospitals and schools
- young men aged 18–25 were required to join the National Labour Service for six months, during which time they would be trained in basic skills and directed to work where it was most needed.

Rearmament

Since Hitler's main objective was the expansion of Germany's military strength, Schacht knew that he would have to provide funds for rearmament. But he did not want spending on arms to drain away vital funds and thus undermine economic recovery. He therefore proposed that rearmament be introduced in stages as the economy strengthened. His proposal had begun to work. By 1935 funding was becoming available for rearmament. However, this was too slow for Hitler. A ***Führer* memorandum** of August 1936 asserted: 'If we do not succeed in bringing the German army as rapidly as possible to the rank of the premier army in the world then Germany will be lost.' Schacht was not dismissed but he was bypassed in favour of Hermann Goering, who was given the task of pushing Germany towards rapid militarization.

KEY TERM

***Führer* memorandum** A document written or authorized by Hitler personally.

Autarky An economically self-sufficient nation.

Goering's Four-Year Plan, 1936–39

Goering's first move was to introduce a Four-Year Plan in October 1936, the chief aim of which was to make Germany an **autarky**. To achieve this, a number of targets were set, including:

- the bringing of Germany's labour force under tighter control so that it could directed into vital areas such as arms production
- increased use of import controls to protect German manufactures
- the production of synthetic substitutes for rubber and oil to avoid these essentials having to be imported.

Economic historians suggest that in the twentieth century autarky was an impossible goal for advanced industrial states like Germany. Their commerce was too interlinked internationally and no country had all the vital resources

to be self-sufficient. In 1939 German industry was still importing a third of the raw materials it needed. Nevertheless, although autarky had not been achieved by that date, Germany had made significant economic advances.

SOURCE J

The growth in German manufacturing (calculated to an index of 100 in 1936).

	Consumer goods	Industrial goods
1933	80	56
1934	91	81
1936	100	114
1938	116	144

SOURCE K

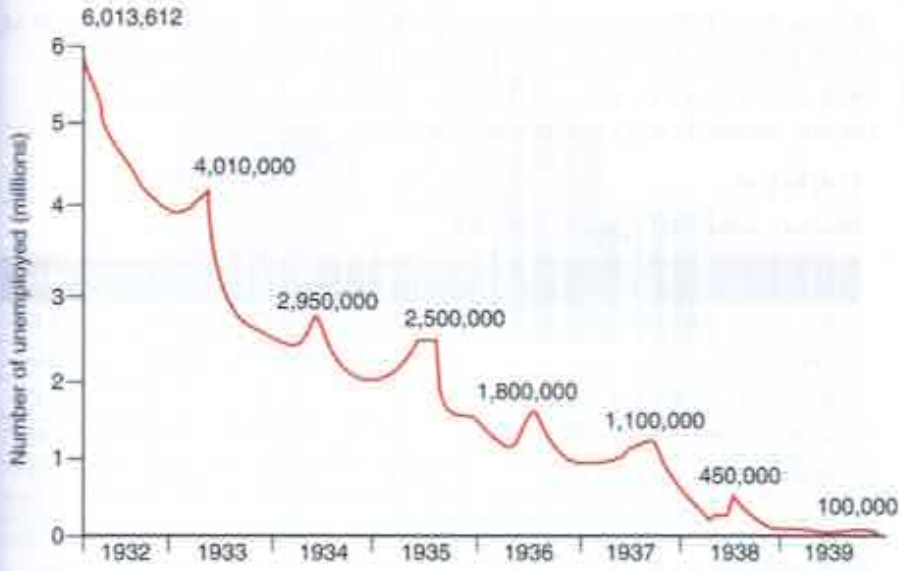
The limited post-recession recovery in the average wage rates of German industrial workers (calculated to an index of 100 in 1936).

1928	125
1933	88
1934	94
1936	100
1938	106

In what way does Source K indicate that German workers had experienced only limited recovery in their wage rates between 1933 and 1938?

SOURCE L

Graph showing the fall in unemployment in Germany, 1932–39.



How far do the Sources J, K and L complement each other in showing the development of the German economy in the 1930s?

The most striking aspect of Germany's economic performance was the sustained fall in unemployment, which added greatly to Hitler's popularity. Encouraged by the figures of industrial growth, he announced major spending programmes for all three armed services that would make Germany ready for war. But when war came in the autumn of 1939, there were fears among a number of Hitler's generals that Germany was not yet ready for a major European conflict.

The wartime economy

A remarkable feature of the Germany economy was that there was no ministry or body with overall responsibility for organizing the war effort. This encouraged rivalry between government departments and the armed services and made a concerted effort difficult. Communication between departments was seldom smooth which meant that decisions and instructions were not always clear. It is a further reminder that Nazi Germany was never the monolithic super-efficient state that its own propaganda suggested and popular imagination believed.

Albert Speer

It was to tackle the problem of liaison and co-ordination that Hitler in 1942 appointed Albert Speer as Minister of Armaments and War Production. As with Schacht earlier, Speer was given a very large measure of freedom to develop policies as he saw fit. He used it skilfully and effectively. Transport and freight movement were streamlined so that bottlenecks were avoided and materials reached the plants on schedule. Despite mounting pressure from Allied bombing raids over Germany, Speer actually doubled German armaments production overall. To quote one example: when he took over as Armaments Minister in 1942, German factories had turned out 4,500 tanks since 1939; by 1944, Speer had raised that figure to 17,300.

How well industry responded to Speer's leadership can be seen in Source M, which indicates that he managed to sustain high output right through to 1944, even though for most of that time Allied attacks on Germany were causing severe damage to factories and plants.

SOURCE M

German industrial output, 1941–44.

	1941	1942	1943	1944
Steel (millions of tons)	31.8	32.1	34.6	28.5
Coal (millions of tons)	248.3	264.2	268.9	249.0
Synthetic oil (millions of tons)	4.1	4.95	5.7	3.8
Synthetic rubber (thousands of tons)	69.0	98.0	117.0	104.0
Aluminium (thousands of tons)	233.6	263.9	250.0	245.3

? Study Source M. What trends do the figures indicate regarding Germany's wartime production of vital resources?

Speer used slave labour. By 1944, a quarter of Germany's workforce of 40 million was composed of foreigners. Some of these were voluntary workers from the nations allied with Germany but the vast majority were forced

labourers, deported to Germany and made to work in appalling conditions. In the pressure of war, Speer paid scant attention to their plight. Circumstances required that he regard them not as people but as economic units.

Propaganda and the media

How was propaganda used to consolidate Hitler's authority?

As soon as the Nazis took power in 1933, Goebbels, as Propaganda Minister, began to promote the idea of the German nation unified under the direction of the Nazi Party and its inspired leader, Adolf Hitler. Goebbels worked from the premise that repetition is the key to inculcating ideas: the repeated slogan or phrase, the recurring image. All the media of the day were used: radio, film, the gramophone, display boards and posters. Hitler's name and image and the swastika appeared everywhere.

SOURCE N

A 1936 poster, *Der Bannertrager* (the Bearer of the Banner).

What image of Hitler is being projected in the poster in Source N? ?

A spectacular element of the propaganda campaign was the great Nazi Party rallies, often held at night by torchlight. Nuremberg was the major centre for these. The gifted film-maker, Leni Riefenstahl, brilliantly captured the essence of these displays in her documentary *The Triumph of the Will*. Her sweeping panoramas conveyed Hitler as the man of destiny creating a Third Reich that expressed the will of the nation he had transformed. She captured the powerful religious impulse to Nazism: Hitler was the new Messiah.

A Berlin professor declared that 'tomorrow has become today – the end of the world mood has been transformed to an awakening. The leader, yearned for and prophesised, has appeared'.

Nazi propaganda under Goebbels was a giant public relations exercise. His aim was nothing less than the transformation of German culture. His Propaganda Ministry set itself these essential tasks, which were to:

- promote the German nation as the supreme form of social and cultural organization
- oblige the media always to present the *Führer* and the Nazi Party in the most positive light
- develop **the *Führer* principle**
- rid the nation of all Jewish influences
- encourage pride in the Aryan race as the highest form of human development
- develop German–Aryan arts free from corruption and decadence.

KEY TERM

The *Führer* principle The notion of Hitler as the faultless leader to whom all Germans owed obedience.

Eher Verlag A publishing house named after its founder Franz Eher, which the Nazis had bought in the 1920s.

DNB *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* – German newspaper bureau.

The Berlin Olympics, 1936

Sport was effectively used as a propaganda tool, the outstanding example being the Berlin Olympics which were held in 1936. The specially-built athletics stadium held 110,000 spectators and was filled every day of the Games. Hitler also attended every day; his appearances occasioned massive outbursts of affection both in the stadium and along the crowd-thronged route. It was also a great sporting success for Germany, whose athletes won more medals than those from any other country.

The press

There had been an abundance of German newspapers before 1933. Determined to prevent an independent press becoming a possible source of opposition to the Nazi regime, Goebbels systematically brought newspapers under control:

- ***Eher Verlag***, the NSDAP's own publishing firm, used its financial resources to negotiate the purchase of a wide range of newspapers and journals. By 1939, only a third of German newspapers remained independent and these, for survival reasons, were reluctant to take an anti-Nazi line.
- Control was further strengthened by bringing all the news agencies on which the newspapers depended for their information into one organization, the Nazi-dominated **DNB**. Newspapers now had to rely solely on Nazi-approved sources
- Under the terms of the 'Editors Law', first passed in 1933 and regularly renewed, editors were made personally responsible for what appeared in their papers. This provided an easy means for Goebbels to control the contents, since fearful editors became, in effect, their own censors.

The result of such measures was that Goebbels soon acquired a tame co-operative press, which provided a highly influential weapon for the inculcation of Nazi ideas in the general public.

The arts

Goebbels' constant theme as Propaganda Minister was the need to guard against what he described as Jewish corruption. In laying such stress on destroying Jewish influences Goebbels was defining culture by what it was against, rather than what it was for. This inhibited genuine cultural growth. Nazism was an attempt to force people to think along prescribed lines. It stifled creativity. The arts did not flourish; they became unadventurous and predictable.

Censorship ensured that painting and sculpture glorified the myths of the German past and emphasized manly, heroic deeds. Abstract works were unacceptable. Jazz was rejected as the product of a decadent African-American sub-culture. Art had to be formal and figurative. Directors of opera or ballet, as with theatre producers and playwrights, had to be careful that the story line did not offend Nazi values. The music of the composer Richard Wagner (1813–83) was reverentially referred to as an expression of the German soul.

Most Germans who had a career in the arts chose to co-operate with the Nazis' demands for cultural conformity, evidence that the majority of German writers, performers and artists, without being avid supporters of Hitler's Reich, were quite prepared to make the necessary compromises in order to be able to continue to work.

Prominent examples were the celebrated conductors Wilhelm Furtwangler and Herbert Von Karajan, and the renowned composer, Richard Strauss. Furtwangler later justified his behaviour by saying that since music transcended politics he felt no guilt. Critics responded by asking why, if music was transcendental, had he not protested against the Nazi ban on performing the works of the Jewish composers Mahler, Schoenberg, Mendelssohn and Hindemith.

Perhaps the outstanding example of intellectual betrayal was that of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who called upon his colleagues and students to reject such notions as freedom of speech and instead place themselves with entire obedience in the service of the new German Reich. It should be added that, rather than put up with political control, some 2,500 artists and scientists went into voluntary exile. If they were Jewish, of course, their motive was not simply artistic freedom but sheer survival.

Radio

Goebbels was swift to exploit radio broadcasting. By 1933 he had established the Reich Radio Company (RRC) whose sole purpose was the spread of Nazi propaganda. A vital development was a campaign to provide as many Germans as possible with radios. Between 1932 and 1937 the number of Germans with access to broadcasting rose from 22 to 70 per cent of the population. A sinister development was the ban on listening to foreign broadcasts, a prohibition which was enforced especially severely during wartime.

How was education used to inculcate Nazi ideas?

Education

Under the Nazis, education became a major means of promoting National Socialist ideas. The school system was brought under the control of a centralized Ministry of Education, headed by Bernhard Rust, one of whose projects was the creation of 'National Political Educational Institutions' (Napolas). Although part of the state education system, the Napolas were intended as training academies for young Nazis. It was this that brought Rust into conflict with Baldur von Schirach, head of the Hitler Youth (see page 99), who regarded such training as the province of his organization. In retaliation, von Schirach insisted that the Hitler Youth set up its own special 'Adolf Hitler Schools'. He claimed that in doing so he was responding to a direct instruction from the *Führer*. Whether this was the case is unclear, since Hitler declined to take sides in the dispute. He seemed to draw satisfaction from observing the enthusiasm with which Nazi administrators sought to show their commitment to him.

The curriculum

The inculcation of Nazi thought was to be achieved by heavy emphasis in the curriculum on race and ideology. The traditional subjects, like German language and history, were also modified to reflect Nazi notions of Germanic superiority. As the textbooks indicated, the race theories the pupils studied were of a simple, repetitive 'Aryans good – Jews bad' kind. History was presented as a study of Jews trying to undermine the great achievements of the Germans. This was backed up in biology classes by models which showed that, as in nature, harmful germs could corrupt the whole body, so in society the Jews could damage the whole people. A typical morning's timetable in a secondary school read:

8.50	9.40	10.25	11.00	12.10	1.00
German	History	Biology	Mathematics	**Eugenics**	Ideology

Progressively throughout the 1930s, in keeping with the anti-Semitic tenor of the curriculum, Jews were demoted or dismissed from teaching positions in schools and universities, and Jewish pupils and students were barred entry. There seems to have been little sustained protest over this from fellow teachers. A career could be blighted, perhaps ended, if a teacher spoke out.

Dispute with the Churches

The Nazi administrators' pointed exclusion of religious instruction from the curriculum in the new schools angered the Churches, who were by tradition the main providers of school education in Germany. The Catholic Church in particular feared that the Nazis were intent on undermining religious schools by imposing an atheist curriculum. Catholic spokesmen claimed this would be in breach of the **Concordat** of 1933, which had guaranteed the right of the Catholic Church to administer its own schools independently of the state. It is significant that when Hitler learned of the over-zealous way in

KEY TERM

Eugenics The science of breeding human beings for their fitness and intelligence.

Concordat An agreement between the Papacy and the Nazi government, signed in July 1933.

which Nazi officials in some areas were threatening the Catholic schools he instructed them to desist. There was to be no organized Nazi anti-Catholic campaign. Hitler wished to avoid the confrontation which might well follow if the interests of the Catholic Church, whose adherents comprised a major section of the German population, were unnecessarily threatened.

The Hitler Youth and the BDM

How did the Nazis develop their propaganda to appeal to the young?

The Nazis deliberately set out to give young people a particular sense of belonging in the new society that National Socialism was building. The mechanism for this was the Hitler Youth, an organization run by Baldur von Schirach with the aim of training young men in National Socialist values: patriotism, loyalty and a readiness to put the *Führer* and the nation before thoughts of self. But it was not all politics. The Hitler Youth laid great emphasis on physical activities and the outdoor life. In those respects it could be enjoyed in the same way that scouting legitimately was in other countries.

SOURCE O

This 1940 poster reads 'Youth Serves the *Führer*. Every ten-year old into the HJ' (HJ is the *Hitler Jugend* – i.e. the Hitler Youth).

Study Source O. What image of Hitler and the young is the poster attempting to convey?

The League of German Maidens (BDM in its German initials) was the sister movement to the boys' Hitler Youth. Both organizations aimed at providing an outdoor life that would keep the young people healthy at the same time as developing their understanding of National Socialism and making them feel truly part of the *Volk*, the community of Germans. The BDM's essential purpose was described by Jutta Rudinger, one the BDM's national leaders. She spoke of the movement developing in the girls 'character and the ability to perform, not useless knowledge, but an all-round education, and an exemplary bearing'.

The obvious aim of the Nazi bosses in creating a youth movement was to produce political conformity in the young so that they would go on as adults to have unquestioning loyalty to National Socialism. But it is also important to appreciate that, for all its politics, the BDM did give young women a sense of pride and self-worth. It also introduced them to people of their own age from other classes and regions of Germany, whom they would never have met but for BDM.

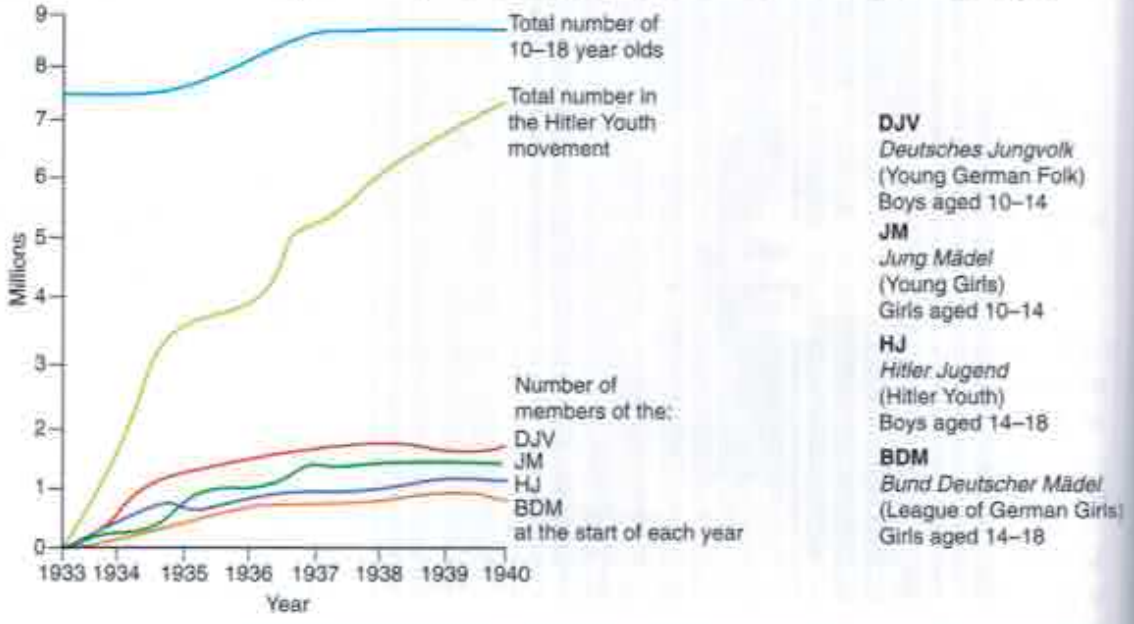
Membership

At first, membership of both the Hitler Youth and the BDM was voluntary but there was strong peer pressure on the young to join. This may in part explain the movements' popularity in the 1930s. Taken together, they showed an increase in membership from 108,000 in 1932 to 7.3 million in 1940. These numbers included the 10–14 year olds who belonged to the DJ and the JM, younger versions of the Hitler Youth and BDM. In 1939, that membership was made compulsory, an indication both of the success of the movement and the tightening of central control in the Third Reich.

? Study the graph in Source P. What trends are observable in the growth of the youth movements between 1933 and 1940?

SOURCE P

Graph showing membership of the various Hitler Youth movements.



German workers

How did the conditions for German workers change under Nazism?

In the world of work, the single largest organization that affected the German people was the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*). This began in 1933 under the direction of Robert Ley, who threw himself into the job with great energy. His aim as Director of the Front was to regulate the German workforce along military lines. He expressed this purpose in his motto: 'Every worker must regard himself as a soldier of the economy'. His first step towards this was to destroy the trade unions. Under the pretext of giving them a greater role in the economic life of the nation, he made them part of the Front. This meant effectively that they came under state control and lost their independence. No longer were they entitled to take strike action or withdraw their labour. Wage rates and conditions were not negotiable; they were dictated by Ley from the top.

During the twelve years of the Third Reich, the Labour Front came to control 25 million workers. Ley presented the Front as the summit of Nazi ideals. He spoke of ending all class conflict in Germany by creating 'social peace'. Workers and people would come together in the *Volk*, a word much used by Hitler to denote the sense of unity and purpose of the German people. They would work together for the good of Germany, willingly subordinating themselves as individuals to the collective will of the nation. To heighten the sense of solidarity, workers were encouraged to wear identical blue uniforms.

Behind the idealistic description, the reality was that the Labour Front required the workers to do what they were told. It was the Front's officials who decided who was to be employed, promoted or dismissed, and what they were to be paid. This control increased after Germany went to war.

Yet it would be wrong to regard the Labour Front simply as a mechanism of oppression. Its military-style discipline did not rule out a strong commitment to workers' welfare. Insurance schemes covering sickness, injury and bereavement were made available to deserving workers. Schooling was provided for the workers' children and adult education was available to the workers themselves.

Kraft durch Freude

Recreational needs were catered for by the Labour Front's sponsoring of one of the most remarkable social experiments in Nazi Germany, the ***Kraft durch Freude*** **(KDF)** movement. The KDF was organized leisure for the masses. It covered everything: theatre, concerts, opera, musicals, lectures, dancing, and sports of every kind. Ley spoke of its offering: 'the best of the best in food for the soul, the mind, and body'.

KEY TERM

***Kraft durch Freude* (KDF)** The Nazi 'Strength through Joy' movement.

An especially successful scheme was the provision of holidays for the workers and their families. Special hotels and campsites, invariably of a very high order of comfort, were set up; one consequence was a great boom in tourism within Germany in the 1930s. In all, some 10 million Germans, over one in seven of the population, were involved in KDF activities at some point between 1933 and 1943.

Impact of war

In purely material terms, leaving aside questions of enforced conformity, there is no doubt that in the years up to 1942 the conditions for German workers had markedly improved. After that, things changed. To sustain its demanding war effort, Germany required a huge labour force. To meet this need, a massive labour conscription programme was introduced in April 1942. The good days were over. During the next three years the grimness of the wartime conditions in Germany with its very high civilian casualty rate destroyed the KDF and made the Labour Front increasingly dictatorial.

How far did the status of women change in the Nazi period?

The status of women

Hitler's plans for a new Germany certainly did not include the advancement of women, whom he did not accept as equals to men. He defined female emancipation as a Jewish idea deliberately designed to weaken society. Although some local Nazi women's organizations were formed, they were not allowed to join the main Party. In 1931, Hitler had ordered that all the separate women's groups be brought into one body, the National Socialist Womanhood (NSF), whose purpose was to keep Nazi women under the control of the exclusively male party.

Motherhood

One of Hitler's particular concerns was that the birth rate was dropping in Germany; he wanted women to embrace motherhood as an ideal. A motherhood campaign was introduced to encourage women to give up work, return to the home and become mothers for the greater good of the nation. The NSF backed the government's measures introduced as part of the campaign. As a result of the restrictions imposed:

- fewer women were allocated university places
- the professions, such as the law and higher education, provided fewer positions for women
- the civil service no longer accepted women entrants.

Campaigns of this kind continued for most of the 1930s. Birth control clinics were obliged to close and abortion was made illegal. In a mixture of puritanism and racism, the authorities strongly discouraged women, particularly if they were mothers, from wearing make-up; it was described as a Jewish habit that good German women should shun. Smoking, too, was held to be unsuitable. The NSF did its part by impressing upon women that what the beloved *Führer* admired in German women was their 'feminine grace and female charm'.

Impact of war

The coming of the war meant an abrupt change in Nazi policy towards women. Their prime duty now was to assist the war effort:

- In September 1939, the month that the war started, a Land Year programme was introduced, a form of obligatory national service requiring unattached females to spend a year working on farms. It was no easy life. The farm camps were usually military-style barracks and the work could be unremittingly hard.
- The pressure of war also obliged the Nazis to drop their opposition to women in the industrial workforce. In 1942 they began to encourage, even to demand, that women go into the factories. By the last full year of the war over half the industrial workers in Germany were women.

In what ways does Source Q present an idealized concept of Nazi womanhood?

SOURCE Q

Nazi propaganda poster *Mutter und Kind* (Mother and Child).

The war proved a great destroyer of social convention in Germany. The huge gaps that appeared in manpower as the lists of war dead lengthened could be filled in only one way: German women would have to produce children in such numbers that Germany's future could be secured. But the absence and death of so many husbands meant there were no longer enough married couples to fulfil this task. Himmler's answer was to appeal to women to make themselves pregnant outside the normal confines of marriage. He spoke of this as a 'sublime task'. The Ministry of Justice backed him by ruling in 1944 that the leaders of Germany's youth movements were acting wholly legally in urging the girls to have unmarried sex in order to 'donate a child to the *Führer*'.

The reality was that the war had changed everything. The Nazis found it impossible to sustain their traditional policies towards women in the face of a war that ultimately destroyed German society.

How were Germany's minorities treated under Nazism?

Treatment of minorities

Nazi racial theory held that 'undesirables', a term which covered the seriously handicapped and racial inferiors, were expendable.

Sterilization programme

As early as July 1933 Hitler had approved the introduction of a 'Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring', which required that those suffering from specified diseases, such as epilepsy, deafness and blindness, undergo sterilization. By 1939, some 350,000 sterilizations had taken place; for example, 17,000 deaf people were sterilized.

Euthanasia programme

In September 1939, on one of the rare occasions when he issued a written order, Hitler gave instructions that a programme of 'mercy killing' was to be implemented. An organization, code-named T4, was commissioned to oversee the elimination of **defectives**. Necessarily relying on the co-operation of the medical profession to run the programme, T4 set up seven killing centres at various places in Germany. The centres, which presented themselves as hospitals or clinics, were responsible for 70,000 deaths during the period of the Third Reich.

KEY TERM

Defectives The Nazi term for those regarded as suffering from incapacitating physical or mental disorders.

At one of the centres, Hadamar, the technique employed was to group patients in a specially-constructed, air-tight chamber and then pump in carbon monoxide. All the bodies, except those kept back for dissection, were then carried on trolleys to the crematorium to be incinerated. The mental asylums were the obvious places around which to construct the programme. The usual method was to tell the selected patients that they were being taken in buses from the asylum for special treatment. Since those selected never returned, it soon became whispered knowledge among the inmates

that to be selected was to be marked for death. On occasion, this led to scenes of panic and resistance when the buses arrived. Force had to be used to restrain the desperate victims and force them aboard.

The practice among the medical staff was to inform the relatives of those who had been killed that the patient had regrettably died from 'breathing problems'. What such a euphemism indicated was that the authorities knew that if the true nature of their programme of death was made public it would be impossible to continue with it. The result was a conspiracy of silence among a large part of the medical profession. Death certificates were completed in such a way that they hid the real causes of death. The T4 administrators issued doctors with a set of 60 suggested formulae from which to choose according to the age and previous condition of the deceased. Those given in Source R were typical.

SOURCE R

Excerpt from an undated document among the medical records for the town of Wiesbaden, quoted in *The Third Reich: A New History* by Michael Burleigh, published by Macmillan, UK, 2000, p. 394.

Pneumonia is an ideal cause of death because the population at large always regard it as a critical illness.

Strokes. This cause of death is especially suitable in the case of older people; in the case of young people it is so rare that one should not use it.

According to Source R, why are certain diseases considered 'ideal' causes of death? ?

Resistance to the programme

Some doctors did protest by refusing to participate in the programme. Dr Friedrich Hölzel turned down the post offered him of 'Head of Children's Euthanasia' in Eglfing-Haar Asylum with these words: 'It is repugnant to me to carry this out as a systematic policy after cold-blooded deliberation and according to objective scientific principles, and without any feeling towards the patient.' Others, without openly disobeying the authorities, found ways of saving some of their patients. One trick was to claim that listed inmates were so important as maintenance workers or assistants to the staff that the asylum could not afford to lose them. Most doctors and nurses, however, remained silent and participated in the programme.

There were many examples of relatives demanding that the deaths of members of their family be fully explained. The standard response from the authorities was initially to commiserate with the family and then use threats if they persisted with their questions. One father who could not understand why his schizophrenic son could have been so healthy one day but suddenly die the next pressed for a proper explanation. He was finally brow-beaten into silence by a menacing letter (see Source S, page 106).

? In what ways do Sources R (page 105) and S illustrate the official attitude of the T4 authorities towards euthanasia?

SOURCE S

Excerpt from a letter written in 1941 by Dr Waltar Schmidt of the Eichberg Asylum to the father of a schizophrenic patient, quoted in *The Third Reich: A New History* by Michael Burleigh, published by Macmillan, UK, 2000, p. 347.

In the course of the year we repeatedly detect the ingratitude of relatives of hereditarily ill *mental patients … The nature and tone of your letter gives me cause to view you in a psychiatric light. I cannot refrain from notifying you that in the event you do not cease burdening us with letters, I will be compelled to have you examined by the public health doctor … You are dealing with a public authority, which you cannot assail when you feel like it.*

Strong-arm tactics were also used to silence the inhabitants of areas near the extermination centres who asked what was going on. The crematorium chimneys attached to one such centre at Hartheim gave off an oily, black smoke which filled the air with strands of human hair and produced such a stench that locals vomited. When they gathered in the town to protest they were visited by one of the T4 administrators who told them that if they continued to complain they would be imprisoned.

Religious protests

When information about the sterilization and euthanasia programme did leak out, there were a number of spirited protests. A number of Protestant and Catholic clergy spoke out against it from the pulpit. Gerhard Braune, a Pastor of the Lutheran Church in Gallneukirchen, having heard rumours of a secret euthanasia programme being run at the local asylum, discovered that in the space of two months over 2,000 inmates had inexplicably died. Appalled, Braune wrote an open letter to Hitler himself, quoting this horrific figure. It is doubtful that the letter ever reached the *Führer*. What is certain is that within days of sending it, Braune was arrested and sent to prison for three months.

Bernhard Lichtenberg, a Catholic priest, condemned the euthanasia programme and asked that the Reich's physician-in-chief should be charged with the murder of the mentally disabled. The Protestant Bishop of Württemberg warned that to treat mental defectives 'merely from the point of view of transient utility' could lead to the justifying of 'brutal extermination'. He asked whether Hitler knew of what was happening in his name. 'Has he approved it?'

Von Galen

The most resounding voice of protest was that of Clemens von Galen, the Bishop of Münster, who, on learning that asylums within his own diocese were included in the euthanasia programme, angrily denounced it (see Source T).

His denunciations became a campaign against state-directed euthanasia. He warned that if the programme continued Germany would sink into 'moral depravity'. Many Nazis wanted von Galen forcibly removed, but Hitler decided

otherwise. Taking into account the residual sense of decency of most Germans and aware of the moral authority that the Bishop possessed among Catholics, Hitler considered it more prudent to withdraw. In August 1941, he issued an order suspending the operation of T4 and thereby ended the euthanasia programme.

SOURCE T

Excerpt from a sermon by Bishop von Galen, August 1941, quoted in *Nazism 1919–1945*, edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, published by University of Exeter, UK, 1998, vol. 3, p. 1038.

We are not dealing with machines, horses and cows whose only function is to serve mankind. No, we are dealing with human beings, our fellow human beings, our brothers and sisters, with poor people, with sick people, with unproductive people. But have they for that reason forfeited the right to life? Have you, have I, the right to live only so long as we are productive, so long as we are recognized by others as productive?

According to Source T, on what grounds does von Galen attack the euthanasia programme? ?

The persecution of the Jews

By what stages did Nazi Germany move towards the annihilation of the Jews?

Although the Jews made up scarcely 1 per cent of the German population, they were subject to systematic persecution from 1933 onwards. The twelve years of Nazi rule are a story of applied hatred, climaxing in an attempt to destroy all the Jews in Europe. However, there is no evidence that the physical annihilation of the Jews was planned from the beginning. Rather it was a cumulative process with persecution increasing stage by stage until, with the coming of the war, all restraints on Nazi behaviour were removed. Claiming that the Jews represented a mortal threat in Germany's time of crisis, the Nazis embarked on what they called the '**Final Solution**'.

KEY TERM

Final Solution The Nazi euphemism for the extermination of the Jews.

Cumulative radicalization

There is no record of Hitler's ordering the Final Solution. An obvious but vital point is that he could not have carried it out on his own. His hatred intensified the German detestation of the Jews and, therefore, he must bear the ultimate responsibility for what happened. But of equal importance was the process described now by historians as 'cumulative radicalization'. By this they mean the system under which officials, eager 'to work towards the *Führer*' (see page 84), turned his vague ideas into deadly policies.

The major stages in the persecution

1933

- Goebbels began to organize open violence against the Jews.
- Jews were barred from positions in the civil service and the professions.

1935

The Nuremberg Race Laws created a systematic programme for depriving Jews of legal and civil rights:

- Marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Germans were forbidden.
- Full Jews were deprived of German citizenship.

- Full Jews were defined as those having three or four Jewish grandparents.

1938

- Jewish doctors were debarred from medical practice.
- Jewish businesses were forbidden to operate.
- Jewish students were dismissed from state schools and universities.
- A strict curfew was imposed on Jews living in towns and cities.
- 18,000 Polish Jews resident in Germany were forcibly expelled.

It is clear that by 1938 Hitler wanted the Jews removed from Germany and considered mass migration as a possibility. In April 1938 Goebbels recorded: 'The *Führer* wants gradually to push them all out. Negotiate with Poland and Romania. Madagascar would be the most suitable for them.' However, questions of international law and the coming of war in 1939 meant that such a policy was never implemented.

Kristallnacht

KEY TERM

Kristallnacht The Night of [Breaking] Glass

The expulsion of Polish Jews was the prelude to the Nazis' most openly violent anti-Jewish action yet. In protest at the expulsions, a young Jewish man assassinated a German diplomat in Paris. Exploiting this as a pretext for retaliation, the Nazis unleashed what became known as '***Kristallnacht***'. On the night of the 9–10 November 1938, over 100 Jews were killed in a series of violent attacks. Houses were smashed, shops looted and synagogues desecrated. The Jews themselves were blamed and 20,000 were arrested, with the majority being sent to concentration camps.

1939

The outbreak of war in 1939 had the effect of intensifying the anti-Jewish persecution which had been building since 1933. In preparing the German people for the likelihood of war, Hitler had insisted that if conflict came it would be the Jews who had caused it. This gave him the excuse to claim that war would offer the German people the chance to exact revenge for the Jews' leading the nation to defeat in 1918. In January 1939, he prophesied in the Reichstag what form that vengeance would take: 'the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe'.

1939–42

The occupation of eastern Europe by German armies between 1939 and 1942 provided the opportunity for annihilation. Deportations and killings became more organized and more widespread. Special SS units followed the German forces as they marched into Poland and the Soviet Union and killed thousands of Jews.

1942: The 'Final Solution'

In January 1942, some of the most prominent of the Nazi leaders gathered at a conference at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. They met to consider plans for the 'Final Solution'. The chief spokesmen were Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann. Heydrich defined the Nazi objectives: Europe from east to west was to be 'cleansed' of its 11 million Jews. In a planned operation they were to be transported to eastern Europe where they would be made to work until

they dropped dead from exhaustion and hunger. Any Jews who survived this would be systematically exterminated.

All those present at Wannsee agreed in principle and none raised serious moral objections to this 'Final Solution'. Furthermore, none doubted that in implementing the plan they were carrying out Hitler's wishes even though he had not issued a specific written order. The only disagreements were over the timing and pace of this vast logistical enterprise. Robert Ley, director of the Labour Front, publicly declared in May 1942, 'It is not enough to isolate the Jewish enemy; the Jews have got to be exterminated.'

1942–45: The Holocaust

Within months of the Wannsee Conference, special concentration camps were established to carry out methodical mass extermination. Bureaucrats sat in offices calculating how they could most efficiently destroy a whole race of people. The extermination programme came as near to achievement as the circumstances of war permitted. By the end of the war some 6 million Jews had been murdered in the camps.

Persecution of other minorities

How were other minorities treated under Nazism?

Attention has rightly been paid to the **Holocaust** as the most destructive of Hitler's race polices, but racial discrimination and persecution were directed towards all those he regarded as racial inferiors or 'asocial degenerates'. This explains the treatment of:

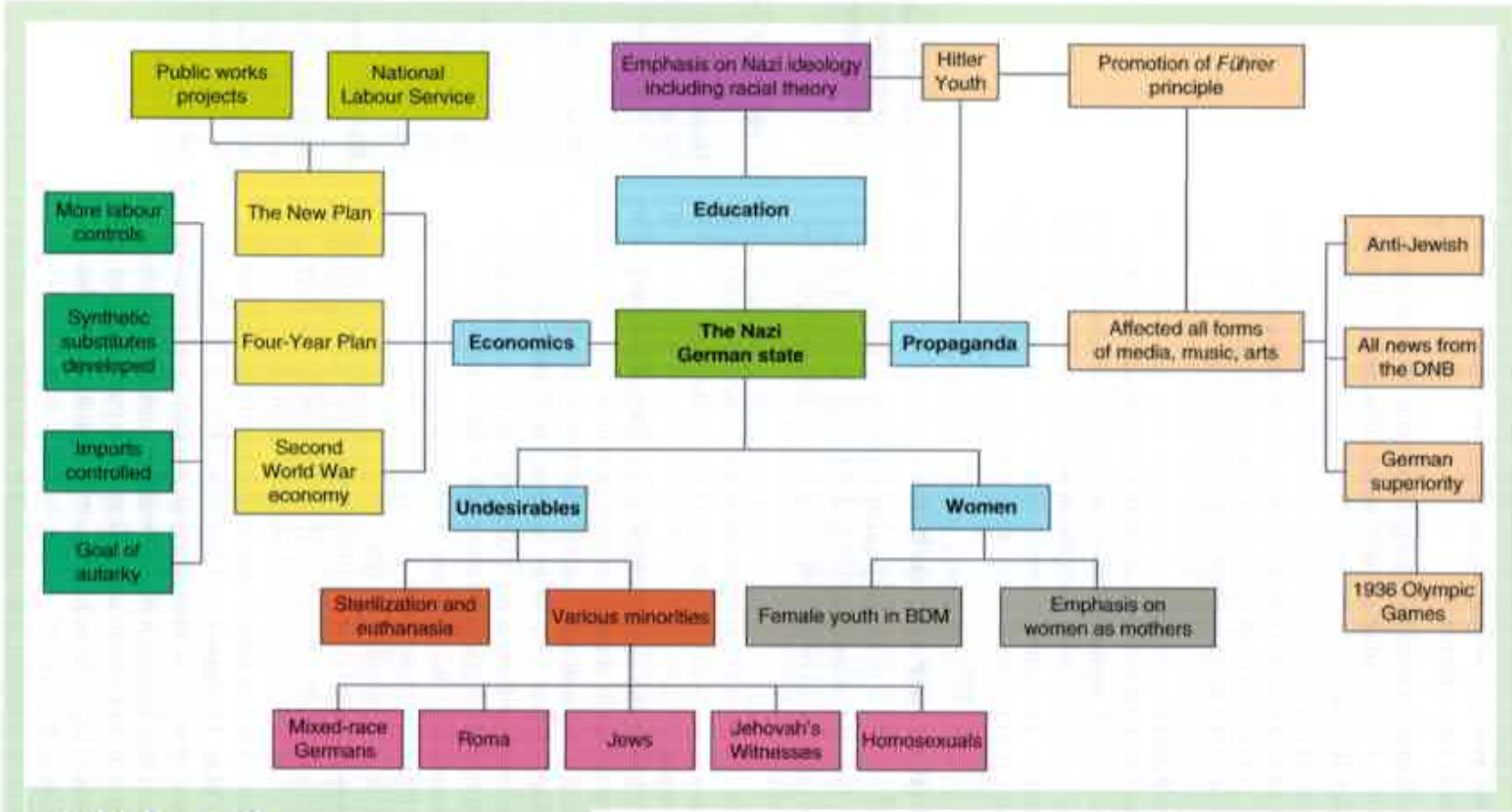
- The Roma gypsies – of the 900,000 Roma estimated to have been living in Europe before the war, some 23 per cent were killed in the Nazi extermination campaign.
- Homosexuals – following the murder of Röhm in 1934 (see page 81), scandalous reports came out about what were described as his 'perversions'. This led to police hunts and prosecutions under the laws against homosexual practices. During the Nazi period, 50,000 men were convicted of 'indecency'; of these some 15,000 were put in concentration camps where part of their degradation was to be made to wear a pink triangle. Homosexuals who did not 'come out' were usually not hunted down. Although female homosexuality was unlawful, there is no recorded case of a woman being prosecuted for this.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses** – 2,000 were murdered under the Nazi regime, 250 specifically for refusing to be conscripted. Those Witnesses who were prepared to sign allegiance to the regime were left untouched.
- 'Rhineland bastards' – this was Hitler's term for the mixed-race children, the offspring of either **black Germans** or of German women and French colonial troops who had been stationed in the Rhineland area after its occupation by France in 1919, including Algerian Arabs. For expedient reasons, since he looked for support from anti-British Arab leaders, Hitler publicly played down his distaste for Arabs. Yet since they, like Jews, were a Semitic people, his anti-Semitism included them as well. Among the first victims of the Nazi sterilization programme were the mixed-race Rhineland children.

KEY TERM

Holocaust The systematic killing by Nazi Germany of 6 million European Jews between 1942 and 1945.

Jehovah's Witnesses A Christian religious sect whose beliefs included the notion that, since the secular state was corrupt, its laws did not need to be obeyed, a view that offended the authorities.

Black Germans There were some 25,000 people of African origin living in the Third Reich, descendants of those whose who had come from the German colonies before 1918.



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Hitler's domestic policies and their impact, 1933–45

4 Hitler's foreign policy and its impact on Germany, 1933–39

Key question: How did Hitler's conduct of foreign policy strengthen his authority as leader of Germany?

It was once a commonly held view that Hitler had a master plan by which he plotted to assert German control over the whole of Europe. Few historians now see things as simply as that. The prevailing view is that Hitler was an opportunist in foreign affairs, as in domestic ones, who responded to events rather than directing them. His style was to play upon the weaknesses of others and see how far he could push them. He preferred to get his way by threats and resorted to war only when his threats were not enough. However his motives are judged, a critical consideration is that Hitler skilfully used his foreign policy to consolidate his hold over Germany. From 1933 until the outbreak of war in 1939, all his moves, though highly risky at times, were invariably successful and brought him massive support and adulation from the German people.

The Treaty of Versailles

What was the impact of the Versailles Treaty on Germany?

Much of Hitler's popularity had derived from his fierce condemnation of the Treaty of Versailles (see pages 67–68). Consequently, when he came to power in 1933 it was expected that he would tear up the Treaty. However, showing initial caution, Hitler proposed that the terms of the Treaty be modified so that the new Nazi–German state could rebuild its armed services to a level with the other European nations. The British and Italians were willing to discuss the question but the French government objected. This enabled Hitler to act as the injured party. In October 1933, he ordered the withdrawal of Germany from both the League of Nations and the current disarmament talks at Geneva, Switzerland, claiming that, if his country could not be treated as an equal, it made no sense for it to remain in these organisations. This assertion of German self-confidence delighted the majority of Germans.

The Saarland returned

Under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, the industrial Saarland region had been detached from Germany, with its ultimate status to be decided later by a **plebiscite**. The Allies hoped that the Saarlanders would choose to be joined to France. However, before the plebiscite was held in January 1935, Germany sent thousands of Nazis into the Saar to mount a huge pro-German campaign that swamped the pro-French viewpoint. The result was an overwhelming Nazi victory, with over 90 per cent of the Saarlanders voting for incorporation into Germany. This remarkable success intensified the admiration of the German people for their leader.

KEY TERM

Plebiscite A vote on a specific question.

Why was there little resistance to Germany's rearmament?

German rearmament, 1935

Hitler took his boldest step yet when he began to rearm Germany. In 1935 he introduced conscription, aiming to increase the German army to half a million men, five times the figure allowed under the Treaty of Versailles. Britain and France issued a mild reprimand to Germany for this breach of the Treaty. Their reluctance to act more forcefully was a matter of military weakness; neither country considered itself ready for serious military action.

SOURCE U

Map showing German expansion, 1933–39

? What does Source U suggest about Germany's rate of expansion?

Remilitarization of the Rhineland, 1936

The evident unwillingness of his western neighbours to oppose German rearmament encouraged Hitler's expansionism. In 1936 he ordered troops into the Rhineland, an area that had been demilitarized by the Treaty of Versailles to safeguard France's eastern frontier. This was Hitler's most provocative act yet, and he expected the French and British to resist. But, apart from diplomatic protests, France and Britain again did nothing. Addressing the troops before they set off, Hitler remarked: 'We have no territorial claims to make in Europe.' He was not being ironic. All his actions so far had been the reclaiming of German lands; nowhere had Germany crossed national borders. The Germans in the Rhineland welcomed his soldiers enthusiastically.

Further areas of expansion

How else did Hitler use foreign policy to consolidate his power?

Anti-Comintern Pact, 1936

As dictators, Mussolini, the fascist leader (see page 9), and Hitler, the Nazi leader, had much in common. Hitler's admiration for Mussolini, whom he described as 'the leading statesman in the world', prepared the way for a formal association, an 'axis' of power. Mussolini coined this term to define the new bond between Germany and Italy. It was soon expanded to include the major Asian power, Japan, in the Anti-Comintern Pact, in which the three nations declared their common opposition to the Comintern.

Anschluss, 1938

Hitler had long dreamed of incorporating Austria, the land of his birth, into the Third Reich. Exploiting the situation created by the Austrian Nazis, who were agitating violently for *Anschluss* (union with Germany), Hitler demanded that the Austrian government give way to Nazi wishes, and ordered German troops to mass on the Austrian border. The Austrian government capitulated and resigned, to be replaced by a Nazi cabinet. This was the prelude to Hitler's triumphant entry into Austria, which was now declared to be part of greater Germany. The huge welcome he received, followed by a referendum that returned an overwhelming pro-*Anschluss* vote, vindicated his actions. Certainly France and Britain, though concerned by the events, were unwilling to intervene.

To acclaim in both Austria and Germany, Hitler treated the *Anschluss* as a great mystical event which he had been destined to lead.

SOURCE V

Extract from a speech by Hitler in Vienna, 9 April 1938, in *Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, edited by N. Baynes, Oxford University Press, UK, 1942, Vol. II, p. 1458.

I believe that it was also God's will to send a boy from Austria into the Reich, to let him grow up, to raise him to be leader of the nation so as to enable him to lead back his homeland into the Reich. That which took place was only conceivable as the fulfilment of the will of Providence.

According to Hitler in Source V, what providential role is he fulfilling? ?

German recovery of the Sudetenland, 1938

Hitler showed the same ruthlessness, with the same success, over the **Sudetenland**. One of the new states created at the end of the First World War had been Czechoslovakia, a country made up of several ethnic groups, including three and a quarter million Germans in the Sudetenland, who, under local Nazi leadership, vociferously campaigned for the right to be incorporated into Nazi Germany.

KEY TERM

Sudetenland German word for 'southland'.

? What does Source W illustrate about Czechoslovakia's regions in 1938?

SOURCE W

Map of the regions of Czechoslovakia, 1938

Taking up their cause, Hitler subjected the Czechoslovakian government to a set of increasingly difficult demands. None of Czechoslovakia's possible allies was willing to risk being drawn into a war by giving the Czechoslovakian state direct military support. This supine attitude left Hitler master of the situation. At the Munich conference in October, Britain, France and Italy agreed with Germany on a settlement that recognised all Hitler's major demands and allowed what was left of Czechoslovakia to remain an independent state. Within days of the agreement, German troops had entered the Sudetenland to frenetic applause from the local people. The region was now part of greater Germany. In March 1939, Hitler simply ignored the Munich Agreement and ordered the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, a seizure that effectively destroyed the Czechoslovakian state. Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, excitedly declared that 'Germany's prestige has grown enormously. Now we really are a world power again.'

How did Hitler use foreign policy to strengthen his position?

The beginning of the war

The Polish Crisis, 1939

Until March 1939, Hitler could argue that he had acted legitimately in his foreign policy; Germany had reclaimed only what was its own: the Rhineland, Austria and the Sudetenland. However, Hitler now began to act in ways that went beyond what was acceptable internationally. Given Hitler's belief that it was Germany's destiny to take the lands to the east, it was likely that Poland would at some point be invaded by Germany. The difference between the Polish case and all the others so far was that there were far more Poles living under German control than there were Germans under Polish authority. Hence, the principle of self-determination did not apply.

Germany demanded that Poland give up all authority over German peoples living in Polish-occupied areas. When Polish ministers attempted to negotiate with German officials, they were contemptuously rebuffed. Short of total surrender, there was nothing the Poles could do to put off the invasion that seemed inevitable. Germany prepared to invade Poland in September 1939. This time, the Western powers responded with greater firmness. Britain and France had earlier given guarantees that they would come to Poland's aid if Germany attacked. However, Hitler reasoned that neither Britain nor France would sustain their opposition to him. After all, the British and French people had applauded the statesmanship shown at the Munich Conference which had pulled Europe back from the brink of war. Why, Hitler asked, was fear of war not as powerful in September 1939 as it had been twelve months earlier at Munich? What Hitler did not appreciate was that there was a sense in which the Allies had reached the end of their tether. The threat to Poland represented a stage too far in German expansion.

The Nazi–Soviet Pact, August 1939

Shortly before Britain and France declared war on Germany in September 1939, there had been an extraordinary twist in European diplomacy. A month earlier, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had entered into a non-aggression pact. The main attraction for Hitler was that an agreement with the USSR would make it easier to defeat Poland. It would also secure Germany's eastern borders, and thus leave it free it to take on France and Britain should they declare war. This is, indeed, what happened. When Germany declined to respond to their ultimatums, France and Britain declared war on 3 September. The future of Germany and Europe was now to be determined by armed conflict.

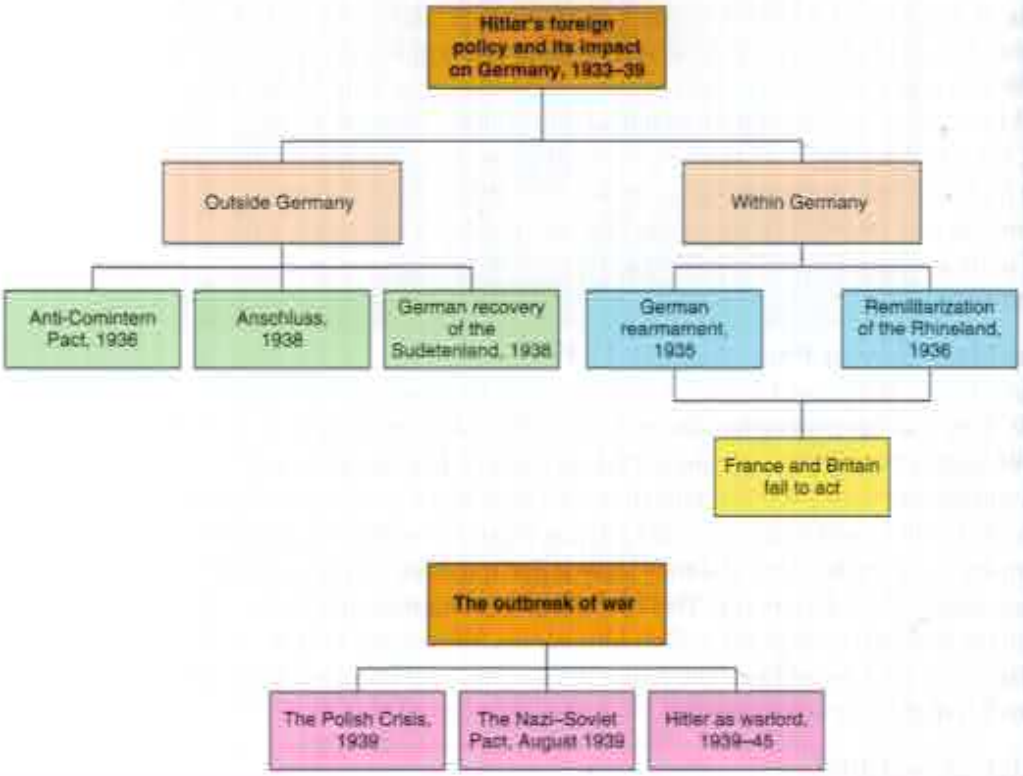
Hitler as warlord

In committing Germany to war, Hitler exposed his leadership to great risk. War had been his personal decision and his status and reputation now hung upon whether his armies would be successful. As a German newspaper put it, 'Trust in the *Führer* will now be subjected to its hardest acid test.' All his achievements, domestic and foreign, could be wiped out if the war went badly.

Initially the war went very well, confounding the doubters and lifting the *Führer* even higher in public estimation. His victories on the western front and his advances on the eastern were greeted with rapture, and he was hailed as German history's greatest warlord. Had the victories continued, his authority would undoubtedly have been unassailable and opposition to him unthinkable.

But, after 1942, the effects of his decision in the previous year to invade the Soviet Union and declare war on the USA made final victory impossible. Hitler's wisdom and judgement were called into question. Yet, even then,

doubt was seldom openly expressed. The aura around him and the awe with which his people regarded him survived even the 1944 July Bomb Plot (see page 86). Such had been his hold on the German people that it was only in the last desperate months, when crushing defeat loomed inexorably, that faith in the *Führer* was extinguished.



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Hitler's foreign policy and its impact on Germany, 1933–39

5 Key debate

Key question: How far did Hitler achieve a totalitarian state?

A question that underlies all assessments of Nazi totalitarianism, and which divides historians, is whether Hitler was a 'weak' or a 'strong' leader. Those who support the weak argument, most notably the German scholars, Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, suggest that, despite appearing to exercise totalitarian authority over the state, Hitler was not all-powerful. Three main reasons are offered:

- Hitler was often indecisive.
- His instructions were not always carried out.
- The political and administrative system of Nazi Germany prevented him from dictating policy.

However, the majority of historians in this field maintain that Hitler was a 'strong' leader. Writers such as Alan Bullock and Richard Evans accept that Hitler delegated the duties of government but suggest that this did not diminish his power. Indeed, his policy of encouraging rivalry among ministers and institutions increased his power according to the divide and rule principle. The main points in the 'strong' argument are:

- The Enabling Act and *Gleichshaltung* left Hitler 'the supreme judge of the nation'.
- There was no open defiance of him among ministers and officials.
- Only one political party was permitted, Hitler's own Nazi Party.
- Opposition was treasonable.
- The trade unions had been abolished.
- The armed services swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler personally. From 1938 Hitler was Commander-in-Chief.
- The legal system operated in Hitler's name; judges swore allegiance to him.
- The Churches were either supportive or quiescent.
- The German press was wholly pro-Hitler.
- The ***Reichsbank*** was subservient.
- The Reichstag became an exclusively Nazi body, existing only to confirm Hitler's decisions.
- The Cabinet existed only at Hitler's pleasure and ceased to meet at all after 1937.

The weak versus strong argument has become merged with the intentionalist versus structuralist dispute:

- Intentionalists regard Hitler's policies as having been the result of his deliberate planning.
- Structuralists see Hitler as having been subject to pressures that obliged him to adopt policies not of his own choosing.

KEY TERM

Reichsbank The German state bank.

How extensive was Hitler's authority?

Hitler's authority

The limitation of the structuralist case is that, while Hitler may well not have initiated policies, the basic fact remained that such was his political dominance that no policy could proceed unless it met with his approval. Although Nazi Germany was not a clearly defined integrated political structure, everything of note had ultimately to pass the scrutiny of the *Führer*. The vital thing for any minister was to keep the confidence of the *Führer*. Those he trusted could approach him and ask for support for their proposals; as Chancellor any instructions he issued had priority over all other orders. That made the policies he backed unchallengeable.

Everything that was done in Germany after 1933 was done in Hitler's name. It is difficult to accept that anything of which he really disapproved would have been pursued. The intentionalist viewpoint is strengthened by a comment of Hitler's in 1939 to the effect that his polices were a compound of planning and the right circumstances. Opportunism, he said, was always the key: 'The actual timing could naturally not be foreseen at the beginning.'

Historians continue to debate the role of Hitler in his government's decisions. To what extent is history essentially unknowable? (History, Language, Reason)

TOK

It was in wartime that Hitler's authority showed itself in an absolute form. As Commander-in-Chief of the army, Hitler made himself so central to the strategic planning of the war that everything had to go through him. He ran the war, a situation which left his generals frustrated. They knew he was making major errors yet, short of assassinating him, they felt they could not stop him.

An important observation is one made by Sir Ian Kershaw. He suggests that the weak/strong, intentionalist/structuralist terms are as much complementary as they are contradictory. They are not exclusive. There is no need for an either/or approach. Strengths and weaknesses can exist side by side. It is also too easy to be misled by terms. 'Weakness' conveys the notion of absence of power, whereas Hitler often chose to let others use power in his name, which is not weakness but a delegation of authority. In Hitler's case, it was a style of government.

Chapter summary

Germany under Adolf Hitler, 1933–45

Embittered by Germany's humiliating defeat in 1918, Adolf Hitler found an outlet for his bitterness in the Nazi Party whose leader he became. Failing to take power in a *putsch* in 1923, he cynically resolved to gain office by legal means. Possessed of a deep hatred of Jews and communists, whom he blamed for Germany's ills, he exploited the troubled economic times to develop the Nazi Party to a position in 1932 where it gained a third of the popular vote. Using guile and skilful propaganda he then outmanoeuvred the politicians of the Weimar Republic to become Chancellor in 1933.

Once in office Hitler adopted *Gleichshaltung*, a programme that destroyed all opposition within the Nazi movement and the country at large. By 1934, he held supreme power as *Führer*. He then stepped back from the domestic scene, leaving day-to-day government to his ministers and officials, of whom he made two demands: they were to rearm the Third Reich and also make it a racial state. This second demand meant that the persecution of the Jews became the outstanding feature of Nazi Germany, culminating in the Holocaust.

Hitler's political pre-occupation was with foreign affairs. His aim was to restore to Germany the territories and peoples taken from it in 1919. Between 1933 and 1939, when his policies tipped into war, he opportunistically used bluff and threats to get his way. In 1939 he went too far and became involved in a war with France and Britain. Two years later his over-ambition resulted in war with the Soviet Union and the USA. Having won all their major campaigns down to 1942, the German forces then found themselves overstretched in a multi-front struggle and by 1945 they had been defeated.

Until war came, Hitler was hugely popular with the German people who admired him for ending unemployment and raising their living, working and educational levels. Understandably, however, the achievements of the Third Reich in such areas have been overshadowed by the horrors to which he ultimately subjected the peoples of Germany and Europe.

Examination practice

Command term: Discuss

When a question asks you to discuss some aspect of twentieth-century authoritarian states or leaders, it is asking you review arguments and creating a conclusion on the basis of the evidence you presented. This will be a popular form of question.

Below are a number of different questions for you to practise using the command term 'discuss'. For guidance on how to answer exam-style questions, see Chapter 10.

1. Discuss the role of ideology in the emergence of an authoritarian state that you have studied.
2. Discuss the weakness of political systems in the emergence of two authoritarian leaders, each from a different region.
3. With reference to two authoritarian states, discuss the extent to which authoritarian control was established.
4. Discuss the aims and impact of domestic economic policies of one twentieth-century authoritarian leader.
5. Discuss the significance of charismatic leadership in the maintenance of power of two authoritarian leaders, each from a different region.

Activities

1. Most historians acknowledge that Hitler's government benefited most Germans, primarily economically. Discuss the following question, perhaps with reference to TOK: At what point is majority rule not defensible as a governing philosophy?
2. Research the political views of Ernst Röhm. Compare and contrast these views with what Hitler's government implemented in Germany.
3. Research the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the Jim Crow laws in the United States and the apartheid system of South Africa. Compare and contrast these three systems in a table or chart. Extend this activity by finding other examples of legal discrimination by various states against their racial, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities and add these to an expanded chart.

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