

## **MODERN HISTORY: *GERMANY***

### **Account for Hitler's accession to power by 1933.**

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Hitler's accession to power was a result of many failures of the republic. These problems came as a consequence of Hindenburg's position as president, the role of the army, the position of von Schleicher, numerous elections, the positions of Papen and Brüning, the final deal in 1933 and then Hitler's enabling act. Each of the problems in the Weimar allowed further power for Hitler and his eventual legal position gained in 1933.

The position of President von Hindenburg had a large impact on Hitler's accession to power. The economic and political problems of the time placed great demands on Hindenburg and as a result he increasingly turned to a small circle of men, who were conservative military figures, including General Kurt von Schleicher chief of the army department, Oskar von Hindenburg and Otto Meißner. Hindenburg was very nationalistic and was particularly influenced by the army. From the start of the republic, the army withheld influence and power. Hindenburg himself actually opposed the idea of a democracy. By the depression there was a growing belief in army leadership and the need for Germany to return to a stronger more authoritarian government. Hindenburg was inclined to make decisions that involved the army or people associated with the army. He often took General von Schleicher's advice, this led to the appointment of people such as Brüning and Papen as chancellors who had a good military record and were supportive of the interest of the German but not necessarily the republic. This began the start of the presidential rule, as Hindenburg was willing to support even with the use of article 48 and other means. This constantly made for weak coalitions and a lack of influence of the Reichstag. This led to people withdrawing their faith away from the republic and looked to other minority groups such as the Nazis and their leaders such as Hitler.

General von Schleicher was a leading military figure actively engaged in political activity. As a friend and advisor to the president, he held political power and intrigue. By 1932, Schleicher was looking for some way to bring Nazis into government and wanted to tame Hitler and turn his movement from one opposing the state to one supporting the state. He foolishly believed that once the Nazis were given a share of power, their extremism would be modified. This led to violence and 19 people were killed on the streets with 200 injured, as the Nazis staged a provocative march through the working-class area of Hamburg. Schleicher had significant influence, especially on the president, however he made foolish decisions, including those that involved appointing and dismissing chancellors such as Brüning and Papen. This resulted in a clear failure in democracy and a loss of faith from the people. This evidently allowed the influence of other political leaders such as Hitler to shine through.

One of the men that Schleicher advised Hindenburg to appoint as chancellor was Brüning. He was in power at a critical time of economic chaos and political instability therefore having a significant influence on the people who looked to the government for stability and order. Brüning's response to worsening economic situation was to implement the policy of deflation which meant cutting expenditure and increasing taxes, despite the fact that the Reichstag voted to reject his budget in July, Brüning believed these harsh measures were necessary and called for Hindenburg to intervene, the budget was then implemented under article 48, arguing that Germany's economic woes constituted a state of emergency. The Reichstag responded by passing a vote of no confidence and Brüning asked the president to dissolve the Reichstag and call new elections, which he did. Authority had been taken from the elected German parliament and placed on the president. In 1931 Brüning persisted with his economic policies, which meant new tax increases and further cuts in wages, the food prices rose and unemployment continued to climb, reaching 4.6 million in October 1931. Hindenburg made the mistake of supporting one individual rather than appealing to the wants and needs of the whole Reichstag. Schleicher later convinced Hindenburg that Brüning was no longer acceptable because he had moved to far left and the ban on the SS and SA had unsettled the army. As a result of Hindenburg's concerns for the army and reliance on Schleicher, he asked Brüning to resign. The fragility of democracy was created by constant calls for new

elections and the appointment of various chancellors. This again influenced the public who were repeatedly seeing a weak republic.

The fall of Brüning meant power no longer resided with the elected parliament but with Hindenburg and his circle. Papen was appointed chancellor and had support of Schleicher and Hindenburg but few others. Germany had a government based purely on the support of the president. In 1932 Schleicher was convinced that an arrangement had to be made with Nazis because of the prospect of civil war that could occur if Papen shut down the Reichstag and ignored political reality. Schleicher persuaded the president that the army had now lost confidence in Papen, as the army couldn't afford to take sides if civil war erupted. Hindenburg was again sensitive to the army and on 2 December he reluctantly asked Papen to resign and appointed Schleicher as chancellor. This again undermined the role of a democracy as a whole power and gave it to one individual- the president.

The abundant amount of elections held between 1930 and 1933 significantly benefitted the Nazi party and influenced the success and popularity of Hitler. Throughout the 1930 elections the Nazi Party held a vigorous campaign where they projected themselves as a party of action. Hitler and other Nazi leaders used rallies and political meetings to attack the inefficiency of the parliamentary system, divided political systems, threat of communism and social and economic consequences of the depression. The elections benefitted the Nazis as they tapped into the mood of resentment and frustration and promised revitalisation of the will of a new beginning. This led to a growing appeal to the disillusioned middle class, small business operators and increasing number of rural and farming population. Hitler didn't promise to cure problems but projected determination and conviction that he would in order to win wide support. As a result, in the 1930 elections, over 35 million Germans voted for the Nazis, this allowed representation in the Reichstag to increase from 12 to 107 seats, making them the 2nd largest party in Reichstag. The elections held in July 1932 allowed another staggering Nazi victory, achieving 37.4% of votes and increasing representation in the Reichstag from 108 to 230 seats, making them the largest political party. The November 1932 elections led to a drop in the Nazis votes to 32%, and representation from 230 to 196 seats but they were still the largest party. Hitler used the elections to his advantage by making them a point of propaganda and using them to promote himself and the Nazi party, he increased popularity via his strong skills as an orator, through newspapers, newsreels, public rallies and his use of aeroplanes to fly from city to city. These elections were also used to target specific groups, including the industrialists.

The industrialists never supported the republic but throughout the Weimar period they remained the powerful, privileged elite of society. Industrialists were attracted by the Nazi image of discipline and order, their promise to restore German honour and their opposition to communism, however they remained suspicious to radicalism. Hitler sought to attract this group in society, knowing they would be a large asset who would provide significant funds and widespread support. It was only in late 1932 that big business and industrialists began to support the Nazi movement, a major cause of this was the fall of Papen and appointment of Schleicher as chancellor.

The final deal of January 1933 is what lunged Hitler into power. Papen was no longer chancellor but stayed in Berlin and set to work to get rid of Schleicher knowing that the only way to achieve this was if the Nazis became part of government. Hitler had already demanded the chancellorship twice but was refused by Hindenburg. Papen intended to bring Hitler in and create a conservative, nationalist, anti-democratic government. On 4 January 1933 Papen and Hitler met secretly in Cologne, followed by a number of other meetings. Papen's plan was to create a coalition government of Nazis, DNVP and his own conservative supporters. The only thing needed now was the support of Hindenburg. Hindenburg only accepted Hitler as president because of the arrangements set up by Papen and others, including the Vice-chancellor (Papen) being present whenever the chancellor (Hitler) met with the president and that Nazis would only take up 3 of 11 posts in the cabinet. Hindenburg was assured that the real power would rest with Papen. On 28 January 1933, Hindenburg dismissed Schleicher and two days later, Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor.

Hitler was made chancellor on 30 January of 1933 and the streets erupted with Nazi celebrations. One condition Hindenburg agreed to when appointing Hitler chancellor, was that the Nazis would only have three cabinet posts. However Hitler manipulated this by giving the Nazis three extremely significant key posts as ministers for the interior, so they were in control of the federal and Prussian police. Hitler took advantage of his position as chancellor in as many ways as possible. As chancellor he has the full resources of the state with the use of media and everything at his disposal to put himself in a position of legal dictator. Hitler was very good at 'pseudo' legality meaning he was going to turn his position from legal chancellor to legal dictator. On 27 February 1933 the Reichstag bursts into flames and burns down, Hitler seizes this fire as an opportunity to turn people against the communists threatening that it was beginning of a communist uprising. He uses article 48 and immediately bans communist publications. Hitler took advantage of absolutely every opportunity he could to gain power. He soon passes a Decree for 'the protection of people and state' that basically gets rid of the civil liberties granted by the constitution such as freedom of speech and freedom to form associations. This was supposed to be a temporary measure but remained in force for the next 12 years. Once Hitler acceded the position of chancellor there was no stopping the rise of his power.