

1. EMERGENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND THE IMPACT OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Successes and failures of democracy
- Nature and role of nationalism
- Influence of the German army

The Weimar Republic had many problems in its early years. The temptation for students is to write all they know about all of them. However, it would be wiser to only write about the problems which had lasting impact. Below are 6 major problems from the early years of the Republic which would remain problems right up until the end of the Republic.

- (a) November Criminals> Stab in the Back Legend and its lasting impact

- (b) Left Wing Division> Spartacist Rebellion> Left Wing Split

“There is no doubt that the most damaging legacy of the German revolution was the rift which opened up on the left between the revolutionary socialists and the more moderate SPD. The brutal suppression of workers’ uprisings in the early years were neither forgotten nor forgiven by the German Communist Party, and fierce rivalries continued to undermine the political stability of the new republic as the two main left-wing parties competed for working-class support. Between them the two parties gained the support of 30-40 per cent of the Weimar electorate, but their total inability to work together constructively undoubtedly contributed to the failure of the democratic regime.”

(Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic 1919-1933*)

- (c) Dependence on the Army > Ebert-Groener Pact

- (d) A Political Revolution, but no Social Revolution

Historian Hans Mommsen argued that when the Republic was created, **“the silent majority (of Germans) regarded democracy as an imported product implanted in Germany under allied pressure in 1919.”**

“According to many textbooks, a revolution is said to have taken place in Germany in November 1918. Indeed, there was turbulent change of governments in that period, there were revolutionary noises all over the place, but once the dust had settled it soon emerged that precious little had changed in Germany.”

(Historian Imanuel Geiss)

- (e) Constitution – Presidential Powers (e.g. Article 48) & Proportional Representation – but should not overstate the role of these – open to abuse in a culture with no democratic tradition

“It was one of the most democratic documents in the world...however it was doubtful whether such a democratic constitution could work in the hands of a people that was neither psychologically or historically prepared for self-government.”

(Klaus Fisher, *Nazi Germany: A New History*)

- (f) Versailles – Psychological/Political impact more important>long-term damage to democracy which was forever linked to the humiliation

“Much more important than the fairness of the treaty was its impact on the new German Republic. How far is it true that the Versailles Treaty wrecked the German democracy? That Germany’s economy was ruined by reparations and her security undermined... Economically and demographically speaking there was no foundation in these assertions...”

Much more serious was the political demoralisation which the treaty caused within the Reich itself...The real damage the treaty did to Germany was to disillusion more moderate men who might otherwise have supported their new republic...The peace settlement continued to poison the political atmosphere in Germany for many years.”

(A Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*)

GERMANY AFTER WORLD WAR I



(G) POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC TO 1929

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Successes and failures of democracy
- Nature and role of nationalism
- Influence of the German army
- Changes in society

Students are generally much better at recognising the failings of the Weimar Republic than acknowledging its successes. A key question that you will need to think about is whether the period 1924-29 was one of genuine, relative, or deceptive stability?

- (a) Right Wing enemies of the Republic > Army, Judiciary, Industrialists, Teachers, Civil Service

- (b) Kapp Putsch – shows support for the Weimar Republic, but sparked another Communist uprising in 1920

- (c) 1923 – Hyperinflation – Economic and Political disaster which turned supporters of democracy to extremes – However, we should not overstate its significance in the collapse of the Republic

- (d) 1924-29 Germany Recovers – Stresemann Years: End of Passive Resistance, New Currency, Dawes Plan & US Loans, Locarno Treaty, League of Nations, Young Plan, new freedoms for women, Cultural creativity, Scientific Progress

BUT

(a) Political Instability remains – No majority government

(b) Election of Hindenburg as President

(c) Economic Weaknesses – Debt, Unemployment, Agriculture depressed

(d) Opposition to Weimar Decadence

Historian Richard Bessel believed the 1924-29 period was one of deceptive stability: **“Even during the years of ‘relative stabilisation’ all was not well with the Weimar Republic. The profound social, economic, political and psychological destabilisation which had set in with the First World War had not really been overcome; underlying economic problems remained, and the relative political stability of Weimar’s ‘golden years’ rested on shaky foundations.”**

Historian P. Pulzer has a more positive view of the period: **“The era of Stresemann was the high noon of the Weimar Republic. Tempers dropped, political extremism subsided. In large part this was due to the return of prosperity. Between 1924... and 1928 money wages doubled and the value of the currency was maintained. The standard of living was higher in 1928 than in 1913. Unemployment was generally below one million. In 1927 the expansion of the German state culminated in the introduction of a comprehensive unemployment insurance scheme. Germany industry regained its technical and organisational lead. The Dawes loan...encouraged modernisation.”**

What do you think? Was the period 1924-29 was one of genuine, relative, or deceptive stability?

(H) RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY (NSDAP) FROM 1923

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Nature and role of nationalism
 - The nature and impact of Nazism
- (a) Founded in 1919> Important Role of Hitler in these early days> Importance of Nationalism and Racism in Nazi ideology (Social Darwinism & Anti-Semitism)

- (b) Munich Putsch> Key lesson learnt – Power to be attained democratically

- (c) 1924-28> Period of consolidation but no political progress – only 12 seats in the 1928 election

Yet in four years the Nazis will become the largest party in Germany and Hitler would be chancellor in 1933 – What can explain this meteoric rise?

(I) THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION ON GERMANY

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Successes and failures of democracy

The Depression was a pivotal event in the collapse of the Weimar Republic and in the rise of the Nazis to power. However, although whilst it could be argued that the Weimar Republic could have collapsed without the Depression, it really is impossible to argue that the Nazis would have risen to power without it. Nevertheless, the Depression alone can't explain why Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933.

- (a) Germany hit worse than any other nation

- (b) Massive Unemployment, Businesses and Banks collapse

- (c) Made worse by government response to reduce expenditure

- (d) Most important was the political impact which turned people to extremist parties with extreme solutions

(J) COLLAPSE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC 1929-33 & HITLER'S ACCESSION TO POWER

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Success and failures of democracy
 - Nature and role of nationalism
 - Influence of the German army
 - The nature and impact of Nazism
- (a) The Appeal of Nazism – The Nazis offered something to all classes (Elites, Middle Classes, Farmers, Working Classes, Youth)

Alan Bullock in this book *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* sums up the appeal of Hitler – **He was prepared to be all things to all men, because to him all men represented one thing, a means to power.**'

- (b) Anti-Communism was the main reason why people joined the Nazi movement

- (c) Nazis did best in rural, Protestant areas of Germany. Main support came from middle classes and youth.

“Electoral studies and surveys of Party membership show that the NSDAP drew particularly on the middle social strata for its intake during the Weimar Republic. The traditional bourgeois parties were squeezed into insignificance as the NSDAP expanded; in middle-class neighbourhoods the NSDAP obtained greater-than-average votes, as it did in rural areas not influenced by political Catholicism; there were disproportionately more teachers, small traders and craftsmen in the Party [...] and [...] even before 1933 the National Socialists had captured key posts in middle-class associations and representative bodies.”

(D.J.K Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*)

(d) Role of Propaganda and Hitler – Hitler over Germany – Innovation and Saturation

(e) Role of S.A – In propaganda and in anti-Communist violence

Nazi Election Results 1928-32

1928	(12 – 2.8%)	(10 th)
1930	(107 – 18.3%)	(2 nd)
1932 July	(230 – 37.3%)	(1 st)
1932 Nov	(196 – 32%)	(1 st)

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ***Why were there so many elections? How did they help the Nazis?***
- ***Why was Hitler appointed chancellor only 2 months after they suffered an electoral setback, when they did not have a majority and when President Hindenburg despised Hitler?***

The main reason why the Nazis came to power in the end was the role played by key conservative elites e.g. Franz Von Papen, General Kurt Von Schleicher, Industrialists, Bankers, and Landowners.

- Their political intrigue destabilised the democracy and created election opportunities for the Nazis.
- Ultimately it was conservative pressure upon Hindenburg that led to Hitler's appointment as chancellor.

“Despite the mass support he had won, Hitler came to office in 1933 as the result, not of any irresistible revolutionary or national movement sweeping him into power, nor even of a popular victory at the polls, but as part of a shoddy political deal with the ‘Old Gang’ whom he had been attacking for months. Hitler did not seize power, he was jobbed into office by backstairs intrigue. Far from being inevitable, Hitler’s success owed much to luck and even more to the bad judgement of his political opponents and rivals [...] As Hitler freely admitted afterwards, the Party’s fortunes were at their lowest ebb when the unexpected intervention of Papen offered them a chance they could scarcely have foreseen.”

(Alan Bullock, Hitler: a study in Tyranny)

“Elections had placed Hitler in a position where he could not be ignored in the power-brokerage game. But he was not ‘elected’ Reich Chancellor. Nor was there any greater compulsion to place him in power in January 1933 than there had been four months earlier. He was appointed by Hindenburg following intrigues of the sort that had made and then unmade his immediate predecessors – Brüning, Papen, and von Schleicher. Hitler needed the brokerage of the men around Hindenburg in order to get to power; the conservative elites needed Hitler’s control of the masses in order to bring off a lasting return to authoritarian rule.”

(Ian Kershaw, Weimar: Why did German Democracy Fail)

“There was nothing inevitable about Hitler’s triumph in January 1933. Five years earlier, the Nazi Party had been a fringe irritant in German politics, but no more...External events, the Young Plan to adjust German reparations payments, the Wall Street Crash, and Brüning’s entirely unnecessary decision to have an election in summer 1930 – put the Nazis on the political map. Though democracy had by that time an unpromising future, a Nazi dictatorship seemed far less likely than some other form of authoritarian dictatorship...In bringing Hitler to power, chance events and conservative miscalculation played a larger role than any actions of the Nazi leader himself.”

(Ian Kershaw, *Weimar: Why did German Democracy Fail*)

“The answer to the question how Hitler came to power is therefore to be found in the actions of those German politicians who were not National Socialists than in those of Hitler himself. He waited, they decided.”

(AJP Taylor, *From the Boer War to the Cold War*)

Historian T. Childers states “It remains one of history’s most tragic situations that at precisely the moment when the Nazis were beginning to lose votes, Hitler was installed as Chancellor by politicians who had done so much to undermine the democracy in Germany.”

WHY DID THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC COLLAPSE? WAS IT INEVITABLE?

Long-Term View – Doomed due to economic weakness, lack of social revolution, lack of democratic tradition, Versailles – **But if this is so why did the Republic survive for so long then?**

Short-Term View – Republic survived crisis after crisis and was prospering 24-29. Therefore the extremity of the Depression and the role of individuals like Hitler, Von Papen & Von Schleicher were most important – **But if this is so why did other democracies survive the Depression?**

(K) CONSOLIDATION OF POWER: 1933-1934

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Influence of the German army
- The nature and impact of Nazism

Although Hitler had been appointed chancellor there were still significant limitations to his power that he would need to overcome before becoming the absolute ruler of Germany. These included:

- (a) The cabinet was dominated by conservatives
- (b) No Reichstag Majority
- (c) The Presidential Powers
- (d) The Army

In order to eliminate these obstacles to absolute power, the Nazis used a combination of terror and legislation. By August 1934 all these obstacles had been removed.

- (a) Reichstag Fire Decree Feb 27 1933 – (eliminated communists from the Reichstag and gave the Nazis emergency powers)

- (b) Enabling Act March 23 1933 – Obsoleted the Reichstag and the Cabinet – this is the true end of the Weimar Democracy

- (c) Gleichschaltung – The nazification of various institutions e.g. Trade Unions, Courts, State governments, Civil Service, Political Parties

- (d) Night of the Long Knives June 30 1934 – Won the support of the army who would swear a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler when Hindenburg died and permitted him to combine the positions of chancellor and President August 2 1934.

(I) SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN THE NAZI STATE: ROLE OF HITLER YOUTH, WOMEN, RELIGION

Relevant Key Features and Issues

- Nature and role of nationalism
- Nature and influence of racism
- Changes in society
- The nature and impact of Nazism

The key to success with questions on this topic is to differentiate between the various social groups in terms of the impact Nazism had upon them.

The Nazis' aim for German society was to create a **Volksgemeinschaft** (A People's Community) which would be racially pure, based on traditional rural values, classless and united under the authoritarian rule of Hitler. The idea promoted in Germany of a "Nazi society" was summed up in phrases such as, "*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*"

Important Questions to Consider

- *Which social groups were impacted most by Nazi rule?*
- *Can the social changes introduced by the Nazis be considered revolutionary?*



The Nazis targeted sections of the German population, including the working class, the middle class, youth, women, the churches and the army, in an attempt to create a Nazi society; but as historian Ian Kershaw argues the reality was a society that maintained many of the variations or entrenched differences that had plagued the Weimar Republic and the experience of Nazism differed amongst the various sections of German society.

“Recent research...which paints an extremely complex picture of social behaviour and attitudes in the Third Reich, suggests strongly that it is easy to exaggerate the nature of changes in values and attitudes under Nazism, and that here too there can be no suggestion of Nazism having effected a social revolution...”

There was some penetration of Nazi values and attitudes, but the regime’s social propaganda made little serious dent in traditional class loyalties, particularly among older industrial workers...The hold of the Church and clergy over the population, especially in country areas, was often strengthened rather than weakened by the ‘Church Struggle’...Nazi policy failed categorically to break down religious allegiance. Even in their attempt to inculcate the German people with racial, eugenic, and social Darwinist values – the core of their ideology – the Nazis, it appears, had only limited success...exposure to Nazi race values had come nowhere near completely eradicating conventional moral standards.

Much suggests that the Nazis made their greatest impact on young Germans...but even here the regime had only partial success...

It seems clear, then, that Nazism did not produce a ‘social revolution’ in Germany during the period of the Third Reich...It was... incapable of bringing about a complete and permanent social revolution, short of attaining total and final victory...in war. Nazism’s intentions were directed towards a transformation of value and belief systems – a psychological ‘revolution’ rather than one of substance.

*(Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*)*

WORKERS

- In 1933 trade unions were abolished and replaced with the Labour Front. This organisation aimed to gain the support of the working class by promoting the creation of jobs, improvement of wages and working conditions (Beauty of Labour)
- “Kraft durch Freude” (‘Strength Through Joy’): programme offering leisure activities, such as sport and concerts, and holidays to exotic locations for workers (in 1938 over 180,000 enjoyed holiday cruises under its auspices).
- The Winter Aid scheme organised collections to help the unemployed
- Public works were created, such as the building of ‘autobahns’ to reduce unemployment. Conscript labour (1935) – 6-month compulsory labour service for all men 19-25, later extended to women. By 1939 Germany was experiencing labour shortages.
- In autumn 1937 a summary of ‘reports from the shop floor’ stated: “All reports agree that the workforce is passive [...] but the National Socialists have not succeeded in winning them over.” (Kirk, 2007).
- Many workers remained loyal to left-wing politics and the trade unions, meeting in small groups to engage in pamphlet and poster campaigns, which encouraged acts of sabotage and absenteeism in factories.

FARMERS

- The Nazis idealised the rural community and sought to reverse the trend of urbanisation. The Hereditary Farm Law (1933) was introduced to ensure that land remained in the hands of rural families in perpetuity.
- The Nazi ideology of 'Blood and Soil' revered the German farmer as being the most racially pure of all the Aryans. Festivals were held annually to celebrate the rural community.
- However, by the late 30s, with the demands of the approaching war taking priority, the Nazis focussed their attention on industry and many rural Germans migrated to towns where their prospects for finding work and better wages were higher.

EDUCATION & THE HITLER YOUTH

- Education was changed to promote Nazi values and ideology. The 'Science of the Races' was introduced to promote Nazi racial theories. There was a strong emphasis on nationalism and physical fitness. Boys and Girls had different curriculums.
- *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth, 1926) and *Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM)* League of German Maidens began to develop rapidly in 1933, but never achieved the popularity the Nazis wanted (60% in 1935) and so membership was made mandatory rather than voluntary (1936, *Hitler Youth Law*).
- Youth groups promoted duty, obedience, courage and strength and condemned individuality, humanity, kindness and peace. For many young people the Hitler Youth meant access to leisure activities that they had not had previously. For a few it was a process of pure indoctrination and they resisted membership and actively reviled the Nazi organisations.

ROLE OF WOMEN

"The mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world"
(Goebbels, 1929).

- The core Nazi role for women was "Kinder, Kirche, Küche" ('Children, Church, Kitchen'). This was promoted by organisations for women such as the Nationalist Socialist Womanhood (NSF).
- Efforts were made to reverse the effect on women of Weimar's liberalisation and, aside from altering the socio-cultural lives of women, the Nazis also sought to eliminate them from leading roles in political and economic life.
- There were no female Nazi members of the Reichstag, and a party rule of 1921 banned women from senior leadership positions.
- Women were banned from the top professional jobs as doctors, lawyers and senior civil servants, and employers were asked to favour men.
- Interest-free loans were available to newlyweds who undertook that the wife would not seek employment outside the home.

- In order to boost the birth rate abortions were made illegal and contraceptive advice was restricted. To encourage women to have babies the Nazis developed awards like the German Mother's Cross.
- Lebensborn ('source of life'): Organisation set up in 1935 in response to declining birth-rates. It provided maternity homes and financial assistance to wives of SS members and to unmarried mothers. It was restricted to Aryans and SS members.
- 4 Year Plan required female employment. Although professional posts remained closed to women, by 1939 33% of the workforce was made up of women.

ROLE OF RELIGION

- Hitler told the Reichstag in March 1933 that the government saw in both Christian denominations (Catholic and Protestant) 'the most important factors for upholding our nationhood'. However, this was simply propaganda. In reality Hitler despised Christianity.
- Christian ideology, with its humanitarian outlook of care for the poor and weak, ran contrary to Nazi ideology, based on a racial 'struggle' and survival of the fittest.
- July 1933: the 28 branches of the Protestant church were brought together into a single "Reich Church" under Ludwig Müller. Müller tried to introduce Nazi ideas such as banning the Old Testament as a "Jewish book"; this led to the formation of a breakaway "Confessional Church" in May 1934.
- Hitler was concerned about the Catholic Church because of it being a larger, more international organisation. Hitler signed a Concordat (1933) with the Vatican, promising the freedom of the Catholic Church on the condition that it did not interfere in the political life of the state. However Hitler broke his promise and the Nazis attempted to introduce their teachings in Catholic schools, ban the crucifix and censor or shut down Catholic newspapers.
- A papal encyclical issued in 1937 protested against the programme of euthanasia, stating that this was a breach of the Concordat.
- There were periodic attacks on both churches' activities in an effort to limit their influence. Over 800 Confessional pastors and over 400 Catholic priests were sent to concentration camps.
- Some in the Nazi leadership, e.g. Himmler, sought to promote a return to pagan Germanic religious practices, however this had minimal impact.