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Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

A source-based investigation into
the rise of the Nazi Party

Mr. Budd
IS HISTORY DEPARTMENT

Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

'In spite of their very well-prepared and thoroughly organised propaganda... their successes remain... very modest... This is a party that isn't going anywhere. Today it is numerically... insignificant, radical, revolutionary splinter group that is incapable of exerting any noticeable influence on the great mass of the population or on the course of political developments.'

That is how a confidential Interior Ministry report described the Nazi Party, the NSDAP, in 1927. Yet within five years it was the most popular German party ever, with 37% of the vote.

How did the transformation come about?

In order to answer that question, your task will be to investigate the following key questions:

- A. What role did Hitler play in the rise of the Nazis?
- B. How well organised were the Nazis?
- C. How important were the SA and the role played by violence?
- D. Who supported the Nazis?
- E. Why did people support the Nazis?
- F. Review: Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

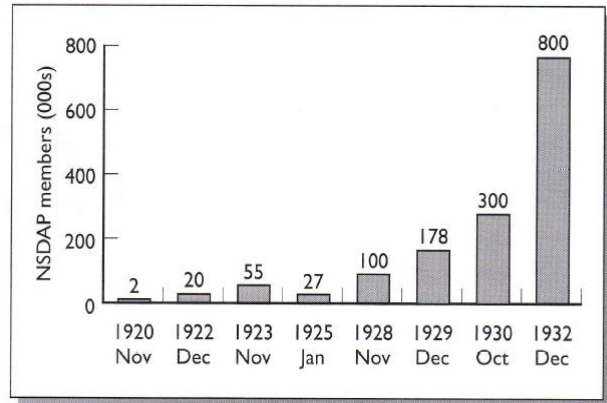
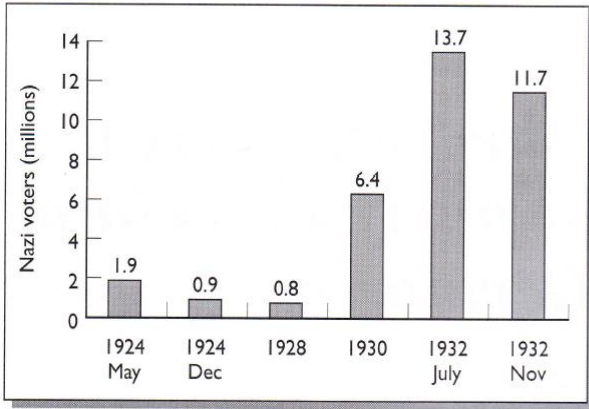
Task: Your final task will be to answer the question: 'Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?' To do this, answer **ALL** the Activity Questions in this pack. Once you have finished, make a large display chart (you may consider other ways to present this) covering all the key points to answer this question. You could use the following headings:

- Role of Hitler
- Nazi Message
- Nazi Organisation
- Nazi Strategy (i.e. propaganda, violence)
- Role of the SA
- Nazi Supporters (who, why)
- Overall Context (especially the Depression and the failings of Weimar government)

ACTIVITY 1

Look at the timeline on the following pages:

- 1) Identify two events that appear important in Hitler gaining control of the Nazi Party.
- 2) Identify six occasions when the Nazis strengthened their position.
- 3) For which of these were they responsible? Which were outside their control?



1919 German Workers Party (DAP) founded by Anton Drexler
Sept Hitler joins as 55th member

1920 Feb DAP is renamed NSDAP; Hitler drafts the 25 Point Programme

1921 Hitler becomes party leader. SA set up. Newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* set up

1924 Feb-March Hitler's trial becomes a great propaganda success. Hitler is imprisoned. He writes *Mein Kampf*, vol 1. Many Nazis make small election gains in aftermath of inflationary crisis. Party nearly falls to pieces in Hitler's absence.
Dec Hitler is released early from prison

1925 Hitler refounds party
1925-8 Party organisation improved, so it was in a strong position to exploit discontent when the slump hit Germany

1926 Feb At Bamberg meeting Hitler finally gains control and establishes a Führer party: the 'Heil Hitler' salute is adopted

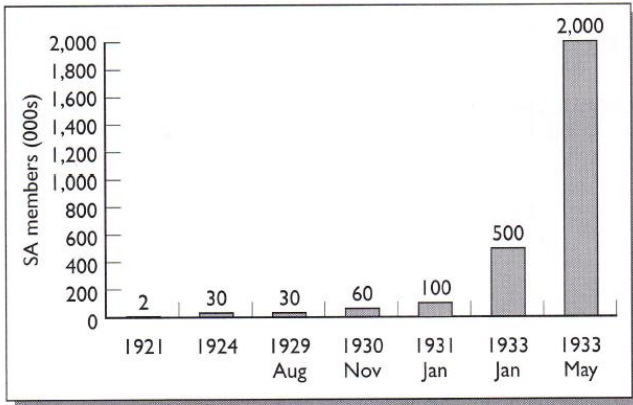
1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926
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1923 Nov Munich Putsch fails, but lessons learnt. Party reorganised to prepare for power legally, under all-powerful Führer

1924 Dec Nazis lose votes as economic growth continues

Bamberg meeting 1926 Hitler faced criticism from northern, more socialist wing of party, centred on Strasser brothers. Pressure to change 25 Point Programme in a more socialist direction, and to make the leader bound by it.

The early development of the Nazi Party
Helped by upper-class contacts, e.g. Ludendorff, publisher Lehmann, piano-manufacturer Bechstein; Röhm's links with army obtains weapons for SA



Key

- Text (white box) Nazi Party advances
- Text (black box) Nazi Party setbacks
- Text (grey box) Independent events

1928 elections; slight overall losses, but significant gains in some rural areas

1929 local election gains; Nazis gain their first ever majority in city of Coburg. Hitler helps lead the Anti-Young Plan referendum campaign

1930 Otto Strasser is forced out of the party Sept elections Nazis make major gains Hitler is able to soothe discontent and appoints radical Röhm as leader. Hitler builds up his disciplined SS as a rival

1931 Feb SA is purged of Berlin SA leader Stennes and other dissidents Goebbels is put in charge of more centralised Reich Propaganda Leadership Front. **Oct Harzburg Front.** Nazis join with DNVP, STAHLHELM and some of the elite

27 Jan 1932 Hitler enthusiastically received by German industrialists at Düsseldorf Industry Club; promises to guarantee the existing social order and property rights, and to weaken trade unions

1932 March Hitler gains 37% of the vote in presidential elections **July elections. Nazis gain 37% of the vote**

1933 Jan Hitler is appointed Chancellor Nazis make gains in Lippe local state elections

1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
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1930 Oct Berlin SA mutiny at reactionary tendencies in the NSDAP

1932 Aug Hitler meets Hindenburg and demands to be made Chancellor; Hindenburg refuses.
Nov Nazis lose 2 million votes in elections
Dec Nazis face a serious internal crisis. They have growing financial problems; there is radical pressure to seize power. Gregor Strasser resigns

Farmers hit by falling prices

1929 Anti-Young campaign Nationalist outcry against 1929 Young Plan

Oct 1929 Wall Street Crash

RECOVERY | DEPRESSION