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

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

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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?
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
1927 | 1928 | 1929 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933

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

1929: Anti-Young campaign Nationalist outcry against 1929 Young Plan

1930: October
- Berlin SA mutiny at reactionary tendencies in the NSDAP
- Oct: Hitler is returned to a more centralised Reich leadership
- Oct: Harzburg Front, Nazis join with DNVP, STAHLMIT and some of the elite

1930: Feb: SA is purged of Berlin SA leader Stennes and other dissidents. Goebbels is put in charge of more centralised Reich Propaganda Leadership.

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1931: March: Hitler gains 37% of the vote in presidential elections.

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1933: Jan: Hitler is appointed Chancellor.

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1932: Aug: Hitler meets Hindenburg and demands to be made Chancellor; Hindenburg refuses.

1932: Nov: Nazis lose 2 million votes in elections.

1927: Oct: Hindenburg crisis. They have growing financial problems; there is radical pressure to seize power.

Gregor Strasser resigns

Farmers hit by falling prices

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.

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