D) Who supported the Nazis?

ACTIVITY 5

1. **Who voted Nazi? Before you examine some detailed evidence about Nazi supporters, try this preliminary exercise based on your current impressions. We will then see how far you will need to modify your view.**
   a. **Study the following list of different sorts of German people.**
   b. **Divide them into two groups: those most likely to vote Nazi, and those least likely to. Then put each group in a column, with the strongest supporters/opponents at the top and the weakest at the bottom.**
   c. **Discuss your results with the rest of the class. Compare them with the detailed evidence on the next five pages.**

Low-ranking civil servant	Industrial worker
Retired professor	High-ranking civil servant
Army general	Protestant student
Shopkeeper in northern Germany	Small farmer
Female industrial worker	Catholic unemployed worker
Junker	Unemployed ex-soldier
Catholic priest	Unemployed artist
Protestant small retailer	

2. **What attracted people to vote Nazi?**
   a. **Write down on separate slips of paper four different Nazi slogans illustrating how the Nazis appealed to the German people.**
   b. **Mix up all the slips from the whole class. Then sort them out into four or five categories, such as economic, political, nationalist, etc., and see how many slogans there are in each category.**
   c. **As a class, discuss whether the proportion of your slogans in each category does actually reflect the main emphasis of Nazi appeal.**

How can we tell?

Nazi support rose dramatically between 1928 and 1932. There has been much debate over exactly who supported this extremist party because historians are hampered by the absence of modern opinion polls. Several types of source are available, beginning with election results. However, the results of secret ballots do not tell us who voted for whom, just how many votes a party list got in any region. One exception is that the constitution allowed states to hold separate ballots for men and women. A few did so, with blue ballot papers for men and pink for women! Thus in a few areas we have figures available by gender.

Historians' analyses of electoral support for the Nazis from particular social or religious groups are normally based on comparing how well the Nazis did in areas that differed by religious or social composition. For example, if the Nazis got 37 per cent of the national vote, but only 25 per cent in a strongly Catholic area, it seems reasonable to argue that Catholics were less likely to vote Nazi. Similarly, if they gained 45 per cent in a predominantly farming area, and several areas show this pattern, then it would seem that farmers were more likely to vote Nazi. But caution is still needed because there could be a whole range of variables affecting the result.

Other evidence is more direct. We have membership records of the Nazi Party and the SA that give some personal details, for example of occupations, although not generally of religion. Even here there are problems, as classifying people's class position is not an exact science, and people do not complete forms in a consistent way. Historians have also used Nazi propaganda, such as leaflets, posters and speeches, as an indication of whom they were trying to attract and why. We also have autobiographies of some Nazi members. One of the most valuable, but still potentially flawed, sources is Abel's survey of 581 autobiographies of Nazi members. In 1934 this American academic offered prizes to Nazi Party members who wrote accounts of why they joined. They provide fascinating insights, but are not necessarily representative and may not be an accurate reflection of their author's motives. There are also accounts by Germans and foreigners who lived in Germany and commented on the growing Nazi Movement and memoirs of former Nazi supporters. All such sources need to be treated cautiously.

Source 11 – Internal KPD document discussing the NSDAP and SA, December, 1931

The betrayal of socialism, of the German working people and thereby of the German nation by the SPD's leaders has led millions of proletarians, rural workers and impoverished members of the middle classes into the ranks of the NSDAP. In particular the… SS and SA boast a high percentage of proletarians. For sure the NSDAP, supported by finance capital, uses bribery to win over the unemployed masses. Unemployed who join the SA receive clothing and sometimes accommodation and board. But this bribery is not the decisive factor behind the flow even of the proletarian masses into the NSDAP. Decisive is the SPD's betrayal of socialism and the lying, pseudo-socialist demagogy of Hitler's party. We have to recognise that a large proportion of the Nazi proletarians are misled workers who honestly believe that they are fighting against capitalism and for socialism.

ACTIVITY 6

1. Using Source 10, identify two groups that were over-represented in the Nazi Party and two that were under-represented in 1933.
2. How did the membership of the Nazi Party change between 1929 and 1933 and then again after 1933? Why might this be?
3. What do Chart 1 and Source 11 show about Nazi support from the working class?
4. What do Sources 12, 13 and 15 tell you about the nature of Nazi support?
5. Were there differences between those who were members of the Nazi Party and those who vote for the Nazis?
6. Using Source 14 and Chart 2:
    a. How does support for the Nazi Party differ by region?
    b. Why do you think it differed in this way?
7. Study Source 16. To what extent do these earlier sources confirm Hitler's claim that the Nazis were successful in appealing to 'every German'?

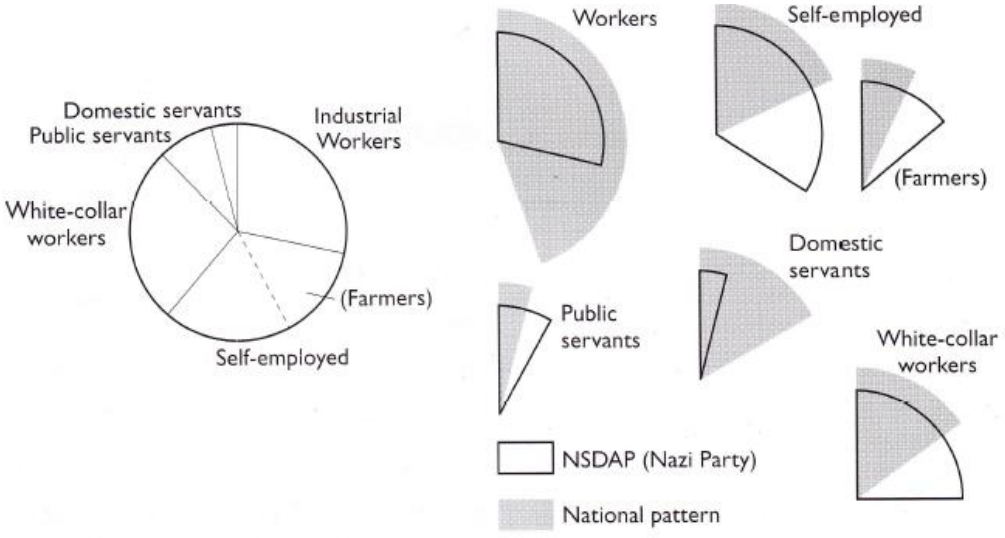
ACTIVITY 7

1. Which groups of people were most likely to:
    a. Be members of the Nazi party
    b. Vote for the Nazis?
2. How has the debate developed among historians over who voted for the Nazis?

Source 10 – This table gives detail of Nazi Party members. Columns A-F divide them according to when they joined the party. Column G gives estimated percentages of each social group in Germany in 1933.

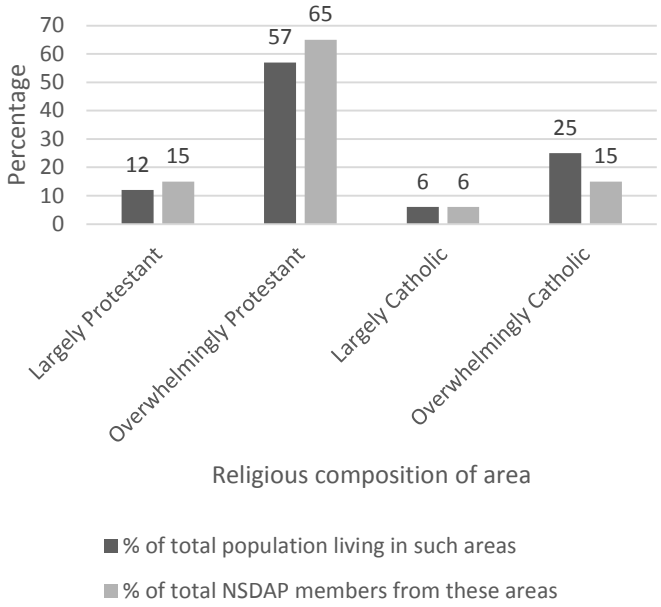
	Before Nov 1930		Nov 1930-Jan 1933		Total Jan 1935		1933
	A Number	B % of total members	C Number	D % of total members	E Number	F % of total members	G Estimated % of society
Workers	33,944	26.3	233,479	32.5	755,967	30.3	46.3
White-collar workers	31,067	24.0	147,855	20.6	484,054	19.4	12.4
Self-employed, including artisans	24,563	18.9	124,579	17.3	475,223	19.0	9.6
Civil servants, including teachers	10,015	7.7	46,967	6.5	307,205	12.4	4.8
Peasants	17,181	13.2	89,800	12.5	255,291	10.2	20.7
Others	12,793	9.9	76,766	10.7	216,130	8.7	6.2
Total members	**129,563**		**719,446**		**2,493,870**		

Chart 1 – The Occupational structure of Nazi Party membership compared to national patterns →

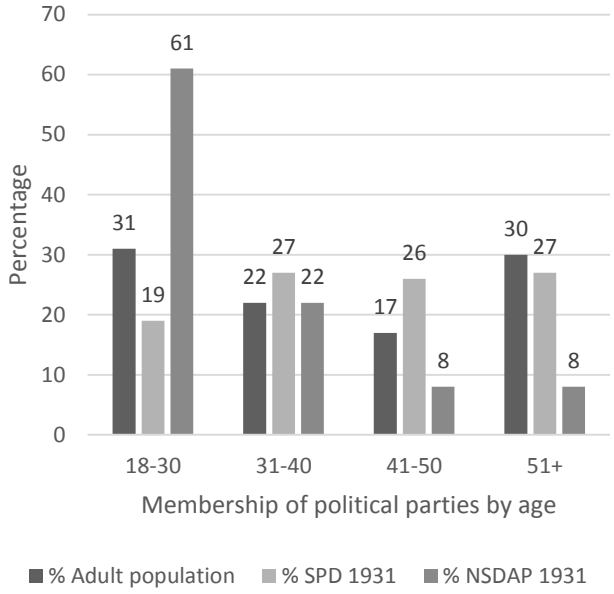


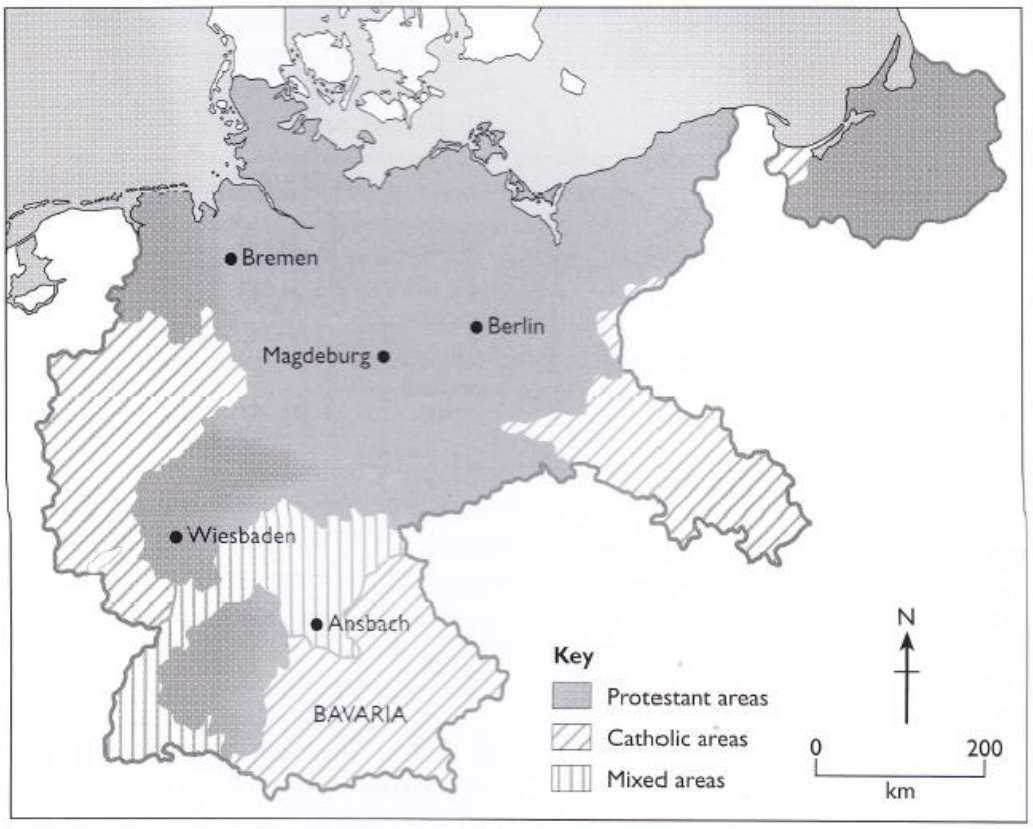
The pie chart on the left shows the occupational structure of the Nazi Party. The segments and shading on the right show the proportion of the German population for each social group overlaid by the proportion of Nazi Party members who were of the group.

Source 12 - Membership of the NSDAP, 1925-33, by religion



Source 13 - Membership of political parties by age





← Source 14 – The distribution of Protestants and Catholics in Germany

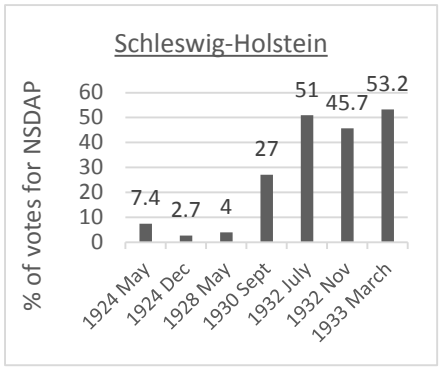
Source 16 – Hitler, November 1928

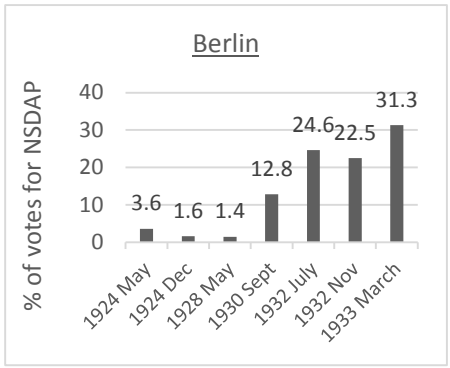
[The NSDAP is] not the movement of any particular class or of a particular status group or profession… [instead it is] in the highest sense of the word a German national party. It aims to encompass all elements of the nation and to embrace all occupation groups, to address each and every German of good will.

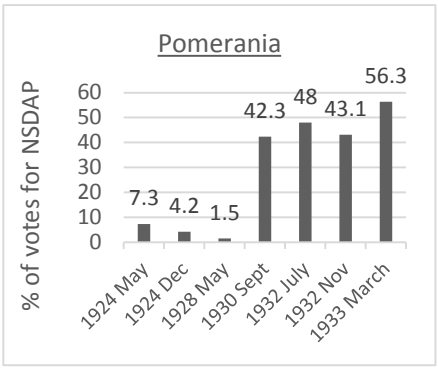
Source 15 – Percentage of German males/females voting Nazi

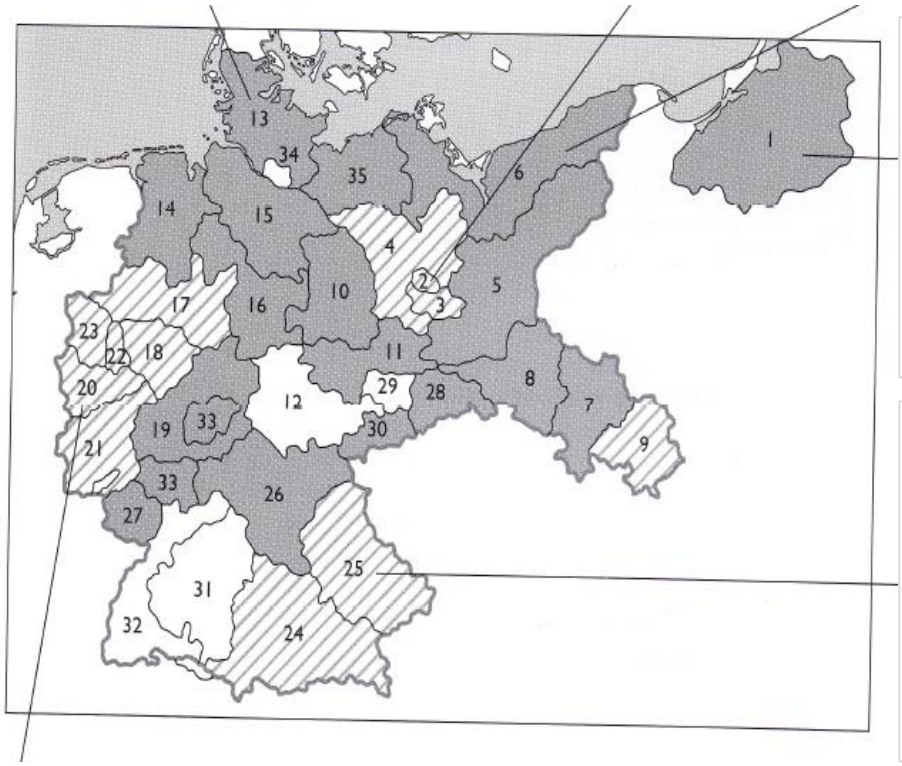
	1930		July 1932		November 1932		January 1933	
Area	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Bremen	12.9	11.1	29.9	30.9	20.8	20.9	30.8	34.4
Bavaria	18.9	14.2	29.2	25.6	27.4	24.7	36.2	34.4
Ansbach	34.6	33.3			47.6	50.0	51.2	55.6
Magdeburg	19.8	18.7	36.3	38.9	31.1	34.0	38.1	43.3
Wiesbaden	29.1	26.0	43.0	43.7	36.1	36.8	44.9	47.3

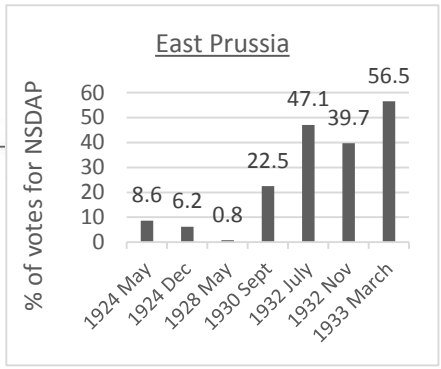
Chart 2 – Map and bar graphs showing support for the Nazi Party in Reichstag elections 1924-33

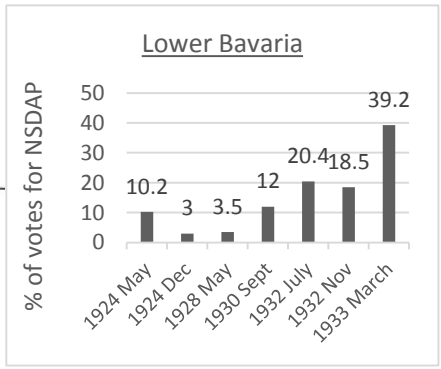


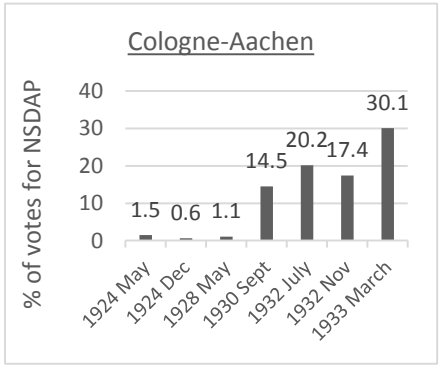


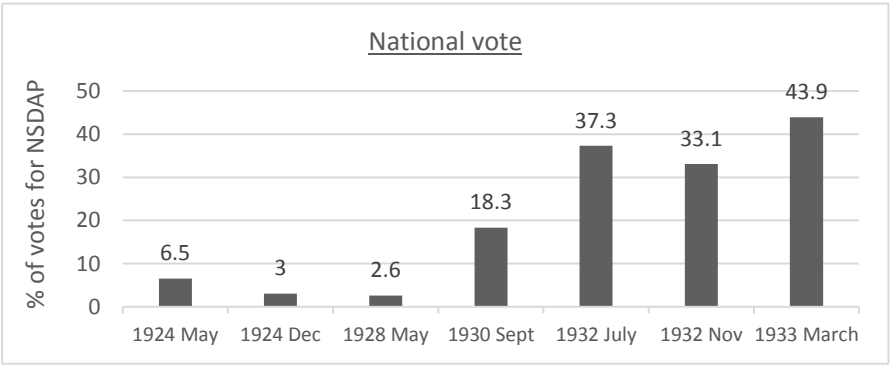












Key

Consistently:

High

Low

1. East Prussia
2. Berlin
3. Potsdam II
4. Potsdam I
5. Frankfurt an der Oder
6. Pomerania
7. Breslau
8. Liegnitz
9. Oppeln
10. Magdeburg
11. Merseburg
12. Thuringia
13. Schleswig-Holstein
14. Weser-Ems
15. East Hanover
16. South Hanover-Brunswick
17. Westphalia-North
18. Westphalia-South
19. Hesse-Nassau
20. Cologne-Aachen
21. Koblenz-Trier
22. Dusseldorf-East
23. Dusseldorf-West
24. Upper Bavaria-Swabia
25. Lower Bavaria
26. Franconia
27. Palatinate
28. Dresden-Bautzen
29. Leipzig
30. Chemnitz-Zwickau
31. Wurttemburg
32. Baden
33. Hesse-Darmstadt
34. Hamburg
25. Mecklenburg

Historical debate: who voted Nazi?

ACTIVITY 8

The issue of who voted for the Nazis has been the subject of great historical controversy. To some extent this is because behind it lies the extremely sensitive question, 'Who was to blame for Hitler?' This activity will help you to identify the main trends in historians' explanations.

1. Copy the table below. Mark a tick if the historian identifies a group as prone to vote Nazi.

Group	1. Noakes (Source 17)	2. Peterson (Source 19)	3. Fischer (Source 20)	4. Falter (Source 18)	5. Geary (Source 21)
Working class					
Petty bourgeoisie / middle class, e.g. shopkeepers, white-collar workers					
Wealthy, i.e. upper middle class					
Protestants					
Wide range, i.e. a people's movement					

2. What degree of historical consensus about Nazi support emerges from this exercise?
3. These are only extracts from the analyses of these historians so care has to be taken when assessing their views. However, the paragraph from Peterson (Source 19) is complete. Is there any surprising omission from his discussion of Nazi supporters? How might this be explained?
4. 'The traditional stress on the petty-bourgeois base of Nazi support need not be discarded, but instead incorporated into a broader picture.' How far do these extracts substantiate this opinion?

Source 17 – J. Noakes, 'The Rise of the Nazis', *History Today*, January 1983, p. 11

The Nazis did best in the rural areas and small towns of the Protestant parts of Germany, particularly in the north and east. They won much of their support from the most rooted and traditional section of the German population – peasant farmers, self-employed artisans, craftsmen and small retailers… In urban areas the party did best in those town and cities which were administrative or commercial centres with large civil servant and white collar populations, rather than in industrial centres; and they tended to win most support in upper-middle-class districts. Nazi support also tended to be strongest among the younger generation. This was particularly true of the membership, which was also overwhelmingly male.

Source 19 – B. Peterson, 'Regional Elites and the Rise of National Socialism' in *Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany*, 1989, p. 172

Most [historians] now generally agree that the social class most inclined to join and vote for the National Socialists was the petty bourgeoisie, including artisans, shopkeepers, and peasants. Substantial support, however, has been shown to have come from higher social strata. Recent studies have demonstrated that residents of affluent neighbourhoods, vacationers, cruise ship passengers, civil servants and rentiers – all arguably elite – supported the National Socialist German Workers Party. On the other hand, big business and Junkers – the core groups of the ruling class in Weimar Germany – were generally disinclined to join or vote for the Nazis, although some of them gave various other kinds of direct and indirect support.

Source 18 – J. Falter, 'How likely were workers to vote for the NSDAP?', in *The Rise of Nationalism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany*, ed. C. Fischer, 1996, pp. 34 and 40.

According to our estimates, probably one in three workers of voting age backed the NSDAP… From July 1932 onwards more workers would have voted NSDAP than voted KPD or SPD… On a regular basis more than a quarter of National Socialist voters were workers… In terms of its electoral support the NSDAP was clearly Protestant dominated, but otherwise in social terms it was a distinctly heterogeneous [mixed] party… There is unmistakable over-representation of voters from the middle classes, a fact certainly disputed by no one as yet. On the other hand, it no longer appears admissible, given so high a proportion of voters from the working class, to speak of a middle class party. The National Socialists' electoral successes were nourished by so many different sources, that the NSDAP might really best be characterised as an integrative [all-embracing] protest movement… Its composition was so socially balanced… that… it possessed the character of a people's party or national party more than any other large Weimar party.

Source 20 – Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis*, 1995, pp. 63 and 99

[The Nazis] intended to mobilise all 'ethnic' Germans, tried to do so and enjoyed a degree of success in crossing class, regional, confessional [religious], gender and age barriers which was unprecedented in German political history… An impressive body of evidence… supports the overall picture of National Socialism as a predominantly Protestant, middle-class rassemblement [movement], and this line of interpretation has provided the starting point and the conclusion for most of the general histories of Nazism… The latest empirical work on the National Socialist constituency [voters] has now created problems for this long-standing consensus which have yet to be fully addressed. It appears that some 40 per cent of voters and party members were working class and some 60 per cent of SA members were working class, leading to the typification of Nazism as a popular or people's movement instead of a class movement.

Source 21 – R. Geary, *Hitler and Nazism*, 1993, p. 27

The NSDAP was most successful where it did not have to cope with strong pre-existing ideological and organisational loyalties. Where these did exist, as in Social Democratic and Communist strongholds, it did far less well. The same applied to Germany's Catholic community, strongly represented over decades by the Centre Party (or the BVP in Bavaria). Loyalty to the party was reinforced by a plethora [great range] of Catholic leisure organisations which penetrated daily life and also by the pulpit, from which the NSDAP was sometimes denounced as godless. On the other hand, Nazi success in Protestant rural and middle class Germany was facilitated by the fact that political loyalties there were either weak or non-existent.

Source 22 – J. Falter, 1996, p. 10

The range of living and working conditions concealed behind the collective term 'worker' was huge. Thus the East Prussian or Pomeranian farm labourer who was paid largely in kind [goods] and received an hourly cash payment of 10 pfennig or less belonged to this group as much as the factory-employed craftsman or the highly specialised skilled worker who might earn ten times as much in the industrialised conurbations. Similarly, the foreman who had worked in the same Wurttemberg family for thirty years was as much a 'worker' according to the census as the young labourer in an Upper Silesian ironworkers, the homeworker from the Erzgebirge or the daily help in a villa in Berlin-Zehlendorf. One might be in everyday contact with 'his' trade union and the workers' parties, while the other might have scarcely heard of either and align his voting intentions according to the political preferences of the estate manager or the proprietor of the small workshop with whom he went to school and who, possibly, belonged to the same hunting association or sporting club. In view of this it appears all the less likely that the working class as a whole would manifest even a degree of homogeneity in its voting behaviour.

Until the 1980s the predominant view was that the key group was the petty bourgeoisie (*Mittlestand)* who provided the Nazis with mass support. They shared responsibility with the elite (who intrigued to get Hitler appointed) for the catastrophe of the Nazis coming to power. Left-wing historians could thus blame the Right and portray the working class as largely without blame. By the 1990s two developments challenged this view. Firstly, the centrality of the whole concept of class has been questioned. The phenomenon of many workers voting for right-wing governments in Britain and the USA led to more sophisticated analysis of political support and voting behaviour. Other factors, such as religion and the local community, have been identified as additional important influences on voting. The end of the Cold War and the decline of Marxism as a major force in Western universities have also encouraged a more empirical approach.

Secondly, more sources have been examined, with new techniques. The use of computers and refined statistical methodology have allowed more data to be viewed in different ways. There has been a growth in local studies, so the German people have been looked at in small groups and as individuals, not as classes. This has inevitably led to more complex views emerging. The collapse of the East German communist regime has further opened up many records. As a result, recent historians such as Falter, Conan Fischer and Brustein have all produced convincing arguments that German workers were far more attached to the Nazis than many have argued in the past.

This does not mean, however, that the long-standing stress on the importance of support from the petty bourgeoisie can be rejected. The evidence does powerfully suggest that this class voted disproportionately for the Nazis, but far less than used to be thought. Religion and local community influences seem to have been a greater determinant of voting behaviour than class.

Chart 3 – The working class and Nazism

(a) **The traditional view: class is crucial**
He is an industrial worker and this will determine his voting. He will not vote Nazi.

(b) **A modern view: we must look more closely at the working class; we must examine how it was made up and what influenced it**
He is a worker, but does he work in a small or large factory? Is his work geared to the export or the domestic market? He also has a religion, an age, a family. He lives in a particular community (city, small town, village). He has a particular outlook; does he identify with fellow workers or is he ambitious? He belongs (or does not belong) to a trade union and other bodies, e.g. choral group. He may vote SPD or KPD, but he might vote NSDAP!