

Chapter 7 Hitler's legal path to power, 1930–1933

Key questions

- Why did 'presidential government' replace 'parliamentary government' in 1930?
- Why did the two versions of 'presidential government' attempted in 1930–1932 both fail?
- How, in early 1933, did Hitler turn limited power into absolute power?
- How did other political parties help Hitler into power?
- Did Hitler come to power legally?

Hitler made no secret of his contempt for the Weimar constitution. But he did not flagrantly disregard its rules in his pursuit of power. The appearance of winning power lawfully mattered to him: he did not want his enemies to be able to question the right of a Nazi government to rule. In a parliamentary system of government the normal route to power is to win a majority in parliament. But Hitler was not able to take this route: the Nazis' best result in a Reichstag election was the 44 percent share of the vote they won – following massive intimidation of their opponents – in 1933. This left them short of the majority they needed to control the Reichstag and form a government on their own. It also left them a long way short of the two-thirds majority in the Reichstag which was required to suspend or alter the Weimar constitution.

Yet in 1933, despite his lack of a parliamentary majority, Hitler overthrew the Weimar Republic without having to resort to armed force. After a fashion, he won power legally. He was able to do so for two main reasons. The first is that in 1930 changes took place in the way in which Germany was governed which presented the Nazis with an opportunity to achieve power through the back door. The second is that in the early 1930s the Nazis found people who were willing to collaborate with them, mostly from within Germany's conservative elites: Hitler was helped into power.

Why did parliamentary government break down in 1930?

The constitution-makers of 1919 expected Germany to be governed in all but the most exceptional circumstances in much the same way as Britain: governments would remain in office between elections as long as they could count on the support of a majority in parliament, and they would use their majority in parliament to change the law in whatever ways they thought advisable. Between 1919 and 1930 these were the lines along which Germany was governed. But in 1930 two developments made parliamentary government of this kind impossible.

Disagreement between the moderate parties

In 1930 Germany's government was a coalition made up of the four political parties which either favoured or accepted the democratic system: the Social Democrats, the Centre, the Democratic Party and the People's Party. The government was headed by a Social Democrat, Hermann Müller.




When unemployment began to rise, the three non-socialist parties in Müller's coalition called for cuts in government spending, in particular cuts in unemployment benefit. Their demand reflected mainstream economic thought at the time, which maintained that the best thing governments could do in an economic downturn was to cut expenditure, avoid borrowing and rely on the private sector to get the economy moving again. The Social Democrats, however, were unwilling to accept spending cuts. It was working-class Germans who would bear the brunt of any reduction in unemployment benefits, and the Social Democrats were unwilling to betray their own supporters. Müller's coalition, hopelessly deadlocked, broke up. No new government which commanded a majority in the Reichstag could be formed to replace it: the Social Democrats and the moderate non-socialist parties had fallen out; neither had enough votes in the Reichstag to form a government on its own; and the extremist parties of left and right stood gloating on the sidelines, relishing the failure of the parliamentary system.

The 1930 Reichstag elections

The Reichstag elections later in 1930 made things worse. The moderate parties lost ground while the Nazis on the right and the Communists on the left made gains. The four democratic parties now had fewer than half the seats in the Reichstag between them. This meant that even if they had been able to overcome their differences they would not have been able to form a government which had a majority in the Reichstag.

KPD	SPD	DDP	CENTRE	DVP	DNVP	NAZIS
13%	24%	4%	15%	5%	7%	18%

The position in the Reichstag after the 1930 election

-  Anti-democratic parties which refused to help make parliamentary government work
-  Party supporting parliamentary government but opposed to spending cuts
-  Parties supporting parliamentary government which wanted spending cuts

NOTE: 14% of seats in the Reichstag were held by other, minor parties

What did 'presidential government' involve?

The collapse of parliamentary government in 1930 brought Article 48 of the Weimar constitution into play. This gave the President at times of national emergency the power to rule by issuing decrees which had the force of law. The constitution-makers of 1919 assumed that emergencies requiring the use of Article 48 would be rare. They also thought that such emergencies would be brief – a matter of days or weeks. They certainly did not foresee Germany being governed under Article 48 for years on end. But this is what now happened. 'Presidential government', as it became known, was technically lawful but no one had ever imagined that Germany would be ruled in this way.

Biography

Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934)

Schleicher was an army general. He headed the army unit which had responsibility for relations with politicians and the government. He was, in effect, the army's political spokesman. It was Schleicher's military connections which led Hindenburg to attach so much weight to his advice and guidance. Schleicher had a number of positive qualities, notably shrewdness and imagination, but he was also over-ambitious, manipulative and untrustworthy. He saw in the economic crisis an opportunity to do away with the parliamentary system – and to further his own career.



Kurt von Schleicher in 1932

Take note

Make a list of Brüning's strengths and weaknesses as Chancellor.

'Presidential government' brought Hindenburg to the fore. He was now 83 years old and not in good health. He relied heavily on the circle of advisers he assembled around him. Most of these advisers were, like Hindenburg himself, extreme right-wingers and convinced opponents of democracy. 'Presidential government' meant that Germany's conservative elites were firmly back in the saddle. The most influential member of Hindenburg's circle of advisers was **Kurt von Schleicher**.

'Presidential government' did not involve the aged Hindenburg taking over everything personally and immersing himself in the detailed work of running the country. Germany continued to be governed on a day-to-day basis by a Chancellor and a group of ministers. But Chancellors could only implement their policies if Hindenburg was willing to use Article 48 to issue the necessary decrees on their behalf. Under 'presidential government' Chancellors were really no more than servants of the President. Hindenburg and his circle of advisers appointed Chancellors and could dismiss them. Chancellors no longer relied on the support of the Reichstag to implement their policies and were therefore no longer accountable to it. Now the Chancellor was accountable only to the President.

Brüning's appointment as Chancellor, 1930

In 1930 Hindenburg, acting on Schleicher's recommendation, appointed as Chancellor a scholarly but dour and colourless financial expert, **Heinrich Brüning** of the Centre Party. Brüning was chosen for a number of reasons.

- He had served as an infantry officer on the Western Front between 1915 and 1918 and had been decorated for bravery. In the eyes of Hindenburg and the military men in his circle this was evidence of soundness and reliability.
- Brüning's political outlook was conservative. He had disapproved of the 1918–1919 revolution and privately hoped for the return of the monarchy.
- It was believed that Brüning's background in economics and finance meant that he was well qualified to tackle the problem of rising unemployment.
- It was within the Reichstag's power to obstruct 'presidential government'. The constitution gave it the right to overturn presidential decrees. Hindenburg's advisers hoped that Brüning's appointment would help to prevent difficulties of this kind because he was well known in the Reichstag, having been a member of it since 1924. Their hopes were not misplaced: in 1930 the Social Democrats, the largest party in the Reichstag, decided not to make life difficult for Brüning. They called their policy one of 'toleration'.

Brüning's policies as Chancellor

- Brüning was a firm believer in the orthodox, mainstream economic ideas of his time. He assumed that the economy would eventually recover of its own accord. He saw the role of the government as helping things along by living strictly within its means, spending only what it could afford and not running up debts. In practice this meant deep cuts in government spending. Brüning reduced unemployment benefit and cut jobs and wages in the public sector. He even cut the pensions of disabled war veterans.
- There were exceptions to this policy of cost-cutting. Spending on the army was not cut and nor were there cuts in the subsidies paid to farmers in eastern Germany, many of them Junkers. Cuts in these two areas would not have been acceptable to Hindenburg and his advisers.
- Brüning was convinced that the German economy was massively weighed down by the need to pay reparations. He worked hard and successfully to rid it of this burden. Reparations payments were suspended by international agreement in 1931 and scrapped altogether in 1932. However, contrary to Brüning's expectations, these agreements did nothing at all to speed up Germany's economic recovery.
- Brüning's policies were deeply unpopular in Germany. They earned him the nickname of 'the Hunger Chancellor'. By 1932 it was clear that they were unsuccessful as well as unpopular. Unemployment was still rising. There was no real evidence to suggest that the end of the economic depression was in sight. Brüning's days as Chancellor were numbered.

Why did Brüning lose office?

The main thing that cost Brüning his job was the failure of his economic policies. As the economy deteriorated, support for the Communists grew. Violent clashes between Communist and Nazi paramilitaries became increasingly frequent (see table). Middle-class fears of a Communist takeover intensified. In these circumstances, Schleicher, Hindenburg's most influential adviser, began in 1932 to think in terms of solutions to Germany's problems which did not involve Brüning.

	Communists	Nazis	Total
1930	44	17	61
1931	52	42	94
1932	75	84	159

Nazis and Communists killed in street fighting, 1930–1932

Two further developments in 1932 sealed Brüning's fate. First, relations between Hindenburg and Brüning turned sour. The two fell out over the shambles which occurred when Hindenburg's seven-year term as President expired in early 1932. Initially, Hindenburg hoped to avoid an election, expecting Brüning to persuade the Reichstag to vote to extend his term in office. Brüning tried to do so, but failed – leaving Hindenburg angry and frustrated. Then things got worse.

Take note

What were the differences between the first version of 'presidential government' which operated between 1930 and 1932 and the second version which began with von Papen's appointment as Chancellor?

Biography

Heinrich Brüning (1885–1970)

A trained economist, Brüning belonged to the conservative wing of the Centre Party. He served as a member of the Reichstag between 1924 and 1933, and at the time of his appointment as Chancellor in 1930 was chairman of the Centre Party's group of representatives in the Reichstag. After Hitler came to power, Brüning left Germany for the United States, where he became a university professor.



Heinrich Brüning in 1930

Take note

Explain why Hindenburg dismissed (i) Brüning, (ii) von Papen and (iii)

Biography**Franz von Papen**
(1879–1969)

Von Papen came from an impoverished Catholic aristocratic family but prospered through his marriage to the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. His career before 1932 was colourful but undistinguished. As a junior army officer in the First World War he was attached to the German embassy in Washington, but was expelled from the USA for spying. He subsequently saw action on the Western Front. Between 1921 and 1932 he was a member of the Prussian state parliament. In 1932 Britain's ambassador to Germany described him privately as 'a man of second-rate ability – a lightweight'.



Franz von Papen in 1933

Hitler decided to stand against Hindenburg in the presidential election which now had to take place. This meant a head-to-head contest between the two of them for the right-wing vote which Hindenburg saw as his own. To Hindenburg's acute embarrassment, Hitler did well enough in the election to deprive him of an overall majority – an outcome which necessitated a second, run-off election between the leading candidates. In the run-off election, Hindenburg defeated Hitler by 19 million votes to 13 million, but it was Hitler who won the right-wing vote. Hindenburg, to his fury, was re-elected largely on the basis of votes cast by people he disliked and distrusted – Catholics and Social Democrats.

Second, it became known in Junker circles that Brüning was toying with the idea of buying up insolvent Junker estates and settling unemployed workers on them. Outraged Junkers complained to Hindenburg that Brüning was an 'agrarian Bolshevik' – in other words, a wild extremist intent on seizing their property. Brüning was dismissed soon afterwards.

Von Papen as Chancellor

The new Chancellor, **Franz von Papen**, was recommended to Hindenburg by Schleicher, just as Brüning had been. Von Papen's appointment was greeted in Germany with astonishment: he was a little-known figure with hard-line right-wing views and no experience of government. But his appointment made sense in the context of Schleicher's wider plans. Schleicher had reached the conclusion that Germany's deepening crisis called for the introduction of a more-extreme form of 'presidential government' than the one which had operated over the previous two years. He now wanted Germany to be run as a near-dictatorship by the President and the army, with the Reichstag being permanently sidelined. In order to bring this plan to fruition, Schleicher wanted to enlist the support of the Nazis: their involvement, given their popularity with the electorate, would provide the appearance of mass support for the idea of authoritarian rule. This is where von Papen came in: he was so right-wing that Hitler, or so it was thought, would be amenable to the idea of working with him.

Von Papen's appointment as Chancellor was not the only ploy Schleicher used to try to draw Hitler into his plans. A number of other steps were taken in mid-1932 which were designed to win over the Nazis.

- Ministers were appointed to serve alongside von Papen who were as right-wing as he was: the new government was quickly labelled 'the cabinet of barons'.
- The ban that Brüning had imposed on the SA was lifted.
- Von Papen's government called for new Reichstag elections, knowing that the Nazis were certain to do well in them.
- In flagrant violation of the constitution, von Papen removed the Social Democrat-controlled state government of Prussia from office. Hitler was glad because it had been a determined opponent of Nazism.



Political intrigues, 1932–1933

In the election of July 1932 the Nazis won nearly 38 percent of votes cast and became the largest single party in the Reichstag. The election was the starting-point of a sixth-month period of intrigue and jockeying for position at the top of German politics which culminated with Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933.

After the July election an intensive round of talks took place involving Hitler, Schleicher, von Papen and Hindenburg. There was only one item on the agenda: the terms on which Hitler might join the government. Hitler made it clear he would not accept a supporting role: he insisted on being made Chancellor. Hindenburg – a snob who disliked Hitler on account of his lowly social origins – was unwilling to agree. At a key meeting in mid-August 1932 he sent Hitler packing.



Hitler and Hindenburg in 1933

A statement published by Hindenburg's office after the August 1932 meeting with Hitler

'The President asked Herr Hitler whether he was prepared to enter the Government under the Chancellorship of Herr von Papen. Herr Hitler replied in the negative, and demanded that the President should confer upon him the leadership of the Government together with entire and complete control of the State. President von Hindenburg emphatically declined to accede to this request.'

Take note

As you read through this section, draw a timeline of the key events in Hitler's rise to power. Make brief notes on the consequences of each event.

The fall-out from the August meeting was extensive but complicated.

- Hitler, angry at being snubbed, took his revenge by ordering Nazi members of the Reichstag to join other political parties, including the Communists, in passing a vote of no-confidence in von Papen's government. This meant another Reichstag election. When it took place in November 1932, the Nazis suffered a reverse: two million fewer people voted for them than had done in the July election. Most of the deserters were right-wing voters annoyed by what they saw as Hitler's selfish refusal to work under von Papen. Some newspapers asked if the Nazi bubble had burst.
- Schleicher thought that von Papen – 'little Franz', as he called him behind his back – had now served his purpose and wanted rid of him. Hindenburg, though, had developed a strong personal attachment to von Papen and was reluctant to part with him. He only gave way when Schleicher told him that the army wanted von Papen out.
- In December 1932 Schleicher took over as Chancellor himself. His position, however, was precarious: he was short of political allies and had no real backing in the country at large. What he came up with was a hastily-improvised scheme to win support for his chancellorship which involved trying to persuade the 'socialist' wing of the NSDAP and SPD trade unionists to join forces behind a push to bring down unemployment. He even offered Gregor Strasser the Vice-Chancellorship. But Schleicher's plan was half-baked. It was fanciful to assume that the 'socialist' wing of the NSDAP could be easily prised away from the main body of the party. In addition, law-abiding Social Democrats and violent 'left-wing' Nazis had virtually nothing in common. Schleicher's plan came to nothing.



The Nazis take power

Hitler becomes Chancellor, January 1933

In January 1933 von Papen met Hitler in secret on five occasions. Out of these talks came an agreement under which Hitler was to become Chancellor and von Papen Vice-Chancellor. Von Papen then persuaded Hindenburg to agree to this proposal. An arrangement along these lines had proved impossible back in August 1932. Now the circumstances were different: Hitler, Hindenburg and von Papen were readier to compromise than they had been previously (see table below). Once the agreement was in place Hindenburg forced Schleicher out of office.

Hitler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was under pressure from his own supporters to do a deal because after the November election there were worries that the Nazis were running out of steam and might not get into power. • He wanted to punish Schleicher for offering the Vice-Chancellorship to Gregor Strasser – an offer which he saw as a deliberate attempt to split and destroy the Nazi movement.
Hindenburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He wanted his close friend von Papen back alongside him in government. • He believed von Papen's assurances that Hitler could be controlled.
Von Papen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was deeply ambitious and was desperate to return to government – even if he did not get the top job. • He was confident that he could control and manipulate Hitler: he told friends in January that he had 'hired' Hitler and would soon have him 'pushed into a corner'. • He was bitter about the way Schleicher had engineered his dismissal as Chancellor in November 1932 and wanted his revenge.

Hindenburg, Hitler and von Papen in January 1933: motives behind their agreement

Hitler did not win the absolute power he craved in January 1933. The government he led was a coalition in which only three out of twelve ministers were Nazis. More important, he was an Article 48 Chancellor who was reliant on Hindenburg in the same way Brüning, von Papen and Schleicher had been before him. Hitler's priority was to end 'presidential government' and to concentrate power in his own hands without acting unconstitutionally. This meant a further Reichstag election. A majority for the Nazis would mean they could make laws on their own, by-passing Hindenburg. A two-thirds majority would mean they could amend the Weimar constitution however they wished.

The Reichstag Fire, 27 February 1933

Since 1933 there has been much argument about whether van der Lubbe was indeed responsible for the fire or whether the Nazis started it themselves in order to put the blame on the Communists. Many people in Germany at the time suspected Nazi involvement. A joke went round in Berlin: 'Why did van der Lubbe have no shirt on when he was arrested? Because it was Brown.' 'Brownshirts' was the popular nickname for the SA.

The March 1933 election

The Nazis did everything in their power to win the 1933 election short of resorting to outright fraud. Opposition meetings were broken up; individuals were attacked and beaten by SA men who had been enrolled as volunteer policemen for the duration of the election campaign; and opposition newspapers were banned. There was a final dramatic twist to the election campaign in the shape of an arson attack on the Reichstag building, allegedly by a Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe. **the Reichstag Fire** was a godsend to the Nazis. It enabled them to play on middle-class fears of Communism by claiming that a Communist uprising was imminent. They also used the fire as a pretext to persuade Hindenburg to issue a decree suspending basic rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. This decree – formally known as the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, but often referred to as the Reichstag Fire decree – was then used to outlaw the Communist Party (KPD).



The 1933 election gave the Nazis a 44 percent share of the vote, leaving them 36 seats short of the number they needed for a Reichstag majority. It may appear that the Nazis had failed to get what they wanted. The reality was different. The Nationalists were by now the allies of the Nazis, giving Hitler their 52 Reichstag votes. In addition, the 81 Communists who had been elected were removed from the equation – they were not permitted to take their seats in the Reichstag because the KPD had been banned. The effective outcome of the 1933 election was that 60 percent of Reichstag seats were controlled by the Nazis and their allies.

The Enabling Act, 23 March 1933

All that remained was for Hitler to amend the 1919 constitution so as to give himself unlimited power. This he proposed to do by getting the Reichstag to pass an Enabling Act which would allow the government to introduce new laws and amend the constitution without the consent of either the Reichstag or the President. As an amendment to the constitution rather than an ordinary law, the Enabling Act had to be passed by a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag. Here Hitler had a difficulty: the Nazis did not have a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag. This meant that he would have to pressurise one of the other major parties into supporting his Enabling Act. The Social Democrats were irreconcilably opposed to it but the Centre Party, after a heated debate, decided to support it. Some in the Centre Party thought that Catholics would earn Hitler's gratitude by giving way over the Enabling Act and would therefore be able to exert influence over him in future. Others believed in Hitler's promises to uphold the position of the Catholic Church in Germany.

The Enabling Act – the Nazis called it the Law to Alleviate the Sufferings of the People and the Country – was passed by the Reichstag by 444–94. Its passage ended any semblance of democracy in Germany.



Artist's impression of the Reichstag Fire, 1933

Timeline: The last year of the Weimar Republic

13 March, 10 April 1932	First and second rounds of the Presidential election
30 May 1932	Brüning's dismissal as Chancellor
1 June 1932	Von Papen's appointment as Chancellor
20 July 1932	Unconstitutional seizure of power in the state of Prussia by von Papen
31 July 1932	Reichstag elections
13 August 1932	Hitler-Hindenburg meeting: Hitler refused to join von Papen's government
6 November 1932	Reichstag elections
3 December 1932	Von Papen removed as Chancellor and replaced by Schleicher
30 January 1933	Hitler appointed Chancellor
27 February 1933	Reichstag Fire
5 March 1933	Reichstag elections
23 March 1933	Enabling Act passed through Reichstag





How did other parties help Hitler into power?

Hitler did not seize power by force but nor did he come into power on the basis of his electoral support alone. He never won a majority in the Reichstag in a free election and even came up short when he resorted to violence and intimidation in March 1933. He was able to become a dictator because others – either deliberately or inadvertently – helped him into power.

The conservative elites

It was the conservative elites who did more than anyone else to open the way to Nazi rule. They were closer to the Nazis in outlook than any of the other political camps, and after 1930 were only too willing to do business with Hitler. The individuals most responsible for Germany's post-1933 nightmare were Hugenburg, who involved Hitler in the campaign against the Young Plan, Schleicher and von Papen – each of whom tried to use Hitler to further their own ambitions only to find themselves outsmarted. Hindenburg may not have been motivated by personal ambition but was nevertheless responsible for the fateful decision to appoint Hitler Chancellor. These individuals did not, of course, operate in a vacuum: behind them, offering support and encouragement, were the Nationalist Party, the army, the Junkers and big business. Some industrial tycoons gave the Nazis significant financial support. It should in fairness be added that there were individual army generals and more than a few businessmen who were horrified at the thought of Nazi rule.

The left-wing parties

The two left-wing parties, the Social Democrats and the Communists, were both enemies of Nazism but they were also deeply hostile towards each other. This hostility to some extent blinded them to the seriousness of the Nazi menace. This was especially true of the Communists, who described the Social Democrats as 'social fascists' and claimed they were a bigger danger to the working class than the Nazis. At no point was there any prospect of a united working-class front against the Nazis.

The Social Democrats are open to criticism for another reason: it can be argued that in 1930, by attaching more weight to the interests of their supporters than they did to the preservation of parliamentary government, they helped to create the conditions which made it possible for Hitler to take a back-door route to power.

The Communists can also be criticised for reasons other than their blindness to the seriousness of the Nazi menace. Their lawlessness, their links with Soviet Russia and their unwavering hostility to all other political parties terrified the German middle classes and helped drive the middle classes into the arms of Hitler.





The Centre Party

Catholics may have been exceptionally reluctant to vote Nazi, but the leaders of the Centre Party were not uncompromising opponents of Hitler. In the early 1930s they indicated that they were prepared to join coalition governments which included the Nazis. In March 1933, the Centre Party smoothed Hitler's path to power by voting for the Enabling Act. By then, however, it was probably too late to stop Hitler.

The middle-class parties

The middle-class parties, the People's Party and the Democratic Party, were wiped out electorally by the Nazis and rendered powerless. They played no significant part in the intrigues of 1930–1933 that paved the way for Hitler's dictatorship. Both, though, moved sharply to the right in the early 1930s and did nothing to stand up for democratic principles.

Conclusion: did Hitler come to power legally?

It can be argued that the requirements of the 1919 constitution were met, at least technically, when Hitler was appointed Chancellor, when the Reichstag Fire decree was issued and when the Enabling Act was passed. It would, however, be nonsensical to suggest that the Nazis always acted within the law in the period up to 1933. From the mid-1920s onwards, they used street violence in a calculated way to destabilise the Republic: scores of people were killed and thousands seriously injured. The wave of Nazi terror which followed Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933 certainly had no basis in law. Hitler's true attitude towards the law was evident when he defended three Nazis convicted of murder as 'nationalist freedom fighters'.

Activity: when did Germany cease to be a democracy?

Divide into small groups. Each group should consider one of the following and put forward reasons why it can be seen as the decisive moment in the ending of democratic rule in Germany.

- The end of parliamentary government in 1930
- The introduction of the second version of 'presidential government' in June 1932
- Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933
- The passage of the Enabling Act in March 1933

Each group should then report back to the whole class.

Activity: analysing Nazi illegality

You are a journalist working for a Social Democratic Party newspaper published outside Germany after 1933. Write a brief article attacking the Nazis' claim that they came to power entirely by legal means.

Take note

Using the information in Chapters 3, 4 and 6 as well as the information in this chapter, list the reasons why middle-class Germans lost faith in Weimar democracy. Note down evidence for each reason.

Taking it further

Disentangling the actions, interactions and motives in 1930–1933 of Hindenburg, Schleicher, Brüning, von Papen and Hitler is no easy matter. For those wishing to study these matters in more depth, there are clear accounts in Chapter 11 of David Williamson, *Germany since 1815* (2005) and Chapter 10 of A.J. Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler* (2000).



Skills Builder 2: Planning answers to questions on causation and change

Questions on causation

In the AS examination you may be asked questions on causation – questions about what caused historical events to take place.

Some questions may ask you to explain why something happened. For example:

(A) Why did electoral support for the Nazi Party increase so dramatically in the years 1929–1933?

Other questions on causation will ask you to assess the importance of one cause of an event in relation to other causes. These often begin with ‘How far’ or ‘To what extent’. Here is an example:

(B) To what extent was the increase in electoral support for the Nazi Party in the years 1929–1933 the result of effective propaganda and electioneering?

Planning your answer

Before you write your essay you need to make a plan. In the exam you will have to do this very quickly. The first thing to do is to identify the key points you will make in your answer. Let’s look at some examples.

When planning an answer to Question (A) you need to note down reasons why electoral support for the Nazis increased in 1929–1933. You can do this in the form of a list or a mind map.

When planning an answer to Question (B) you need to think about the importance of each reason. You could:

- Write a list of all the reasons then number them in order of importance.
- Draw a mind map with ‘increased electoral support for the Nazi Party’ at the centre and put the most important reasons near the middle and the least important reasons further away.

It is much easier to assess the importance of one factor when you have a list of all relevant factors in front of you.

The information you require for these answers can be found in Chapter 6. Go to Chapter 6 and identify the reasons why electoral support for the Nazi Party increased after 1929.

Linking the causes

Once you have identified the relevant information and organised it, it is important to highlight links between the reasons.

In making your plan, try grouping together reasons that have links. If you have produced a list of reasons, you may want to rearrange the points where you can identify clear links between them. If you have drawn a mind map, you could draw arrows between the linked points.

Writing your answer

For Question (A) above, you could write a paragraph on each cause. Alternatively, you might want to start with what you think is the most important cause and then deal with the other causes.

For Question (B) above, it is essential that you refer to the relative importance of different causes, focusing particularly on the role of effective propaganda and electioneering. Remember to answer the question! You might want to deal with the role of propaganda and electioneering first and then assess the importance of other factors which help to account for increased electoral support for the Nazi Party. Make sure you write a separate paragraph for each reason that you identify.

In your concluding paragraph, make sure that you reach a judgment on ‘how far’ effective propaganda and electioneering were the major reasons for the Nazi electoral breakthrough.

Questions about change

These questions will require you to explain how far a specified factor changed during a historical period. Examples of this type of question would be:

(C) How far did the organisation and methods of the Nazi Party change in the years 1920–1929?

(D) How far did the way in which Germany was governed change in the years 1919–1933?

Planning your answer

When you plan, organise your ideas in a way that will help you to answer the question.

For instance, for Question (C) you could begin by listing two or three ways in which the organisation and methods of the Nazis changed during the 1920s (for example, the post-1924 'legality' strategy, the imposition of the *Führerprinzip* and the changing role of the SA). Having done that, you could list two or three ways in which organisation and methods stayed the same (for example, Hitler's domination of the NSDAP and the Nazis' willingness to use violence). Alternatively, you could arrange this information on one or two mind maps. Remember that your answer needs to be balanced. Therefore, it should provide points for and against change.

Each of these points will form the basis for one paragraph in your answer. In the last Skills Builder section, you considered the importance of providing specific examples to support your points. Don't forget this!

When you plan, there is no need to organise your material in a chronological way. This may encourage the writing of descriptive or narrative-style answers. Such answers may contain lots of accurate and relevant historical information but may not be directly focused on the question.

Writing your answer

In Questions (C) and (D) you are asked 'how far' in relation to changes. So in your final paragraph – the conclusion – you will be expected to make a judgment. Based on the historical evidence you have presented in your answer, you should decide, and state, whether you believe the situation mainly changed or stayed the same.

Activity: How much have you learned?

Here are some examples of questions which deal with causation and change. First, identify the causation questions and give a reason to support your choice. Then identify the questions which deal with change and give a reason for your choice. Finally, choose one 'causation' question and one 'change' question and produce a plan for each, showing how you would organise your answer.

- (A) Why did democratic government in Germany survive the problems that it faced in the years 1919–1923?
- (B) How far do you agree that Germany became increasingly prosperous in the years 1919–1929?
- (C) Why did political extremists of the left and right oppose the Weimar Republic so strongly in the years 1919–1929?
- (D) How far did the attitudes of the German middle classes towards the Weimar Republic change in the years 1919–1933?
- (E) How far does effective propaganda account for Nazi electoral success in the years 1928–1932?