

A Why did parliamentary government decline after 1930?

You are now entering a danger zone. Not only was this a hazardous period for the Weimar regime, but it is also one that has seen many a history student become confused. You have already seen how, in the 1924 and 1928 elections, parties loyal to the Weimar system did well. These elections produced a series of coalition governments that managed to get their legislation passed by the Reichstag. Potentially the strongest of these was the 'grand coalition' government led by the Socialist Hermann Müller that took office in 1928. However, even before the Depression, there were worrying signs for the parliamentary system. President Hindenburg and his associates were discussing a more authoritarian system to 'put an end to the impotence [powerlessness] of politics'. This new form of government would not negotiate with parties in the Reichstag, but instead would rely on using Article 48 to issue decrees and would threaten DISSOLUTION of the Reichstag if it opposed the government.

So let us first try to establish a clear, basic view of the period and then look at the detailed chronology of the changes in government.

This period saw the gradual decline of democracy, as Germany moved from parliamentary government to presidential government, and then to dictatorship under Hitler. Article 48 of the constitution, giving the President powers to issue decrees, had been intended to be used only in an emergency, to defend the regime against potential enemies. After 1930 it was increasingly used to sustain governments that were unable to get their legislation through the Reichstag.

The prospect of parliamentary government surviving was further weakened by the Reichstag elections of 1932. In both July and November the majority of voters supported the two extremist parties who were hostile to the parliamentary regime.

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Explain the difference between parliamentary and presidential government.
- 2 Explain how presidential government came to replace parliamentary government in 1930-2.

8B The decline of parliamentary government

Parliamentary Government 1928-30
Müller led a coalition government with majority support in the Reichstag.

Presidential Government, 1930-3
Hindenburg dismissed Müller. He was succeeded by a series of Chancellors (Brüning, Papen, Schleicher) who had little support in the Reichstag and depended upon President Hindenburg for support and to issue decrees. There was a growing move to change the Weimar system, by reducing the power of parliament and establishing a more authoritarian government.

Dictatorship
In 1933 Hindenburg appointed Hitler, leader of the largest party, as Chancellor. Within a year he set up a dictatorship.

SOURCE 8.1 The role of the Reichstag and the President 1930-2

	1930	1931	1932
Presidential decree laws	5	44	66
Reichstag laws	98	34	5
Reichstag: days sitting	94	42	13

Chart 8C introduces you to five of the most important politicians in 1930-2.

8C The President and his Chancellors, 1930-2



Herman Müller



Heinrich Brüning



Franz von Papen



Kurt von Schleicher

Paul von Hindenburg, 1847-1934

A somewhat reluctant President, Hindenburg played a key role, through his appointment of Chancellors and the use of Article 48. Having refused to appoint Hitler after his election success of July 1932, he reluctantly did so in January 1933. Hindenburg was the last potential obstacle to Hitler as dictator, but died in 1934.



Paul von Hindenburg

Hermann Müller, 1876-1931

As Foreign Minister, Müller signed the Treaty of Versailles for Germany in 1919. He was briefly Chancellor after the Kapp Putsch in 1920 and from that year onwards was leader of his party, the SPD. In May 1928 he became Chancellor for the second time and formed a grand coalition government ranging from the SPD to the DVP. It failed to agree on how to fund the rising unemployment payments brought about by the Depression. When President Hindenburg refused to support him, he resigned in 1930. His was the last genuine parliamentary government. He died within a year of leaving office.

Heinrich Brüning, 1885-1970

The son of a Catholic merchant, Brüning became a teacher and from 1915 to 1918 served as an infantry officer. In 1924 he was elected to the Reichstag and became the Centre Party's Reichstag leader in 1929. He was appointed Chancellor in 1930. In July 1930, in order to win Reichstag support, he called a new election which led to major gains for extremists. He failed to take action to reduce the impact of the Depression, and his austerity programme earned him the nickname of the 'Hunger Chancellor'. He was forced to resign when he lost the confidence of Hindenburg over plans to divide up bankrupt estates in east Germany. He emigrated in 1934 and settled in the USA. See also pages 136-7.

Franz von Papen, 1879-1969

Born into a Catholic noble family, Papen married the daughter of a Saar industrialist. He became a cavalry officer. In 1921 he was elected as a Centre Party candidate to the Prussian LANDTAG. He was chairman of the conservative newspaper *Germania*. At heart, Papen remained a monarchist. A friend of Hindenburg, he had limited political experience but was asked to be Chancellor in 1932. After his dismissal, he intrigued with Hitler to replace Schleicher. In January 1933 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor. He resigned in July 1934, becoming ambassador to Austria, then Turkey. He was tried at Nuremberg (see page 426) but acquitted. In 1947 a German denazification court sentenced him to eight years in a labour camp, but he was released in 1949.

Kurt von Schleicher, 1882-1934

From a noble family, he became an officer in Hindenburg's regiment. General Schleicher considered the army the true embodiment of the nation, far more so than the new Weimar Republic. He became a confidant of Hindenburg and his son. Between 1919 and 1932 he held various posts, linking the army and governments. He also cultivated links with key individuals, wanting to make the army the centre of power. This upset other generals, such as Blomberg, who wanted the army to have a lesser political role. Schleicher was responsible for getting Hindenburg to appoint Brüning, then Papen and then, reluctantly, himself as Chancellor. By 1932, worried about the power of the Nazis and the danger of civil war, he tried to tame them by including them in government. He was murdered by the Nazis in the Night of the Long Knives, 1934 (see page 173).

TALKING POINT

By the time of his re-election as President in 1932, Hindenburg was 85. How might that have affected developments in 1932-3?

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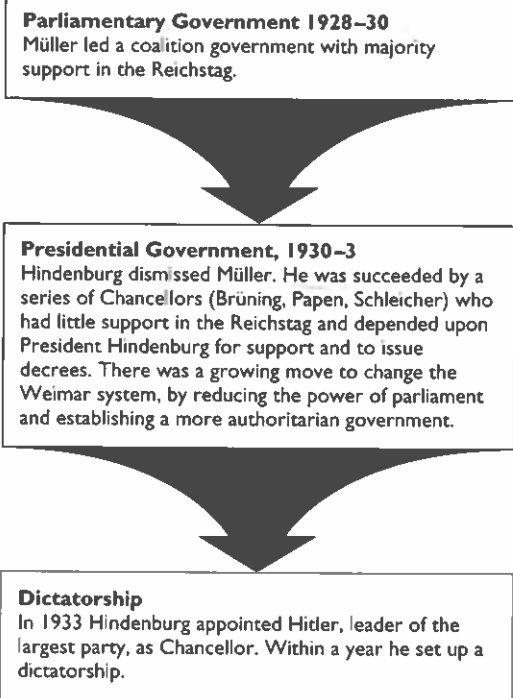
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TALKING POINT

By the time of his re-election as President in 1932, Hindenburg was 85. How might that have affected developments in 1932-3?

■ Learning trouble spot

The Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments

In many ways it is more important to grasp the overall nature of the period than to get bogged down in detail. The three chancellorships had a lot in common: all were looking to reorder the Weimar parliamentary system into a more authoritarian form of government. The key differences between the various governments can be summarised as follows:

- Brüning was probably more prepared to accept a greater role for the Reichstag than Papen or Schleicher. He tried to work with the Reichstag but found this increasingly difficult. Brüning included trade union leader Adam Stegerwald in his government and planned agrarian reforms, yet his austere (harsh/severe) policies and inability to inspire the masses meant he was unpopular and his agrarian reforms upset some in the elite. His position was also weakened by his hostility to co-operation with the Nazis.
- Papen was the most hostile to the Reichstag. His 'government of barons' had no real chance of getting Reichstag support on any positive basis.
- General Schleicher was a complex character. He considered Papen's approach was too narrow and that it risked civil war, which as a general he was concerned to avoid. He described himself as a 'socially minded general' and tried to create a broader based government through links with trade unions and the more socialist wing of the Nazis. This failed and, like Brüning, his preparedness to consider agrarian reform upset the elite.

■ Learning trouble spot

Papen's coup against the Prussian state government

This event often causes confusion, and many students decide not to bother about it as it seems unimportant. All historians have to decide which events are significant, so why not discard this complex one? However, it was not only important in its own right but it also illustrates much about the Weimar Republic.

Firstly, it reminds us that the new Weimar Republic remained a federal state. Prussia was by far the most important state government. Since 1919 it had been run by an SPD-Z coalition which had acted effectively to reform the state. This has been seen as an example of what could have happened nationally if parties had co-operated. However, in 1932, under the impact of the Depression, the SPD-Z lost its majority in the Prussian Assembly, continuing as a caretaker government. During this period there were political fights in the streets of Berlin. Papen used this decline of law and order to intervene under Article 48 to depose the state government and put it under federal control. A parliamentary system was thus replaced by an authoritarian government. This shows how Article 48, designed to protect democracy, could be used to replace it. Furthermore, Papen's coup was a massive blow to the morale of the Left. The SPD lost its last stronghold without resisting. The deposed Prussian government stuck to the course of legality and just appealed to the courts. It was intimidated by the threat of the Reichswehr and refused to organise mass protest, since high unemployment weakened the prospects for a general strike as had happened in 1920 against the Kapp Putsch.

When Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 he inherited control of the Prussian state and used the precedent of Papen's actions to overthrow other state governments. Once again, the Left did not resist. Papen's coup has thus been seen as a mortal blow to the Weimar regime.

ACTIVITY

- 1 For each government between 1928 and 1933, list:
 - a) how it came to power
 - b) its main policies and actions
 - c) the reasons for its fall.
- 2 How did German voters harm the prospects for parliamentary government? (Source 3.2 on page 63 will also help you answer this question.)

ACTIVITY

Study Chart 8D. Match each of the descriptions below to the correct Chancellor.

- 1 He was lucky to be appointed, since his support was falling. However, he did have a good chance of getting support in the Reichstag. Appointed through intrigue amongst the elite, he was underestimated.
- 2 The scheme behind his government was too ingenious in attempting to attract support from the Nazi and socialist Left, whilst also being concerned to buttress the elite. He became a victim of intrigue amongst the elite.
- 3 His was the last genuinely parliamentary government. This illustrates the key role of the Depression and shows Hindenburg's hostility to the SPD.
- 4 His two-year chancellorship marked a decisive shift away from parliamentary government. Eventually, some major improvements were seen, but he lost the support of the elites. A victim of intrigue, both his appointment and his fall show the key role of Hindenburg.
- 5 His chancellorship was a blatant attempt at authoritarian government with no hope of Reichstag support. He enacted a major blow against the SPD yet made concessions to the Nazis. A victim of intrigue amongst the elite.

■ 8D Chancellors and governments

1928-30 MÜLLER'S GOVERNMENT

1 March 1930: the fall of Müller's government

Once Müller's SPD-led coalition had got the Young Plan through the Reichstag, Hindenburg began looking to replace him as Chancellor. The government was divided over measures to deal with the slump, particularly over whether to

increase unemployment contributions (from 3 to 3.5 per cent) to fund the increased numbers needing relief. The SPD argued employers as well as workers should bear some of the extra costs; the DVP argued relief benefits should be cut. In March 1930 Müller resigned when President Hindenburg refused to

use Article 48 to support his government.

This was to be the last coalition government with a working majority in the Reichstag. It marks the effective end of parliamentary government.

1930-2 BRÜNING'S GOVERNMENT

2 The appointment of Brüning as Chancellor

In March 1930 Hindenburg, on General Schleicher's advice, appointed Heinrich Brüning, a prominent member of the Centre Party, as Chancellor. He formed a government from the centre-right, but one without a majority in the Reichstag.

In July, the Reichstag rejected the government's finance bill. Instead of trying to compromise to win parliamentary support, Brüning had the bill issued by Article 48. The Reichstag demanded its withdrawal. Brüning then persuaded Hindenburg, unwisely as it turned out, to dissolve the Reichstag in the hope of gaining more support in a new Reichstag.

3 September 1930: Reichstag election

In the new election the Nazis caused a shock by making major gains. The increase in deputies from extremist parties (Nazis 107, KPD 77) harmed the effective working of the Reichstag.

Any government would find it hard to get a majority in the Reichstag. Frightened foreigners withdrew 800 million marks in investment funds.

4 Brüning's government struggles on

Despite the election setback, the Brüning government survived. It relied on presidential decrees, rather than the Reichstag. The SPD tolerated Brüning's government for fear of another election and further gains by extremists. As they said, 'Anything but Hitler.'

Brüning tried to use the worsening economic situation to get reparations ended, and to reorder the Weimar welfare state. He took little action to reduce the impact of the slump that was causing a massive rise in unemployment. In 1932 after the suspension of reparations, he belatedly began modest reflation via public works and land reforms. In April 1932 Brüning banned the SA in an attempt to reduce street violence.

5 March-April 1932: the presidential election

In the scheduled presidential election, Hindenburg, now supported by the moderate Left and Centre, defeated Hitler. Hitler gained 37 per cent of the vote. The rise in the Nazi vote led some to believe that the Nazi Party must be included in government.

6 The fall of Brüning's government

General Schleicher, who had supported Brüning's appointment in 1930, now turned against him. He felt that Brüning's opposition to the Nazis was wrong and that some co-operation was needed. Brüning's proposals to break up bankrupt Prussian estates finally persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss him in May 1932. Brüning was not dismissed after losing a confidence vote in the Reichstag, but merely because Hindenburg had turned against him.

MAY-DEC 1932 PAPEN'S GOVERNMENT

7 The formation of Papen's government

In May 1932, Schleicher persuaded Hindenburg to ask Franz von Papen to form a non-party government of 'national concentration'. It consisted of the elite, or 'barons'. The government did not contain any members of the Reichstag; it was seen as a presidential government. Papen hoped to gain support from the Nazis to help sustain his government.

8 July 1932: Papen's coup against Prussia

In June, Papen lifted the ban on the SA. Next month he used emergency powers to depose the Socialist-led coalition government in Prussia. This was a further blow to democracy in Germany. The Reich Chancellor became Prussian Minister-President, with a Reich Commissioner as Prussian Interior Minister. Papen also agreed to Hitler's demand to call for new elections.

9 July 1932: Reichstag election

With deadlock in the Reichstag, Hindenburg agreed to dissolve it and hold an election. The results were a disaster for the Weimar regime. Extremists made further major gains. The Nazis and Communists won over half of the Reichstag seats.

10 Hitler demands to be made Chancellor, August 1932

After his party's success in the Reichstag election, Hitler, with 37 per cent of the vote, demanded that Hindenburg should make him Chancellor, with an Enabling Act allowing him to issue decrees. Hindenburg, who disliked the upstart 'Bohemian corporal', bluntly refused. (Hindenburg had apparently been misinformed that Hitler came from Bohemia, part of Czechoslovakia since 1919, not Austria. But Hitler had only been a German citizen since February 1932.)

11 September 1932: Papen humiliated in the Reichstag

Papen carried on and tried to gain support in the Reichstag. It was a hopeless task. In September the new Reichstag voted no confidence in him by 512 votes to 42. (Only the DNVP and DVP supported him.) Hindenburg dissolved the Reichstag after one day; Papen and Hindenburg originally planned not to call a new election (contrary to the constitution), but Schleicher was afraid this would cause civil war and he persuaded Hindenburg to allow new elections. This, however, was unlikely to solve anything.

12 November 1932: election

In the new election the Nazis lost 2 million votes (their share fell from 37 to 33 per cent). The KPD made further gains. The new Reichstag would be as unworkable as the old.

13 Attempts to end the deadlock

The elite discussed a possible new government. Schacht and industrial leaders asked Hindenburg for a government led by Hitler; Hindenburg said only if Hitler could get a Reichstag majority; Hitler refused to make the necessary compromises; he wanted a strong government. Papen wanted to continue as Chancellor and proposed permanently to replace the Reichstag, and to use the army to suppress opposition. There would be a new authoritarian constitution.

Schleicher was hostile to this drastic option, and advised Hindenburg that it risked civil war. Schleicher was developing links with the trade unions and sections of the NSDAP around Gregor Strasser in a 'diagonal front' stretching from Right to Left to try to gain popular support for major constitutional change.

DEC 1932-JAN 1933 SCHLEICHER'S GOVERNMENT

14 Schleicher's attempt to form a stable government

In December 1932 Schleicher persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss Papen and appoint himself as Chancellor. He tried to get support for his plans by making the Nazi Gregor Strasser Vice-Chancellor and developing Brüning's land resettlement schemes. However, Schleicher not only failed to win support on the Left he also alienated the elite who warned Hindenburg of 'agrarian Bolshevism'.

15 Papen's intrigue against Schleicher

Papen now took the initiative against Schleicher; he wanted revenge. In January 1933 he met Hitler several times. Hitler still insisted on being Chancellor; Papen could be Vice-Chancellor. Hindenburg's son, Oskar, also now favoured a Hitler-Papen government, as did others in the elite.

HITLER BECOMES CHANCELLOR

16 January 1933: the appointment of Hitler

Hindenburg refused to back Schleicher's request to rule by decree and suspend further elections. After discussions, and after he had gained the support of the army with General Werner von Blomberg agreeing to be Defence Minister in a Hitler government, Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor, with Papen as his deputy.

FOCUS ROUTE

Outline Brüning's approach to governing and the problems facing the Weimar regime in 1930-2. What arguments can be made for and against his strategy?

B Brüning: potential saviour or destroyer of Weimar democracy?

Although there were personal and strategic disagreements between Schleicher, Papen and Hindenburg, most historians agree that they all favoured replacing the Weimar system of parliamentary democracy and played a crucial role in its death. There has, however, been considerable debate about Brüning's motives and role. Was he the last defender of Weimar democracy or its enemy?

Supporters of Brüning would argue that he was trying to defend the Weimar parliamentary regime in adverse circumstances. They would say that he was near to succeeding when he was forced to resign. Critics of Brüning say he was planning to establish a more authoritarian, non-parliamentary system. Furthermore, they say there were alternatives to his deflationary policies which could have been tried if he had wanted democracy to survive.

What do you think? For Brüning? Against Brüning?

Let us now examine Brüning's chancellorship in more detail.

Brüning's chancellorship, March 1930-May 1932

In March 1930, Brüning's Cabinet contained most of Müller's ministers, except those from the SPD. In July, when the Reichstag rejected some of his austerity measures, Brüning began using Article 48 of the constitution to govern by presidential decree. He dissolved the Reichstag and held new elections, in the hope that the new assembly would support his policies. However, this turned out to be a major mistake. In the September elections both the Communists and the Nazis increased their representation, making it far harder for Brüning to gain the co-operation of the Reichstag. Instead he had increasingly to rely on presidential decrees.

Brüning's economic policy

Brüning was prepared to worsen the effects of the Depression to achieve his aim of ending reparations. He told a meeting of Centre Party Reichstag deputies in August 1931 that 'only deflation would convince the world that Germany could not afford to pay reparations'. He also tried to use the Depression to reverse earlier Weimar governments' interventionist welfare policies and to create a leaner, more competitive economy. As he told Hitler in October 1930: 'The first country prepared to implement all the unpopular domestic measures necessary will rise to the top.'

Brüning rejected inflationary policies financed by large-scale borrowing. Instead, he opted for deflationary policies, which included government expenditure cuts, especially targeting civil servants' wages, and tax increases. Brüning cut the government deficit drastically (it was 38 per cent lower in 1932 than in 1928). He lowered prices to help exports, but since other countries' prices were also falling and protectionism was widespread he achieved little. Real incomes fell. These harsh measures earned him the nickname 'Hunger Chancellor'. Brüning has been greatly blamed for Hitler's eventual appointment as Chancellor. Firstly, Brüning's decision to call unscheduled elections in 1930 gave the Nazis an opportunity to break into the political mainstream, and his deflationary policies 1930-2 drove millions to vote Nazi.

Late in 1932, after reparations had been suspended, he embarked on a programme of public works and the economy began to improve.

Foreign policy

With the backing of Hindenburg and the army, there was an overall shift under Brüning from Stresemann's conciliatory approach to a more assertive one. Brüning hoped to improve the economy, and then to use Germany's economic might to get the Treaty of Versailles overturned. He had several foreign policy successes.

- In June 1930 the last Allied troops left the Rhineland (as had been agreed in 1929).

- Brüning took a strong line on reparations: partly as a result of the Depression, reparations were suspended in July 1931 under the Hoover moratorium (a temporary legal suspension of debt repayment). Reparations were finally cancelled a month after Brüning lost office.
- Brüning pressed for equal treatment for Germany over disarmament, as laid down by the Treaty of Versailles. The Disarmament Conference finally met at Geneva in February 1932. In December 1932, seven months after Brüning had resigned, parity (equality) was declared, though no action by the other powers was forthcoming.

Brüning's fall

On 30 May 1932 Brüning was forced to resign. His proposal for land reform had upset the agrarian elite. Hindenburg, himself an eastern landowner, considered it Bolshevik and withdrew his support.

Brüning lost office not through a vote of no confidence by the Reichstag, but because he had lost President Hindenburg's support. Brüning felt he had been brought down 'a hundred metres before reaching the goal'.

Historians' assessments

There are various interpretations of Brüning's chancellorship, all of which can be supported by reference to his policies. The terms of the debate were significantly changed with the posthumous (after his death) publication in the 1970s of his memoirs. Here he claimed he had been trying to restore the monarchy. Some historians, however, argue that this was a retrospective (after the event) attempt to give greater coherence to his chancellorship than it deserves. The picture of him as a desperate improviser, who might yet have helped some form of parliamentary system to survive, still retains support.

SOURCE 8.2 E. Feuchtwanger, *From Weimar to Hitler*, 1995, p. 277

Brüning was the last chancellor to govern with any kind of constitutional legitimacy. His personal integrity, intelligence and devotion to duty have never been doubted by men of goodwill. He was also secretive and sometimes paranoid. The debate about his place in history is focused on two main issues. The first question is whether his method of government by decree can be regarded as a last attempt to preserve a non-dictatorial political system or should be seen as a stepping stone to dictatorship. The second question is whether there were any realistic alternatives to Brüning's policies.

SOURCE 8.4 H. Mommsen, *Weimar to Auschwitz*, 1991, pp. 125, 140

He deliberately intended his policies to deepen the economic crisis as he hoped this would enable Germany to get over the worst of the crisis before other comparable states ...

Breaking the spirit of the constitution, and replacing it with formal legalisms [strict conformity to the letter of the law] was his doing. This contributed to the final destruction of the Weimar Republic just as surely as the systematic escalation of the economic crisis, which he deliberately engineered, produced the atmosphere of utter hopelessness ... which Hitler could exploit more effectively than any other.

SOURCE 8.5 R. Henig, *The Weimar Republic 1919-1933*, 1998, p. 67

Many commentators, at the time and since, have argued that there were alternatives to Brüning's deflationary policies, that measures could have been introduced to stimulate credit formation and to create comprehensive job-creation schemes. But such alternatives would have undermined Brüning's main objectives, to use the crisis to end Germany's reparation payments, to dismantle Weimar's comprehensive and elaborate system of welfare provision and to reduce Germany's manufacturing costs in order to make her industry more competitive than that of her European neighbours.

SOURCE 8.3 K. Bracher, quoted in Kolb, *Weimar Republic*, 1988, p. 182

[Brüning] was not ... the last chancellor before the break-up of the Weimar Republic, but the first chancellor in the process of destroying German democracy.

TALKING POINT

What are the dangers of adopting a strategy of relying on matters to get worse in order to achieve one's aims?

ACTIVITY

- 1 'In the circumstances, Brüning's policies were well judged and could have helped the Weimar regime survive.' Do you agree?
- 2 Read the historians' assessments in Sources 8.2-5. Do they agree with you?

C Was Hitler's rise to power inevitable?

Some commentators would give a clear 'yes' to this question. However, one would then need to consider when Hitler's appointment became inevitable – in 1930, or 1932, or not until the last days of January 1933, or was it inevitable as far back as 1919 when the new Weimar government signed the Treaty of Versailles?

Many historians object to this degree of DETERMINISM. If one argues that Hitler's rise was inevitable right from the beginning, it undermines the reasons for studying the events of 1920 to 1933. One would just be tinkering with a development that had already been determined. Partly for this reason, most historians are very cautious about the word 'inevitable'. Some react against it to such an extent that they maintain that nothing is inevitable until it happens. It is probably wiser to use phrases such as 'more likely' or 'highly probable' rather than 'inevitable'.

Here we are going to look at two issues that shed light on the possible inevitability of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor.

- Was Hitler lucky to be appointed Chancellor just as the Nazis were on the verge of disintegration?
- Were there viable alternatives, either authoritarian, liberal or communist?

One intriguing aspect of the debate on the inevitability of Hitler's coming to power is the evidence that the Nazi Movement was in severe difficulties by late 1932: it seems possible that if Hitler had not been appointed Chancellor in January 1933 the Movement might well have declined. Hitler's options in those circumstances might also have been limited. For example, he might have tried to repeat his putsch of 1923. Given his greater mass support, his prospects for success looked brighter, and there were radical elements in the Nazi Party, and especially the SA, who urged a seizure of power after he had been refused the chancellorship in August 1932. Hitler himself, however, seems to have abandoned the idea of a putsch. His strategy was based on winning electoral support to gain the chancellorship, ideally through controlling a majority of the Reichstag, but, if that proved impossible, by being in such a position that there was no alternative to Hindenburg's appointing him. With Nazi electoral support falling, if Hindenburg had not appointed him Hitler's prospects looked bleak.

8E The Nazis' position in late 1932 and early 1933

1 Election results

a) Reichstag

- In November 1932 the Nazis lost 2 million votes and 34 seats, partly because some voters were disillusioned as they had failed to gain power. Their protest vote seemed to be getting nowhere.
- The inexorable (unstoppable) advance of the Nazi Movement had thus been reversed.
- Some middle-class voters were alienated by Nazi moves to attract more working-class support, e.g. by supporting the Berlin transport strike in November 1932, and by the party's radical propaganda.
- The Nazis were still the largest party in the Reichstag where anti-parliamentary parties had a majority.

b) State elections

- The Nazis did badly in local elections in November and December 1932, e.g. they lost 40 per cent of their vote in the Thuringian municipal elections.
- In January 1933 the Nazis poured resources into the elections in the small state of Lippe; they increased their vote and claimed a comeback.

2 Finances

- By the end of 1932, Nazi finances were very low due to the cost of competing in so many elections.

3 Organisation

- The SA had 400,000 members in 1932 – making it four times larger than the Reichswehr.
- Party membership stood at 850,000, but there was a high turnover.

4 Internal disagreements

- There was considerable discord in the party and SA; some in the party criticised the SA's unruly behaviour and its lack of commitment to electioneering in November.
- The internal disagreements in the Nazi Party were evident enough for General Schleicher to believe that he could split the Nazi Movement.
- Hitler's 'all or nothing' tactics worried some: e.g. Gregor Strasser, who resigned in December 1932.
- There were internal Nazi Party reports of low morale.

5 Other points

- The SPD newspaper *Vorwärts* predicted in December 1932: 'The decline [of the NSDAP] will hardly be less rapid than its rise has been.'
- The Nazis had to be successful to keep the party together and to maintain their sense of momentum.
- In April 1932 Goebbels said, 'We must come to power in the foreseeable future. Otherwise, we will win ourselves to death in elections.'
- Apart from the KPD, the Nazis were the only party not associated with a discredited government.

FOCUS ROUTE

1 Study Sources 8.6–9 and Chart 8E.

What evidence is there that

- the Nazis would have been in difficulty if Hitler had not been appointed Chancellor in January 1933
- the Nazi Party was still a powerful movement that could influence the course of German history?

2 Explain why the awareness of Nazi weaknesses and divisions in late 1932 might actually have encouraged the elite to risk recommending Hitler's appointment.

SOURCE 8.6 Secret report by the Reich Propaganda Leadership (a Nazi organisation), November 1932

We are of the opinion that little can be salvaged by way of propaganda . . . New paths must be taken. Nothing more is to be done with words, placards and leaflets. Now we must act . . . It must not come to another election. The results could not be imagined.

SOURCE 8.7 Extracts from Josef Goebbels' diary for 1932

- 13 Aug: *Nothing is more difficult than to tell victory-flushed troops that victory has been snatched out of their hands.*
- 14 Aug: *Great hopelessness reigns among the party comrades.*
- 15 Oct: *Party workers become very nervous as a result of these everlasting elections. They are overworked.*
- 8 December: *Severe depression prevails . . . Financial worries render all systematic work impossible . . . The danger now exists of the whole Party going to pieces . . . Dr Ley telephones that the situation in the Party is becoming more critical from hour to hour . . . [Gregor Strasser's] letter to the Führer [resigning his offices] is dialectic pettifoggery [argumentative quibbling] . . . Treason! Treason! Treason! . . . For hours on end the Führer walks anxiously up and down the hotel room . . . Once he stops and merely says: 'If the Party should ever break up, I'll make an end of things in three minutes with a revolver.'*
- 15 December: *It is hard to hold the SA and the Party officials to a clear course . . . If we succeed in holding the movement together we shall also succeed in saving the situation.*
- 29 December: *It is possible that in a few days the Führer will have a conference with Papen. There a new chance opens.*

SOURCE 8.8 H. Heiber, *The Weimar Republic*, 1993, p. 205

[By late 1932 the Nazis were in barren opposition] wavering between claims to legitimacy and revolutionary slogans, between socialistic promises and conservative contacts.

SOURCE 8.9 T. Childers, *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency*, 1986, p. 254

After an ascent of unparalleled swiftness, the NSDAP had reached the limits of its electoral potential and now [in December 1932] faced almost certain decline. The policy of legality, of mass mobilisation for electoral campaigning had reached a dead end.

The political situation in 1932

During 1932 the Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments embarked on public works programmes. Unemployment reached its peak in December 1932, then started to fall. To some, it seemed that the worst of the crisis was over and that the Weimar Republic had weathered the storm. For example:

- Allied troops had withdrawn from Germany in 1930.
- Reparations had been virtually ended in July 1932.
- In December 1932 Germany was granted the right to equality of armaments at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

However, these developments did not stop the communist vote increasing in the November 1932 Reichstag election.

Was there an alternative to Hitler?

FOCUS ROUTE

- Copy and complete the following table to assess the political possibilities in Germany from 1932, using the material below and any other knowledge you have.
- Which of the options do you consider provided the most realistic alternative to the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor?
 - How strong was your choice of alternative?
- When, if at all, did Hitler's appointment as Chancellor become inevitable?

Possible form of government	Factors favouring this option	Factors against this option
Nazi dictatorship		
More authoritarian system, e.g. restored monarchy		
Parliamentary democracy		
Communist dictatorship		

Was there an authoritarian alternative?

In many ways the most likely outcome to the political crisis of 1930-2 was some form of more authoritarian government, involving a permanent reduction in the powers of the Reichstag and the formation of a government less dependent upon popular elections. This, of course, was what had been happening in an improvised way with the Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments reliant on Article 48. The elite were actively exploring revision of the constitution, and perhaps even a return to something similar to the Second Reich with a powerful monarchy.

The problems with this approach were that to carry it out constitutionally needed a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag, and this reactionary programme had limited mass appeal. To revoke (overthrow) the constitution unilaterally (on their own initiative) might have provoked civil war, and the politically powerful army was very concerned about such an eventuality. Papen was prepared to risk civil war, but Hindenburg initially favoured Schleicher's ingenious scheme to try to get a broader basis of support. When this failed, Hindenburg's options were clearly limited.

However, many ordinary Germans were as disillusioned with Weimar democracy as were the elite, so a restoration of the successful Second Reich might be attractive to many. In the end, Hindenburg took the advice of Papen and others by trying to use Hitler, with his popular appeal, to enhance their own power. This turned out to be a fatal, though understandable, miscalculation. Many historians consider this decision was a very narrow one and that other authoritarian options might well have succeeded.

Could Weimar parliamentary democracy have survived?

This seems a more unlikely option, given the problems the Weimar system was already facing, even before the Great Depression. The mass misery this caused was largely blamed on the weak Weimar governments and their acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles and reparations. With the majority of Germans in 1932 voting for parties hostile to the parliamentary system, with the decline of liberal parties and with key elements within the two largest democratic parties (SPD and Z) hostile to each other, the prospects looked bleak. Many historians also stress that Weimar had a fundamental problem in its lack of legitimacy in the eyes of millions of Germans. Many of the elite had never been committed to parliamentary democracy and by 1930 they had moved decisively against it.

However, the economic and international situations were improving by the end of 1932. If these trends had continued, it is possible that the moderate parties might have regained their electoral support at the expense of the extremists (as they had done in 1928) and formed a government backed by a majority in the Reichstag.

Could Germany have gone communist?

Fear of communism was a vital factor in the history of the Weimar Republic. The first socialist government had won the provisional support of the elite in order to co-operate against the Bolshevik threat. The Communists probably had their best chance of gaining power in the chaos of 1919 and 1923, but failed to exploit the situation. From 1930 communism seemed on the advance again but its efforts were concentrated on elections rather than on organising a revolution. However, its renewed electoral support and massive presence in the streets (especially its paramilitary wing) encouraged members of the elite in their hostility to the weak Weimar state and their preparedness to co-operate with the anti-communist Nazis.

The Communists were never able to gain more than 20 per cent of the vote, as their appeal was mainly to the working class, who made up about 50 per cent of the population but who were split politically. Membership of the KPD was very fluid. The limited appeal of the Communists was in stark contrast to the cross-class appeal of the Nazis. Further, Hitler, as the leader of a nationalist, anti-communist movement, could reasonably look for potential co-operation from the elite and the authorities, whereas the KPD was an explicitly revolutionary movement which could not gain their co-operation. Thus the KPD would have to obtain power either through gaining a majority electorally or joining a coalition (neither of which was likely), or by seizing power in a revolution.

The Communists could only have gained power legally in co-operation with the Socialists, but the two Marxist parties remained bitter enemies. Ebert's SPD-led government had suppressed the communist risings of 1919-23 and in the eyes of the Communists had betrayed the working class and sold out to the elite. The SPD remained the main supporter of the Weimar democracy it had founded, whereas the Communists rejected the parliamentary system. The KPD's close identification with the Soviet Union also alienated some potential supporters. In the late 1920s the KPD followed the line laid down in Moscow by the Communist International, which viewed Socialists as rivals and delayers of the world revolution. This reinforced the split between the KPD and SPD, as illustrated in the KPD's slogan: 'All party forces must be thrown into battle against social democracy.' The KPD further crucially underestimated the power of fascism, considering it would be the prelude to a communist victory. 'After Hitler, us,' they chanted.

SOURCE 8.10 Membership of the KPD

Date	Numbers		
	Joined	Left	Total members
1923	250,000		
1929	50,000	39,000	130,000
1930	145,000	95,000	180,000
1931	210,000	130,000	260,000



SOURCE 8.11 May day demonstration by the Communist Party in Berlin in 1930

SOURCE 8.12 'Religion is the opium of people': a 1923 communist election poster on the side of a lorry. Beneath it says 'There is no higher being, no God, no Kaiser, no tribune to save us'



D Why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

FOCUS ROUTE

Explain the reasons why key members of the elite eventually favoured the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

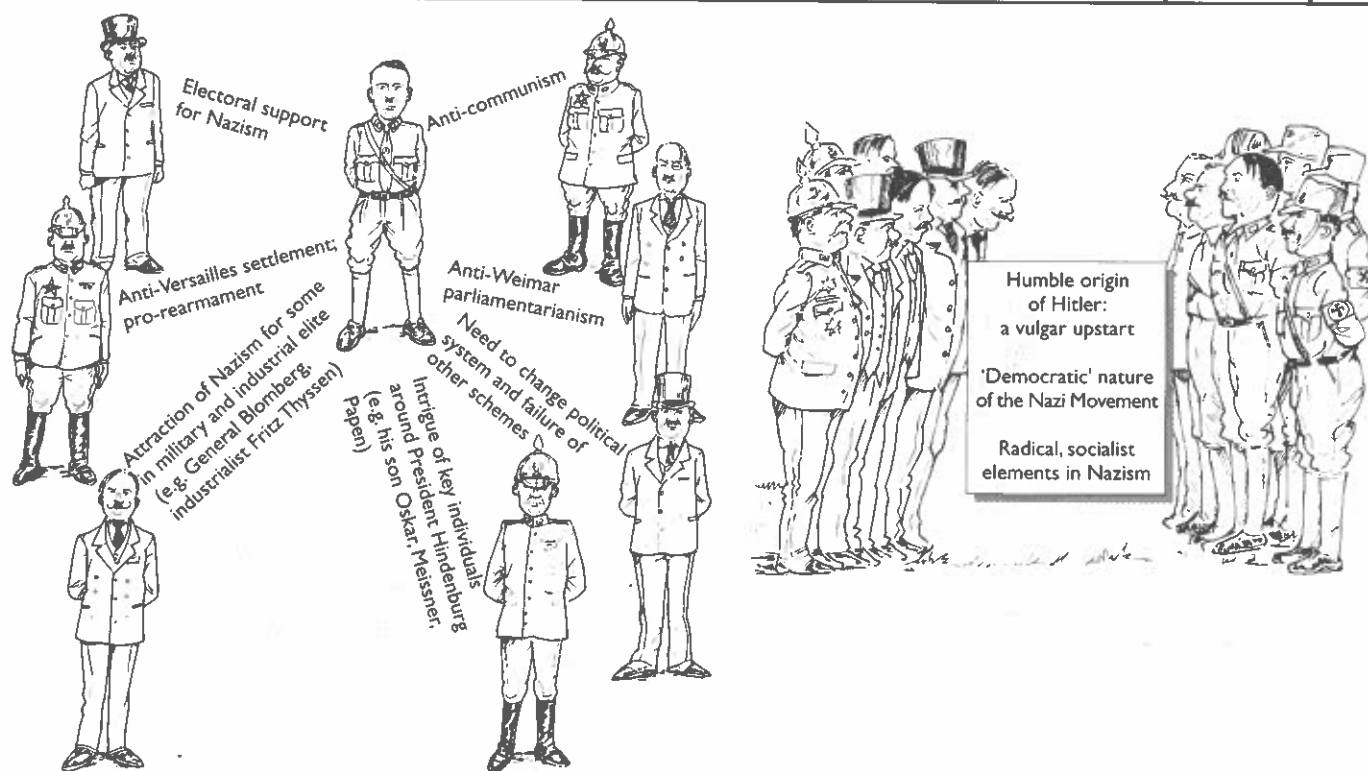
On 30 January 1933 President Hindenburg summoned Adolf Hitler to Berlin and appointed him Chancellor. In many ways this was a surprising development. Hindenburg disliked Hitler. In August 1932 he had refused to appoint him Chancellor after the Nazis' great electoral success. Since then Nazi support had declined and the movement had been torn by divisions. Many in the elite were also wary of the radicalism and the generally vulgar nature of the Nazi Movement.

Despite this, in January 1933, members of the elite persuaded Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor. By 1932, key industrialists and landowners were very concerned about the lack of effective government. They had never been committed to parliamentary democracy and now believed their fears were confirmed. Some saw the possibility of using the Nazis' popular support to channel the political system in a more authoritarian direction. The Junkers were also upset by Brüning's and later Schleicher's reform proposals to buy up bankrupt estates to resettle poor farmers. This was seen by landowners as 'agrarian Bolshevism', and contributed to the intrigue that persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss both Brüning and Schleicher.

Members of the elite used a number of tactics in what has been called their 'taming strategy' for the Nazi Party.

- 1 The first tactic was to make Hitler Vice-Chancellor under Papen; this was put forward in August 1932, but Hitler rejected it, demanding to be Chancellor. Hitler's rejection was risky, since he did not get the chancellorship, and it was seen as a great defeat by many Nazis.
- 2 The second tactic was used in December 1932. Schleicher, hoping to split the Nazis, proposed the idea of himself as Chancellor, with the Nazi Gregor Strasser as Vice-Chancellor. This failed, and Strasser left the Nazi Party.
- 3 The final tactic (arranged by a Cologne banker, Kurt von Schröder, members of the Reich Agrarian League, industrialists and Oskar von Hindenburg) was to put Hitler in office as Chancellor, but surrounded by Papen as Vice-Chancellor and other conservatives. The Nazis' current difficulties would make them easier to control. Hindenburg agreed, against his own judgement. Papen commented to a friend, 'We've hired him', but he was fatally wrong.

8F Factors bringing the elite and the Nazis together – and factors that kept them apart



Hindenburg – a personal motive?

Some historians argue that Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler as Chancellor was partly a selfish move.

In the late 1920s, German agriculture suffered from low prices for farm products. Large landowners in the east used their influence on governments to get financial help. This resulted in the *Osthilfe* (Help for the East) programme. Funds were allocated to large landowners to help them stay afloat. Hindenburg had been given back his family's formerly bankrupt estate at Neudeck in East Prussia in 1927 as an eightieth birthday present. This was intended, successfully, to tie him close to Junker interests. However, in 1932 a Reichstag committee investigating the misuse of *Osthilfe* funds for gambling, supporting mistresses, etc. implicated the Neudeck estate in the scandal. This may have influenced Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler in the hope that the investigation would be ended.

SOURCE 8.13 Industrialists' letter to Hindenburg, November 1932

Your Excellency! Like you, we are imbued [filled] with an impassioned love of the German people and the Fatherland... together with Your Excellency, we agree that it is necessary to create a government independent of the parliamentary parties...

The outcome of the Reichstag elections of 6 November has demonstrated that the present cabinet, whose honest intentions no one among the German people would doubt, has failed to find sufficient support among the German people for its actual policies.

... It is quite apparent that another dissolution of parliament, leading to yet another general election with its inevitable frenzied party-political struggles, would be inimicable [harmful] to political as well as economic peace and stability. But it is also apparent that any constitutional change that does not have widespread popular support would have even greater negative economic, political and moral effects.

We therefore consider it to be our duty, Your Excellency, to humbly beg you to consider reconstituting the cabinet in a manner which would guarantee it with the greatest possible popular support.

We declare ourselves to be free from any specific party-political interests. But we recognise in the nationalist movement, which is sweeping through our people, the auspicious beginning of an era of rebirth for the German economy which can only be achieved by the surmounting of class conflict. We know that the rebirth will demand great sacrifices. We believe that these sacrifices will only be made willingly when the greater part of this nationalist movement plays a leading role in the government.

The transfer of responsibility for leading a Presidential cabinet to the leader of the largest nationalist group would remove the waste and slag that inevitably clings to any mass movement. As a result millions of people who at present still stand on the sidelines would be swept into active participation.

Fully trusting in Your Excellency's wisdom and Your Excellency's feeling for the unity of his people,

*We greet Your Excellency with the greatest respect,
Bosch Schacht Thyssen Krupp [and 20 other industrialists]*

SOURCE 8.14 An account by Otto Meissner, State Secretary in Hindenburg's office, made to the Nuremberg Tribunal after the Second World War

Despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler Chancellor. He wanted to have Papen again as Chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were missed, a revolt of the national socialists and civil war were likely.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Why do the industrialists in Source 8.13 favour a government led by Hitler?
- 2 According to Meissner (Source 8.14), why was Hindenburg persuaded to appoint Hitler as Chancellor?
- 3 With reference to the origins and content of Sources 8.13 and 8.14, how valuable are they in explaining Hitler's appointment?



SOURCE 8.15
A 1932 DNPV poster. It says: 'More power to the presidency! Away with the supremacy of Parliament (Article 54). Vote Nationalist'. (For Article 54, see page 26)

SOURCE 8.16
A September 1932 cartoon by John Heartfield



SOURCE 8.17 A 1932 cartoon: the big wheel of politics. The cartoon is captioned 'A breakdown: a pleasing phenomenon'



ACTIVITY

Explain what each of Sources 8.15–17 shows about the Weimar Republic at this time.

■ Learning trouble spot

Did Hitler come to power legally and democratically?

It is sometimes said that Hitler was elected into office. This is not really the case. The way of being elected into office in a parliamentary system is to win a majority of members of parliament. Hitler never did this in free elections. As the Weimar Republic had a proportional representation electoral system, unlike Britain's first-past-the-post method, Hitler could only have become Chancellor directly through elections by winning 50 per cent of the vote. He peaked at 37 per cent.

Hitler came to power because Hindenburg, legally, appointed him Chancellor. If Hindenburg had not made this decision, Hitler could not legally have become Germany's leader. However, he did win 37 per cent of the vote (far more than any other party except the SPD in 1919); he led the largest party in the Reichstag, and thus had a 'moral' (if not constitutional) claim to be Chancellor. Having 'won' both Reichstag elections in 1932 he was appointed constitutionally by the democratically elected President.

However, some historians argue that Hitler's use of violence means that he cannot be seen as coming to power legally. The violence committed by the Nazis in the streets that intimidated communist opponents contributed both to the Nazis' electoral success and to the preparedness of the elite to use the Nazis and then tame them. This violence helped create an atmosphere where many favoured strong government to restore law and order, and also won the support of many of those who were worried by the threat of communism.

Some also consider the fact that Hitler's programme was fundamentally undemocratic relevant to this issue.

TALKING POINTS

- 1 It has been said that proportional representation was crucial in helping Hitler gain power. It has also been said that proportional representation would have stopped him gaining power, if it had not been for President Hindenburg. Can you explain both views?
- 2 Does Hitler's rejection of parliamentary democracy disqualify him from being considered a democratically elected leader?

E Review: Why did parliamentary government decline in Germany 1930–3 and why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

In this chapter you have studied the decline of parliamentary government and how within that context Hitler became Chancellor. Students can be confused about the relationship between the failure of the Weimar Republic and the appointment of Hitler. Was his appointment an abrupt end to Weimar democracy? Most historians now argue that seeing 30 January 1933 as marking the end of Weimar democracy is too simple. Indeed, it is argued that Weimar democracy was already in deep, perhaps terminal, trouble from 1930 onwards and that some form of authoritarian government was virtually inevitable. This could have taken many forms; the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor was just one of the options. In this view, the failure of the Weimar Republic happened for far deeper reasons than those behind Hitler's appointment, which might have been avoided.

Students also sometimes assume that they need to explain why many Germans wanted to create a totalitarian Nazi dictatorship. However, you need not look for deep reasons why Germany succumbed to totalitarianism. This was not the intention of the elite, but the result of its miscalculation of how it could use Hitler for its own purposes. In addition, the millions of Germans who voted for Hitler did not do so because they wanted to kill millions of Jews or start a world war. These were the eventual results of their actions, but not the reasons for them.

Our final two sources are powerful testimony to why many ordinary Germans were prepared to support the Nazis and have Hitler as their leader.

SOURCE 8.18 The distinguished banker Johannes Zahn, writing in 1997, explains his feelings in the early 1930s

You have to consider Germany's general position [in] 1930–33. An unemployed man either joined the Communists or became an SA man, and so business believed it was better if these people became storm troopers as there was discipline and order... you really have to say this today, at the beginning you couldn't tell whether National Socialism was something good with a few bad side-effects, or something evil with a few good side-effects; you couldn't tell.

Finally, we end this chapter by reading Kershaw's summary of the reasons for Hitler's appointment.

SOURCE 8.19 I. Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1991, p. 55

Access to Hindenburg was the key to power. Accordingly, the presidential palace became the focal point of intrigues of power brokers, who, freed from institutional constraints, conspired with guile and initiative in private wheeler-dealings to further their own power ambitions. And behind the maverick power-brokers stood the lobbying of important elite groups, anxious to attain a political solution of the crisis favourable to their interests.

Few... had Hitler as their first choice. But by January 1933, with other options apparently exhausted, most, with the big landowners to the fore, were prepared to entertain a Hitler government. Had they opposed it, a Hitler chancellorship would have been inconceivable. Hitler needed the elite to attain power. But by January 1933, they in turn needed Hitler as he alone could deliver the mass support required to impose a tenable authoritarian solution to Germany's crisis of capitalism and crisis of the state.