

Key topic 2: Hitler's rise to power, 1919–33

1 The creation of a dictatorship, 1933–34

The Reichstag on fire in 1933.



Hitler becomes Chancellor: January 1933

Hitler was made Chancellor in January 1933. However, he did not have the complete power he wanted. Some things got in way. Between January 1933 and August 1934, Hitler managed to remove these problems.

The **Communists** were still a threat.

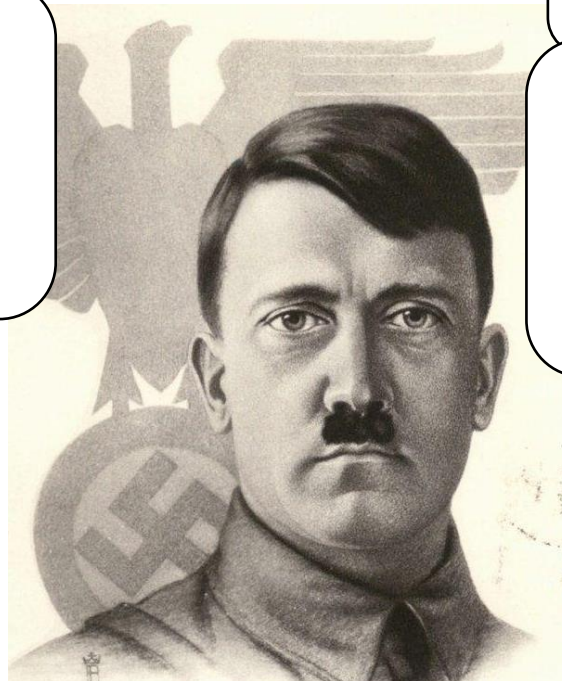
There was still a threat from the **trade unions** – they supported the Social Democrats and the Communists and could go in strike to stop Hitler.

Hindenburg had appointed him Chancellor, but he did not like Hitler.

He has opponents within the **Nazi Party**.

The **Army** was not totally happy that Hitler was the new Chancellor.

The **Social Democrats** and other political parties still had a large number of seats in the Reichstag. They could have blocked Hitler's plans.



The Reichstag Fire: 27 February 1933

What was the Reichstag Fire?

One of the first things Hitler did when he became Chancellor was call a General Election to be held in March 1933. He used violence and intimidation to frighten his opponents. There were over 70 deaths during the election campaign.

Just a week before the election, on 27 February 1933, the German Parliament, the Reichstag, was burned down. It is not known how the fire got started, but the Nazis blamed a Dutch Communist, Marinus Van der Lubbe for the fire.

Some people suggest the Nazis started the fire so they could blame the Communists. Hitler and Goebbels claimed the fire had been started by the Communists as the first stage of a communist revolution.

How did the Reichstag Fire help Hitler?

- Hitler convinced Hindenburg to pass some decrees using Article 48. ***The Decree for the Protection of the People and the State*** suspended normal politics and freedoms.
- Hitler used the decrees to arrest thousands of Communists, including their leaders.
- Newspapers that criticised Hitler were banned.
- Hitler took control of the police force. His SA men beat up their opponents and killed around 50 people. The police did nothing to stop them.
- Hitler used the fear of a Communist uprising to win support from the rich. They donated millions of marks to his party.
- People voted for the Nazis out of fear of communism and because they liked Hitler's ideas. The Nazis and their supporters won control of the Reichstag.
- The Communists were banned from taking their seats in the Reichstag.

The Enabling Act: March 1933

What was the Enabling Act?

Hitler suggested the Enabling Act (or Law For the Removal of the Distress of the People of the Reich) in order to by-pass the Reichstag altogether.

Hitler used his SA men to intimidate the Reichstag into passing the law.

How did Enabling Act help Hitler?

It gave him the power to:

1. Suggest and make laws without the consent of the Reichstag.
2. Overrule the Weimar Constitution.
3. He would be able to do this for four years.

Democracy in Germany had come to an end.

Hitler had all the power he needed.

Removing opposition outside the Nazi Party: 1933-1934

Banning Trade Unions:

Why: The trade unions were usually supporters of the Communists and Social Democrats. Hitler knew that the unions could organise strikes and demonstrations against his government.

How: In May 1933 the Nazis:

- Broke into trade union offices all over Germany and arrested union officials and leaders. They had the power to do this under the Enabling Act.
- Hitler used his power to ban all trade unions and make strikes illegal.

Banning Political Parties:

Why: The Communists and Social Democrats could have organised opposition to Hitler's government.

How:

- In May 1933 the Nazis sent the SA in to the offices of the Social Democrats and the Communists and destroyed their documents and took their funds. They also smashed up their newspaper offices.
- In July 1933, Hitler banned all political parties apart from the Nazis.

Closing down the Länder:

Why: Germany was divided into 18 local areas and each one had its own local Parliament known as a **Länder**. These Länder worried Hitler as they still had some power and could be used to organise opposition to his Government. The Länder had caused trouble for Hindenburg during the period 1929-32 – Hitler did not want the same issues.

How: In January 1934, Hitler abolished the Länder and replaced them with local Nazi leaders.

Removing opposition inside the Nazi Party 1934: The Night of the Long Knives

What was the Night of the Long Knives?

On 30 June 1934, Hitler authorised the SS to carry out a series of arrests and killings. The victims were members of the Nazi Party (especially within the SA) and other political figures who were a threat to his power. Ernst Rohm and the other SA leaders were killed, von Schleicher, Gregor Strasser and Gustav von Kahr.

In total, around 400 people were killed.

Why was it carried out?

- *The SA was too powerful:* The SA had 3 million members and many of them felt under-valued by Hitler. Hitler was afraid that they were too independent and could be a threat to his government.
- *Rohm disliked Hitler:* Rohm disagreed with the direction Hitler was taking the Party. Rohm wanted to tax the rich and help the workers more. Rohm started to oppose Hitler and may have been plotting to have him killed.
- *The Army hated Rohm:* The Army hated Rohm and were afraid that he wanted the SA to replace them as the official defence force. Hitler had to get rid of Rohm to reassure the Army.
- *The SS hated Rohm:* The SS hated Rohm and wanted him and the SA scrapped.

Completing the Picture 1934: Hindenburg and the Army.

The Death of Hindenburg

When Hitler became Chancellor, President Hindenburg was in his late 80s and very frail. He died on 2 August 1934.

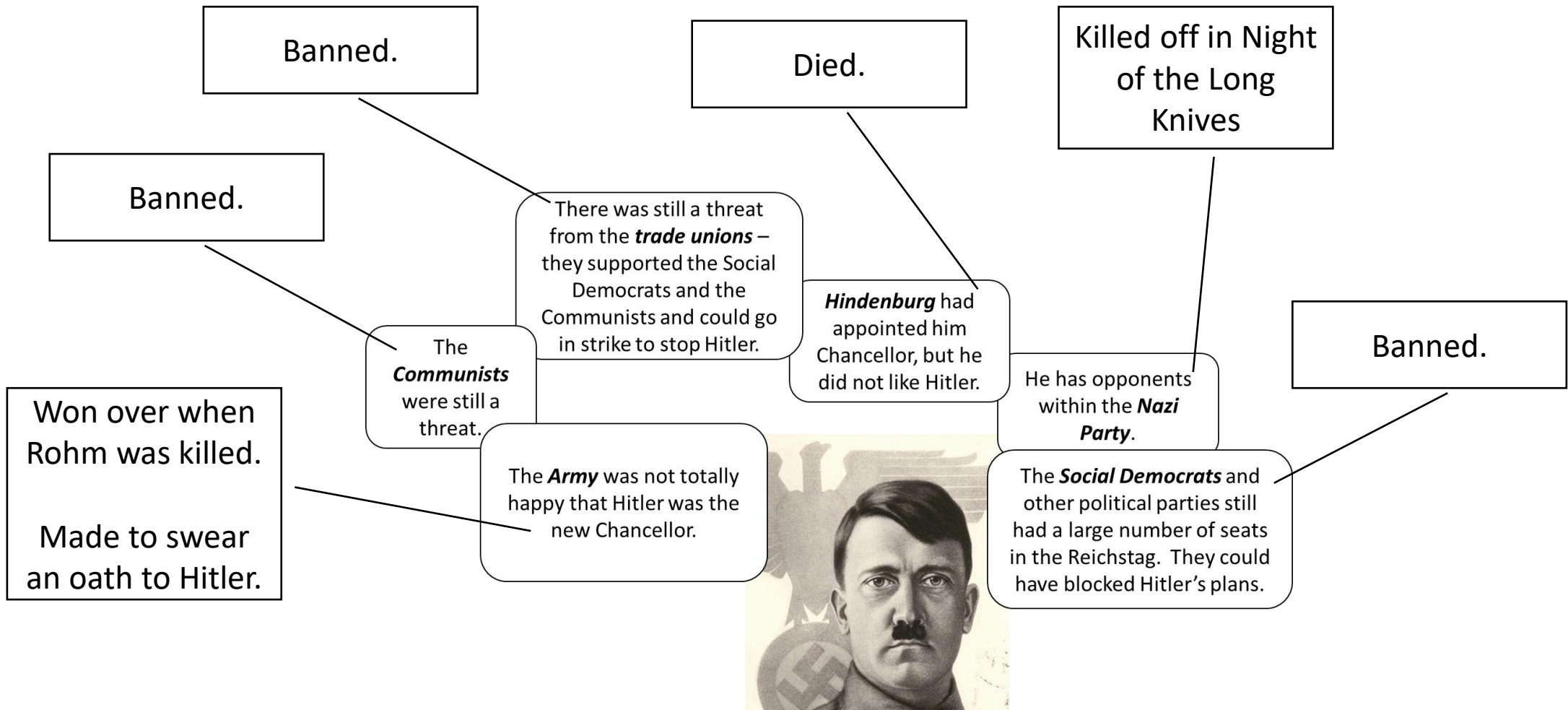
Hitler immediately took Hindenburg's powers and declared himself Fuhrer – the leader of Germany.

Hitler then held a vote of the German people to confirm his new powers. They were bombarded with propaganda and 90% of the people voted to support Hitler's new status.

The Army was forced to take a new oath of loyalty to Hitler.

The Weimar Republic ended and the Third Reich was declared.

Summary: How did Hitler consolidate his power: 1933-34



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2 The police state

An SS leader in the
1930s



Setting up the Nazi Police State.

The **Third Reich** (Germany under Hitler) was a **police state**. This meant the government used the police and secret police to control the German people. This was done by setting up a new system that was loyal to Hitler and included the SS, the SD (Security Force) and the Gestapo.

The SS

This had originally been set up as Hitler’s bodyguard and was quite small. It became more important in the early 1930s and it had been used to kill Hitler’s opponents in the Night of the Long Knives.

Its members were carefully selected for their “racial purity”. It had around 240,000 members by the time Hitler came to power.

It was headed by **Heinrich Himmler** and was put at the top of the police system. It controlled all aspects of security and had little regard for the law and acted as it pleased.

Controlled

Controlled

Ran

The SD

This had been set up in 1931 by Himmler. He appointed **Reinhard Heydrich** as its head. They wore uniforms and spied on the German people. They kept a complex system of index cards at the Nazi headquarters that kept track of any opponents. Many members of the SD were well-educated lawyers and professors.

The Gestapo

This had been set up in 1933 as a secret police force. It was originally run by Herman Goering, but was then transferred to Heydrich. Its role was to spy on opponents and stamp them out:

- It tapped telephones and intercepted letters.
- Used informants to spy on people.
- Arrested people for questioning – violence and torture were common. In 1939 alone, 160,000 people were arrested by the Gestapo.
- Many people died during their questioning.

People feared the Gestapo. They were small in number, about 30,000 in total, but the German people were afraid of being arrested by them. This helped keep people in line.

Concentration Camps

Camps, such as Dachau, were set up to house the people arrested by the various part of the police state. Prisoners could be political opponents of the Nazis, beggars, homosexuals, religious leaders who spoke out against Hitler, Jews, criminals and sex offenders. The inmates were forced to wear uniform and do hard labour. Beatings, torture and killings were common. At any time, there were about 20,000 people in the six concentration camps.

People would be released from the camps and spread news how terrible they were – there was a popular saying in Nazi Germany: **Lieber Gott, mach mich stumm, dass ich nicht nach Dachau kumm – Dear God, keep me quiet so that I stay out of Dachau.**

Nazi Control of the Legal System:

The Nazis liked the idea of things being seen to be “legal”. Although Hitler had stripped away all aspects of democracy, he wanted to make all of his actions appear to be within the law – even if the law was made by him in an undemocratic fashion.

He also wanted to use the legal system to condemn his opponents. He wanted to make it look as if people were genuine criminals being found guilty by the courts.

Hitler made all judges join the ***National Socialist League for the Maintenance of the Law***. He made sure all judges were on his side.

Hitler abolished juries and let the judges decide who was guilty. The ***People's Court*** heard cases of treason. Between 1934 and 1939, 534 people were sentenced to death for political crimes.

Nazi Control of religious views:

Germany was a Christian country and many people attended Church. Some members of the Church were uncomfortable with the Nazis way of running the country. At first, Hitler reassured them that things would be ok, but this did not always work. Hitler soon turned the power of the police state and the law against some areas of religion.

The Catholic Church: One third of Germans were Catholics and they were worried about two main issues. They believed that the Pope, and not Hitler, was their true leader. They were also worried that Hitler would take over the schools run by the Catholic Church. The Catholics wanted to keep their own schools, but the Nazis wanted to close them so they could make sure all children got the Nazi message in Nazi controlled schools.

In 1933, Hitler reached an agreement – or ***Concordat*** - with the Pope. This agreement said Hitler would leave the schools and Catholic Church alone if Priests agreed not to interfere in politics or criticise the Nazis. However, Hitler broke his promise and harassed and arrested many Catholic priests. He also brought Catholic schools into line with Nazi teachings or simply closed them. He banned the ***Catholic Youth League***.

The Protestant Church: Most Protestants were happy with Hitler and the way he brought order to Germany. They were especially happy he had got rid of the anti-religious Communists. In 1936, many of the Protestant Churches who liked the Nazis came together and formed the ***Reich Church***. Protestant Pastors in the Reich Church supported Hitler and shaped their sermons to support his views.

Some Protestant Pastors continued to oppose Hitler.

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3 Controlling and influencing attitudes

Joseph Goebbels.



Joseph Goebbels and Propaganda:

Hitler's ***Totalitarian State*** (a system where the government control all aspects of life) shaped the attitudes of the German people using:

Censorship: Banning information and ideas that do not fit with Hitler's message or view of how Germany should be. Newspapers, pictures, radio and film were all subjected to censorship.

Propaganda: Using things like newspapers, posters, films, radio and big events to spread Hitler's ideas.

The person in charge of this was the Minister of People's Enlightenment, Joseph Goebbels. He made use of a number of tools to shape the attitudes and opinions of the German people. He did this a complex and subtle way that meant the German people didn't even realise it was happening.

Newspapers: There were many newspapers in Nazi Germany, but they all had to agree to print the message of the Nazi Party. Goebbels constantly briefed the journalists so they had the information he wanted them to have. He also made sure all the stories were written in the way he approved of. Journalists who did not cooperated were arrested and newspapers that would not fall into line were closed.

Radio: After 1933, Goebbels made sure radio stations fell into line with Nazi policies and only carried Nazi ideas and approved news stories. Hitler made frequent radio broadcasts – these were virtually compulsory listening.

To make sure everyone heard the Nazi message, cheap radios were produced and loud speakers were places in public places. Goebbels also made sure there was plenty of popular music on the radios so people would stay tuned in.

Rallies: Rallies were big meetings and parades. These were elaborate shows with fly pasts by aircraft, women on horses, huge Nazi flags and symbols, searchlights and military bands. Soldiers would parade and speeches would be made. A huge stadium was built at Nuremburg to house these rallies. This was a way of showing off the strength of the Nazis and spread their ideas via speeches.

Sport: Sporting events were used to highlight Nazi ideas and the Swastika and straight arm salute was used by all teams. Sporting victories by German football teams, rowers and boxers were all used to show the supposed superiority of the German people.

In 1936, the Nazis hosted the ***Olympic games***. They used it to show off the strength of the Nazi Germany. Huge stadia were built, events were well organised and films were made of the event. Germany won 33 medals, more than any other country. People came from all over the world and witnessed the efficiency and organisation of Nazi Germany. The violence a arrests stopped fro the duration of the Olympics.



Control of culture and the arts:

The Nazis made sure all aspects of life were used to influence the way people thought. They banned artists and writers who did not fit with their views and the old art of Weimar Republic was outlawed. In 1933 they set up the **Reich Chamber of Culture** to control film, art, architecture, literature and theatre. All art and culture had to promote traditional values of the family, celebrate German history and promote ideas of strength, loyalty, struggle, sacrifice and discipline.

Art: The Reich Chamber of Visual Arts controlled art and all artists had to apply to be a member. Anyone who was not a member could not teach, make or sell art. The Gestapo raided artists' studios to check their work.

In 1936, 12,000 works of art were removed from galleries for not conforming with Nazi ideas. Huge exhibitions of Nazi-approved art were regularly held.

Music: Some music was banned. Jazz and swing were outlawed because they had black origins. The work of Jews was also banned. Wagner's music was popular as it often celebrated German heroes and legends. Beethoven and Bach were also played as these were seen as "German music".

Literature: Only approved books could be published. They had to support Nazi ideas and values. 2,500 writers were banned. Millions of books were taken off the shelves and burned because they were written by Jews or had "inappropriate" themes.

Architecture: **Albert Speer** was Hitler's leading architect. He designed huge buildings that used Nazi symbols. The idea was to use buildings to show the power of the Nazis.

Speer was influenced by Roman and Greek buildings and he used columns and domes to recreate their impressive designs.

Film: Cinema was controlled by Goebbels. All cinemas had to start their shows with long newsreels showing the achievements of Nazi Germany and celebrating Hitler.

All films had to be approved by Goebbels. He also produced around 1,300 Nazi Party films.

Films and cartoons showed Germans as heroes and Jews as villains. In *Hitlerjungen Quex* a young Nazi is killed by Communists. The cartoon canary, *Hansi*, had a Hitler haircut and fought with crows that were drawn to look "Jewish".

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4 Opposition, resistance and conformity

Swing Kids.



Opposition from the Church:

Pastors' Emergency League: In 1933, a group of Protestant Pastors, including **Martin Niemöller**, set up the Pastors' Emergency League. They objected to the way all of the Churches were being merged into the Reich Church and the way Hitler banned Jews from becoming Christians. They also disliked the banning of the Old Testament of the Bible because it was associated with the Jews. It had 7000 members, many of whom were persecuted by the Nazis. They did set up the **Confessing Church** as an alternative to the Reich Church. Many left because of the pressure put on them by the Gestapo.

The role of Pastor Martin Niemöller: Niemöller had voted for Hitler and liked the idea of a strong leader. However, he opposed Hitler's control of the Church. He helped set up the Confessing Church and the PEL. He was repeatedly arrested between 1934 and 1937. He was put into a concentration camp in 1938 where he was kept in solitary confinement. He was not released until 1945.

Catholic Opposition: Some Catholics opposed Hitler's ideas. War and persecution offended their Christian beliefs. They also objected to his euthanasia policy – killing people considered inferior by the Nazis. Hundreds of priests were arrested and sent to Dachau where some were executed. In 1937, the Pope attacked Hitler's ideas in a public article.

Opposition from the young:

Most young people simply accepted the teachings and rules of the Nazis. Others did not and either opposed or resisted the Nazis.

Edelweiss Pirates: They emerged in working-class areas of German cities.

- Each local group adopted its own name. The “Travelling Dudes” were from Essen and the “Navajos” from Cologne.
- They were teenage boys and girls.
- They wore an edelweiss flower to show they were members.
- They had long hair.
- They would meet and chat.
- Sometimes they would fight with the Hitler Youth.

The Swing Youth: They were rich young people from big cities.

- They listened to imported American jazz.
- They would dance banned swing dances.
- They wore American fashions.
- They organised illegal dances and clubs.
- The SS, Hitler Youth and Gestapo often beat up Swing Youth.

Why did most people not oppose Hitler?

- They were afraid of the SS and Gestapo.
- The opposition leaders had been locked up or killed.
- People did not really know what was going on - the Propaganda was working.
- People were happy with the Nazis - they were making Germany strong and solving the problems left by the Weimar government.
- Many people felt they should support Hitler because they had voted for him.
- The opposition was divided - the people who hated Hitler could not agree on what to do to stop him.