

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 18

How did political developments in 1932 result in Hitler becoming Chancellor in January 1933?

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What is the Weimar Constitution?

The constitution is the basic principles, and laws that determine the powers and responsibilities of the government. These principles are known as the Weimar Constitution as these were the duties and laws of the Weimar Republic.

This included the role of the **President**, who was was the head of the republic, elected by the people (men and women over 21 years old) every 7 years but played no part in day-to-day politics. Within this structure, you would also find the **Chancellor**, who was the head of the government and had to have the support of the majority of people within the **Reichstag**.



What happened in the 1932 elections?

1932 saw the end of **Hindenburg's** 7 year term as **President** of the Weimar Republic, by the stage he was 84 years old and growing increasingly frail. However due to the consequences of the 1929 **Wall Street Crash**, Germany was in the depths of an economic depression and so try and keep the government as stable as possible during this difficult time, **Hindenburg** made the decision to stand for election again!

In addition to **Hindenburg**, two other men stood in the Presidential election. **Ernst Thalmann**, who was the leader of the **KPD** (the communist party) and **Adolf Hitler**, who was the leader of the **NSDAP** (Nazis).



What happened in the 1932 elections?

In order to win the election, one of the candidates needed at least 50% of the vote; remember the **President** was elected by German men and women over the age of 21. In March 1932, the results were in. **Ernst Thalmann** received 5 million votes (14% of all the votes), **Adolf Hitler** received 11 million votes (30% of all the votes) and **Hindenburg** received 18 million votes (49.6% of all the votes). **Hindenburg** received the most votes in this election but he was not appointed as he did not achieve 50% of the vote! Therefore there is another election a month later in April 1932. Within this month, people were campaigning furiously. **Hitler** used effective **propaganda** strategies to try and persuade the German public to vote for him. He used methods such as renting an aeroplane and flying from town to town to deliver speeches, he used the SA to disrupt **communist** rallies and parade in the streets showing their support of the Nazis. On the 10th April 1932 the results were in. **Ernst Thalmann** received 4 million votes (an 11% share of the votes, lower than the previous result!), **Adolf Hitler** received 13 million votes (an increase from 30 - 36 % of the votes) and **Hindenburg** received 19 million votes, which gave him a 53% share of the vote which meant he had achieved over 50% and so was elected for another 7 year term as **President**.



Hitler does not become President after the election of 1932, but why can the 1932 elections be considered a success for Hitler and the Nazi Party?

Although **Hitler** didn't win the 1932 Presidential election it can be seen as a success for the Nazi Party for different reasons. Firstly, As Hitler's votes increased by 2 million in within a month this would not only demonstrate an increase in his popularity with the German people, but more importantly that the **propaganda** used as part of his campaign was effective and could be used as a powerful tool. Additionally, you could argue it was a success for the Nazis based on how much of a blow this was to the **communists**. **Thalmann's** popularity actually decreased between the March and April election which could indicate to **Hitler** that the **communist party** were losing supporters within Germany, which is good news for him as it reduces the threat they pose as political opposition to him.



Why did Brüning resign as Chancellor in 1932?

Heinrich Brüning was appointed by **President Hindenburg** as the **Chancellor** of Germany in March 1930 with the unenviable task of trying to repair the damage caused to the German economy as a result of the **Wall Street Crash**. **Brüning** was also worried about the unrest and the violent atmosphere on the streets of Germany, he was concerned that this could lead to a civil war. As a result, he made the decision to ban the **SA** and **SS** which obviously infuriated Hitler, but it wasn't just Hitler who was angered by this. This also angered other political parties who had **paramilitary groups** like the SA and SS and they were fearful that this would also happen to them; this then united political groups with a common cause, anger towards **Brüning**. When using the phrase **paramilitary group** we are referring to a group whose structure, tactics and training is often very similar to a professional military group. The main difference is that they are not part of the official armed forces of the country. Another example is the **Freikorps** after the **Treaty of Versailles** reduced the official German army to 100,000 men.



Why did Brüning resign as Chancellor in 1932?

This in itself wouldn't cause **Brüning** to **resign** from his position as **Chancellor**, he could and did rule by presidential decree (you may have seen this before as **article 48**), therefore he did not necessarily need the political parties and the **Reichstag** to support him. But he did need the **President** to support him. The reason for **Brüning** losing the support of **Hindenburg** primarily comes down to **Brüning's** plan to improve the German economy. He planned to buy land, in the form of farms, from land landowners. This would then be used for unemployed Germans within cities to move and work on as a way to try and reduce unemployment, reduce tensions and conflict in the cities and give people more of an investment in the Weimar Republic leading them to support the government as they were now land owners. **Hindenburg** was furious about the plans as he was a landowner and the landowning class were very powerful within Germany. There was a fear that this idea of taking land and distributing it to 'non landowning classes' was reminiscent of **communist** ideas, something which the landowning class wanted to avoid!



How does Brüning's resignation help Hitler to become Chancellor in 1933?

Hitler does not directly become Chancellor after **Brüning resigns** in May 1932. **Brüning's** actions show **Hitler** that **Hindenburg** was willing to use **article 48** if a **Chancellor** he appointed did not necessarily have the full support of the **Reichstag**. It also further demonstrated that it is essential to have **Hindenburg's** full support, not just to appoint you but also to keep you in this position and **Hitler** was supported by the wealthy within Germany which could have influence over those in power.



Glossary

Article 48 - this gave the Chancellor emergency powers to pass laws without going to the Reichstag, they just had to ask the President to agree.

Chancellor - The head of the Weimar Government and appointed (chosen) by the President.

Constitution - The basic principles, and laws that determine the powers and responsibilities of the government.

President - The head of the Weimar Republic and elected by the people every 7 years.

Propaganda - using all forms of media (newspapers, radio, posters etc.) to promote a political view.

Reichstag - the German parliament, where the country is run from.

Resignation - when a person quits their job.



Comprehension Questions

1. How did someone become Chancellor of Germany in the Weimar Republic?
2. Who was elected as German president in 1932?
3. What was Brüning's main aim when he was appointed Chancellor?
4. Which part of the Weimar Constitution did Brüning use that caused his support to decline?
5. Challenge question: To what extent did the Presidential election of 1932 lead to Hitler becoming Chancellor in January 1933?

You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer

*To a **large** extent the Presidential election of 1932 led to Hitler becoming Chancellor because...*

*However, it could be argued that the Presidential election was only a **small** part of the reason why Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 because...*

Overall, I think...

