

# How did Hitler consolidate power by 1934?

History - Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1919 - 1939

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## What is the difference between the SA and the SS?

The **SA** were created in August 1921 as a **paramilitary force**, a **paramilitary force** is a group which behaves like an army but it isn't the official army of the country. The **Freikorps** are another example of a paramilitary force. Members of the **SA** were often ex-soldiers and they were led by **Ernst Röhm**.



By 1930 the **SA** had increased to **4,000 members** and were identified by their **brown uniforms**. This led to them often being called the **Brownshirts** and they were also known by another name, **Storm Troopers**. The main role of the **SA** was to threaten and intimidate opposition, especially during elections, or when **Hitler** wanted to pass the **Enabling Act**.



However **Hitler** didn't full trust the loyalty of the **SA**. So in **1925** he created another group, called the **SS**. The **SS** was created to act as a **protection squad**, they were **Hitler's personal bodyguards** and were led by **Heinrich Himmler**. By 1930 there were **3,000 members** of the **SS**. The **black uniform** of the **SS**, which was introduced in 1932, was said to strike fear in people who saw it!



## The Night of the Long Knives

On the **30th June 1934**, **Röhm** and other leading **SA** members were invited to a meeting. On **Hitler's** order they were arrested and over a four day period approximately **400 people**, including 150 SA leaders, were shot. **Röhm** was taken to prison and on the 1st July an SS officer arrived, placing a pistol loaded with one bullet in **Röhm's** cell.



They wanted **Röhm** to use this pistol to shoot himself. But after 15 minutes of hearing no sound, the SS officer and his deputy entered **Röhm's** cell and shot him. But it wasn't just the **SA** which was brutally attacked on the **30th June 1934**. Leading politicians were also murdered or threatened, this included **Von Schleicher**, the ex-German **Chancellor**, and his wife who were both shot. The story given by the Nazis was they were shot trying to resist arrest. **Von Papen's** staff were arrested, his home surrounded with **SS** guards and his telephone line cut off.



## The Night of the Long Knives - Why did it happen?

**Hitler** was growing increasingly concerned that **Röhm** was a threat to his power. **SA** members were loyal to **Röhm** and some of them complained that although they risk their life for **Hitler**, he didn't value them. This was a worry for Hitler, if they were more loyal to **Röhm** and he decided to challenge **Hitler** then the **SA** would likely offer support to **Röhm**.



**Röhm** was also against **Hitler's** policies, and was especially against **Hitler's** connections with the rich **industrialists** (factory owners) and army generals. **Röhm** wanted policies which were more **socialist**, he wanted to tax the rich to help the working class. This wouldn't go down too well with the wealthy who were supporting **Hitler!**



The German army were also concerned about **Röhm** and his plans for the **SA**. They believed that **Röhm** wanted to replace the German army with the **SA**. **Hitler** needed the support of the **army** if he was going to have control of Germany. Finally, leading Nazis such as **Himmler** didn't like **Röhm** and **Himmler** wanted to reduce the power of the **SA** and increase the power of his own **SS**. In 1934, leaders of the **SS** and the **army** warned **Hitler** that **Röhm** was planning to seize power. As a result **Hitler** began the **Night of the long knives!**



## The Night of the Long Knives - Consequences

Some Germans did object to what happened on the **30th June 1934** and the violence that was used. But very few people actually knew how bad it was and for some people they were just relieved that the brutal **SA** were being brought under control. The **SA** still existed after 1934, but it was limited and they were no longer a threat to **Hitler** or the German **army**.



One of the main consequences of the **Night of the Long Knives** was that it enabled **Hitler** to remove both **internal and external threats**. **Internal threats** refer to those within the Nazi Party where as **external threats** were those outside of the Nazi Party. Hitler removed the **internal threats** of **Röhm** and the **SA**. He also removed **external threats** such as **Schleicher** and **Von Papen**. **Von Papen** wasn't murdered, but he did **resign** from his position as **Vice-Chancellor** three days later.



**The Night of the Long Knives** also increased the power of the **SS** and sent a clear message to the German **army** that **Hitler** would support them. In return, the **army** officers offered to support **Hitler** after he removed the threat from the **SA**.



## The Death of Hindenburg & army allegiance

On the **2nd August 1934**, at age 87, **President Hindenburg** died. **Hitler** didn't hold an election to decide who will replace **Hindenburg** as **President**. Instead he combined the role of **Chancellor** with the role and powers of the **President** and declared himself as the **Führer** of Germany.



**Hitler** wanted the approval of the German people to **legitimise** his position as **Führer**. So, on the 19th August a public vote was held to confirm **Hitler** as **Führer**. Whether as a result of Nazi propaganda, or an awareness of how **Hitler** treated those who opposed him, **90%** of the votes were in favour of **Hitler** becoming **Führer**.



Every member of the German army now swore an **oath of allegiance** (or support), but not to Germany as a country, to **Hitler** individually. As the oath said, “I swear before God to give my unconditional obedience to **Adolf Hitler**.” This was now the end of the **Weimar Republic**. **Hitler** had become the absolute ruler and **dictator** of Germany.



# Glossary

**Democracy** - A political system in which the people vote for their leaders and policies. An example of this is the Weimar Republic.

**Dictatorship** - A political system in which one person or political party has complete control and power to do what they want. An example of this is Germany under Nazi rule.

**Enabling Act** - Gave Hitler the right to make laws for 4 years without the consent of the Reichstag.

**External threat** - Potential threats to Hitler's power from **outside** the Nazi Party.

**Führer** - A title used by Hitler after 1934 which combined the powers of the President and the Chancellor.

**Internal threat** - Potential threats to Hitler's power from **inside** the Nazi Party.



# Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Hitler want to remove Röhm during the Night of the Long Knives?
2. What was a major consequence of the Night of the Long Knives for Hitler?
3. How did Hitler use the death of Hindenburg to secure his power and authority in Germany?
4. How did Hitler make sure he had the support of the German army in August 1934?
5. **Challenge question:** How far do you agree that Hitler's political power by the end of August 1934 was based on illegal methods?

***You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer***

*It could be argued that Hitler's political power by the end of August 1934 was based on illegal methods. This is because...*

*However, there are other reasons to explain why Hitler had achieved political power by the end of August 1934 which weren't illegal. For example...*

*Overall, I mostly agree/disagree that...*

