

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 24

How much resistance existed in Nazi Germany before 1939?

Miss Shanks



To what extent did the Nazi Party have support from the German people?

The **events of 1932** in particular are a good example to show that **Hitler** and the Nazi Party did have a high level of support from the German people. **Hitler** increased his percentage of the vote in the **1932 Presidential elections** and achieved **36% of the vote in April of 1932**, which was voted for by the German men and women over the age of 21. Then in the first **Reichstag** elections of 1932 the Nazi Party became the **largest party in the Reichstag** with **38% of the votes**. Again, this was a vote by the German people!



Why did some of the German people support the Nazis?

Firstly, the power of the **propaganda and censorship methods** used by the Nazi Party should not be underestimated. In his role, **Goebbels** made sure to ban and remove any criticism of **Hitler** and the Nazis. He did this through propaganda methods such as the use of the **radio** and **controlling the newspapers** to make sure that only positive and supportive comments about the Nazis were given. Therefore, making sure that the Nazis stayed popular with the German people.



Another reason why the Nazis had support could be due to **conformity**. This is when people behave the way they are expected to, in terms of their **attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and politics, in order to fit in with the rest of society**. Some people didn't want to appear to be different from other people within Germany. If supporting the Nazi Party was what was expected, then they will conform and do the same.



Finally, the Nazi Party also had support from some of the German population because of the work the Nazis had done to increase the **reputation** and power Germany had with other countries. In particular, their efforts to repair some of the problems which had occurred within Germany due to the **Treaty of Versailles**. The shame caused by the terms of the **Treaty of Versailles** was being removed. In **1935 the Saar** was returned to Germany, the **army increased** under rearmament programmes, and **unemployment had reduced**.



Resistance and opposition

Resistance is when you **refuse to do something** or **speak out against it**. For example, disagreeing with the banning of political parties or the treatment of minority groups within Germany. However, **opposition** is a bit more than disagreeing with it. Opposition is when you do something to remove the thing you disagree with; you are **actively trying to destroy it!** It might actually be surprising that there was any **resistance** or **opposition** in Nazi Germany, as official political opposition was banned. Additionally, resisting and opposing the Nazis was dangerous, any criticism could be reported to the **Gestapo** and the person reported would end up being punished. But there are examples of **resistance** and **opposition** to **Hitler** and the Nazi rule of Germany.



Religious opposition

Despite the **concordat** (agreement) between **Hitler** and the **Pope**, some **Catholic** priests still opposed **Hitler** and Nazi policies and were arrested. At least **400 Catholic priests** were sent to **Dachau concentration camp**. As a result of **Hitler** not sticking by the terms of the **concordat**, the **Pope** openly opposed and attacked **Hitler** in his message called '**With Burning Concern**'. This message was read in every **Catholic** Church and described **Hitler** as 'mad, repulsive and arrogant.'



The **Reich Church** supported **Hitler** and the Nazis, whereas the **Confessional Church** opposed the Nazis. In 1933 a group of **Protestant** pastors, including **Martin Niemöller**, opposed two key parts of Nazi policies and ideas towards the **Protestant** Church. In particular they opposed the creation of the **Reich Church**, Nazis stopping Jews becoming Christians and banning the Jewish Old Testament from **Christian** teaching. As a result, these pastors created the **Confessing Church** in **1934**. Roughly **2,000 Protestant pastors** remained in the **Reich Church** whereas roughly **6,000** joined the **Confessing Church**. It is estimated that **800 members of the Confessing Church were arrested and sent to concentration camps**. The large majority of methods used by the church to oppose Nazi rule can be considered **resistance**. Church leaders would voice their critical opinions and there was a large number of people attending regular church services.



The role of Martin Niemöller

Niemöller served as part of the German navy during the First World War and **trained as a pastor in 1920.** **Niemöller** opposed the **Weimar Republic**, he believed that Germany needed a strong leader to deal with the aftermath of the First World War and that the Weimar Republic did not offer this strength. So, in the **elections of 1924 and 1932** **Niemöller** voted for the Nazis and welcomed **Hitler's** appointment as **Chancellor** on the **30th January 1933.**



However, he began to oppose the Nazis and their interference in the **Protestant** Church, especially the creation of the **Reich Church** and so created the **Confessing Church** in 1934. Also in 1934 **Niemöller** realised that the Nazis had been listening to his private conversations, the **Gestapo** had tapped his phone. It was clear to him that Germany was now a **dictatorship**. So he became to speak out more and more in opposition of the Nazis, this resulted in him being **arrested numerous times between 1934 and 1937**. Then in 1937 he was arrested and in **1938 he was found guilty** of opposing the Nazis, which was considered a treasonable act. He was sent to **Sachsenhausen concentration camp** before later being transferred to **Dachau concentration camp**.



Youth opposition

The **Edelweiss Pirates** began in the late 1930s with **teenagers from working class backgrounds** in the big German cities. They were not one united group but instead they were different local groups. They used the symbol of the **white edelweiss flower** to show support to the movement. The **Edelweiss Pirates** were made up of both **male and female teenagers**, but mainly boys. Members hated the military discipline of the Nazi youth groups and the general lack of freedom in Nazi Germany.



They wore clothes which allowed them to express their freedom, but that didn't conform to the Nazi view. The **boys had long hair** and copied styles of clothing they saw in America, **often wearing checked shirts, dark shorts and white socks.** They resisted Nazi rule by creating **anti-Nazi graffiti on walls**, insulting young people who were part of Hitler Youth and would sometimes even attack them. They went on long hikes in the countryside, they pitched tents, sang parodies (funny versions) of **Hitler Youth** songs and told jokes, sometimes insulting the Nazis. **By 1939 they had 2,000 members** who read and listened to banned literature and music as an act of resistance.



Another youth opposition group within Germany was the **Swing Youth** who were **mainly teenagers from the wealthy (rich) middle-class families**, living in big towns. They loved **American culture** like the **clothing, films and especially the music**. **Swing Youth** members often owned record players and had illegal music brought to Germany to play on their record players. Members of the **Swing Youth** would get together to **drink alcohol, smoke, listen to music and dance in groups**. This was hated by the Nazis as their music of choice was **jazz music**, made popular by black singers and musicians such as **Louis Armstrong**, and non-German music. This was hated by the Nazis. Gradually, they started to organise **illegal dances**. These were attended by up to **6,000 young people**.



The actions of youth groups like the **Edelweiss Pirates** and **Swing Youth** were clearly acts of **resistance** against the expectations the Nazis had about how young people should behave and think in Germany. They were not political opponents to **Hitler** and the Nazi Party, they were opposed to the ideas of Nazism which impacted on their personal freedom and ability to express themselves. Although the membership numbers may seem impressive, it is also important to note that the membership of **Hitler Youth** at the same point was **8 million!** - But this isn't entirely what it appears to be either and is something which will be looked at in a different lesson.



Glossary

Christianity - A religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Within Christianity there were different churches such as the **Catholic Church** and **Protestant Church**.

Concentration camp - A new type of prison created by the Nazis and ran by the SS.

Conformity - When people behave in the way they are expected to in terms of their attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and politics in order to fit in with the rest of society.

Opposition - When a person, or group of people, do something to remove the thing they disagree with; they are actively destroying it.

Pope - The head of the Catholic Church.

Resistance - When a person, or group of people, refuse to do something or speak out against it.



Comprehension Questions

1. How did the Catholic Church oppose the Nazis?
2. How did members of the Protestant Church oppose the Nazis?
3. Which method of punishment did the Nazis typically use when dealing with religious opposition?
4. Why would the Nazis not have felt threatened by youth opposition?
5. **Challenge question:** How far do you agree that the Nazis had the support of the German people?

You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer

It could be seen that the Nazis had the support of the German people. This is because...

However, it could be argued that the Nazis did not have the support of the German people. For example...

Overall, I mostly agree/disagree that...

