As the SA and SS whipped up support in the localities, in a piece of cleverly timed propaganda President Hindenburg was persuaded to stand alongside Hitler, in full military dress, at a ceremony of national reconciliation in Potsdam on 21 March 1933. Consequently, on 23 March, the Enabling Act was passed with only 94 SPD members voting against it. This was to provide the basis for Hitler's dictatorship. It virtually destroyed the power of the Reichstag by allowing the chancellor to issue laws without consultation for a period of four years.

Gleichschaltung This refers to a co-ordination process whereby all German institutions were to conform to Nazi ideals.

It took Hitler just four months after the Enabling Act was passed to set up a single-party state. He was able to combine his legal powers and the threat of force to remove or Nazify those groups or institutions that might limit his power in a process known as *Gleichschaltung*. The constitution of 1919 was never formally abandoned and the Reichstag survived, but in the first six months of 1933, what lingering democracy there had been was destroyed. For further information on how Hitler consolidated his position, see Unit 3.

End of unit activities

1   Make a diagram to illustrate why Hitler became chancellor of Germany in January 1933, using the following layout.

Long term	Short term	Catalyst	Specific event(s)

2   Find out more about those who voted for the Nazi Party in 1930–32. Research the level of support for the Nazis, explaining which aspects of Nazism each group found attractive and arrange your points under the following headings: working class; lower middle class (shopkeepers and office workers); upper middle class (businessmen, bankers and professionals); the élite (aristocracy, army officers, members of government); Protestants/ Catholics; northern Germans/southern Germans; others.

3   Make a Powerpoint® presentation for your class displaying a variety of election posters used by the Nazis to win support before 1933.

4   Make a spider diagram to illustrate why parliamentary government collapsed in Germany in the years 1930–33.

5   Divide into two groups. One group should seek to support the view that Hitler's rise to power was inevitable in the context of Germany in 1918–33; the other should seek to support the view that there was nothing inevitable about the Nazis' rise (considering, for example, that the Weimar Republic could have survived or that power might equally well have gone to the communists). Each group should present its findings for a class debate.

6   What was the personal contribution of Adolf Hitler to the rise of Nazism? Make a four-column chart, with the headings, 'Personality', 'Leadership qualities', 'Communication skills' and 'Political strategy'. Under each heading, try to record as many points and examples as you can to support the importance of this attribute.

Historical debate

The historians A. J. P. Taylor and William Shirer linked the rise of Nazism to the aggressive nature of the 'new' German state forged by war in 1871. Karl Bracher emphasised the circumstances of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Marxist historians associate the rise of Nazism with capitalists' attempts to resist communism. More recently, Alan Bullock and Ian Kershaw have emphasised the personality of Hitler.

Theory of knowledge

Historical determinism

Taylor has suggested that Hitler was a product of Germany's militaristic history and that the Germans never developed a democratic tradition because they preferred strong, authoritarian government – which Hitler continued. Is it possible to talk of 'national characteristics'? Can these account for, and perhaps excuse, a nation's actions?

2 Ideology and the nature of the state

Key questions

- To what extent was Nazi ideology rooted in the past?
- What did Hitler himself contribute to Nazi ideology?
- How important was the role of ideology in Nazi Germany?

Overview

- Many of the elements that made up Nazi ideology were already to be found in 19th- and early 20th-century thought – for example, the belief in the superiority of the Aryan race, anti-Semitism, the cult of the leader or *Führerprinzip*, and the concept of the survival of the fittest, known as Social Darwinism.
- Hitler brought his own belief in German nationalism to the NSDAP and drew on the discontent in post-war Germany to establish a new doctrine of Nazism. In 1920, his 25-point programme set out the principles of nationalism, racialism, anti-Semitism and *Volksgemeinschaft* (community). In the 1920s and 1930s, there was an increasing emphasis on anti-communism, anti-feminism, the need to prepare for war to combat communism and obtain *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east, and on the aims of achieving racial unity, the elimination of the Jews and total authoritarian control.
- Ideology remained fluid throughout the 12 years of Nazi rule and was adapted according to circumstances. However, it was used to justify policies that seemed to make little practical sense, such as the murder of millions of Jews at a time when Germany was suffering an acute labour shortage.

A poster showing Nazi anti-Marxism and anti-Semitism; a Marxist 'angel' is walking hand-in-hand with a wealthy Jewish businessman and the text says: 'Marxism is the guardian angel of capitalism. Vote National Socialist.'

Timeline

1908 Hitler begins to develop his ideas in Vienna

1919 Weimar Republic is established; Treaty of Versailles is signed, which influenced Hitler's thinking

1920 25-point programme is introduced reconciling nationalism and socialism

1924 Hitler writes his semi-autobiographical *Mein Kampf* while in Landsberg Fortress

1933 Hitler becomes chancellor and is in a position to put ideology into practice

1942 final details of the Holocaust are established

Below is a list of Hitler's main ideas, with brief definitions:

Idea	Definition
Supremacy of the state and *Volksgemeinschaft*	the belief that loyalty to the state is more important than any other loyalty; people should feel bound together by blood as a single community
Social Darwinism	the acceptance that life is a constant struggle and, without interference, the strongest will always win; this was indirectly derived from Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest
Lebensraum	the right of the superior German race to acquire living space for its peoples
Pan-Germanism – *Herrenvolk*	the supremacy of the German Aryans as the master race
Anti-democracy	a conviction that democracy gives undue weight to weaker peoples and mediocrities
Führerprinzip	the principle that the leader's will is the source of all political authority; from this developed the 'cult of the leader'
Anti-feminism	the belief that a woman's role is as the bearer of future Aryans
Anti-Marxism	hostility to Marxism as an international creed that weakens nations
Anti-Semitism	a belief that Jews are the lowest race in the social hierarchy and should be persecuted
Blut und Boden (blood and soil)	the belief that the blood of the community is rooted in the soil

To what extent was Nazi ideology rooted in the past?

Most elements of Nazi **ideology** were absorbed from Hitler's study of works that grew out of the political, economic and scientific changes of the 19th century, as moulded by his own experience.

The superiority of the German race

The idea of a superior German *Volk* (the *Herrenvolk* or people) originated in the writings of the philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder at the end of the 18th century, at a time when Germany was divided into many separate states. The term *Volk* (meaning a special race of people) was commonly used in the 19th century and the German philosopher Georg Hegel proved a powerful inspiration to subsequent German nationalists by suggesting it was the destiny of the Germans to emerge as a single people in a strong unified state.

Hitler's desire to unite all people of German race, create a sense of national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), emphasise the superiority of the Germans and demand a strong German state can all be traced back to these ideas. This attitude is sometimes referred to as 'pan-German'.

Anti-Semitism

The persecution of Jews was not unique to Hitler's Germany. European Jews had suffered for centuries, but by the mid 19th century most Jews outside Russia had been assimilated into their communities, and laws, for example confining them to ghetto districts, had been relaxed. However, the growth of industrialisation, which provided Jews with new opportunities for money making, had led to a revival of anti-Semitic feeling by the end of the century.

This rise in anti-Semitism was encouraged by writings such as those of the Frenchman Arthur Comte de Gobineau and the Germans Paul de Lagarde (an assumed name) and Julius Langbehn. Langbehn used vocabulary that foreshadowed Hitler's later ranting. Langbehn referred to the Jews as 'pest and cholera' and as 'poison' polluting the purity of the *Volk*. When the journalist Wilhelm Marr published *The Victory of the Jew over the German* in 1873, it was so popular that it went into 12 editions within six years.

Kaiser Wilhelm II and most of the conservative élite of late 19th- and early 20th-century Germany were anti-Semitic in their views, although they may not have expressed them in quite such an extreme form.

The cult of the leader – the *Führerprinzip*

In the 1880s, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche put forward the idea that, just as there were superior races, so there were superior individuals. He suggested that a man with the 'will to power' was needed to lead the lower orders and that such a leader would be naturally superior – an *Übermensch* (superhuman). This idea was to be used to justify the Nazi idea of the *Führerprinzip* or indispensable leader.

The contempt shown by Nietzsche for ordinary people was shared by the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon. His *Psychology of Crowds* (1895) portrayed most people as unthinking and easily swayed by their emotions. This too was a direct influence on Hitler.

Struggle and the survival of the fittest

'The survival of the fittest' was a phrase first coined by the British philosopher Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Biology* (1864). The idea came from the new scientific ideas about evolution that were put forward in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin had never expected his theories to be used to justify human action, but Social Darwinists distorted his ideas to argue that, just like animals, humans, races and states were driven by an instinctive fight for survival. They suggested that struggle and warfare were healthy activities that allowed the best to rise to the top while leaving the weak to perish. Furthermore, in the fight for the survival of the strongest state, individuals were unimportant.

A number of writers, including the German composer Richard Wagner, accepted these Social Darwinist ideas. Wagner's operas, based on German folklore, were to become favourites of Hitler. Wagner's son-in-law, the Social Darwinist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, was celebrated as the 'seer of the **Third Reich**'.

ideology This term refers to a set of beliefs and ideas that characterise a political movement and provide the principles from which its policies derive.

Fact
Charles Darwin (1809–82) was a British naturalist who studied evolution. He came to the conclusion that animals become stronger and more adapted to their environment over time as weaker specimens die out, and features that are necessary for their survival become more pronounced. This is known as the theory of the 'survival of the fittest'.

Question
Explain the link between Darwin's scientific theories and Hitler's racialism.

Third Reich This term describes the German state (literally empire) in the years 1933–1945. It was known as the 'Third Reich' because Germany had known two former empires. The Holy Roman Empire (962–1806) was referred to as the First Reich and the German Empire, which was established by Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1871 and lasted until 1918, was known as the Second Reich.

What did Hitler himself contribute to Nazi ideology?

The development of Hitler's ideas before 1914

Four of the basic elements of Nazi ideology – the superiority of the German race, anti-Semitism, the cult of the leader and the survival of the fittest – were already well established before Hitler emerged as a politician. Nazi ideology was also shaped by Hitler's own experience. His upbringing and his experiences in Vienna before the First World War (see page 67) helped to turn him into a fervent German nationalist and anti-Semite.

Hitler probably possessed a dormant anti-Semitism before his arrival in Vienna, but it was here that he observed and read pamphlets, newspapers and books that reinforced his prejudices. He attended the operas of Wagner and read the anti-Semitic Viennese newspaper the *Volksblat* and the pro-**Aryan** monthly journal *Ostaria*, which carried the **swastika** logo.

Hitler's time in Vienna also taught him to despise democracy. He hated the 'mediocrity and compromise' that he witnessed from the public gallery of the Reichsrat (the Austrian parliament). He rejected the views of the Austrian social democrats, a socialist party devoted to the interests of the working man, but he approved of their methods. He learnt from the way they swayed the crowds through powerful speeches and threats.

Hitler also learnt from Austria's Pan-German Nationalist Party founded by Georg Ritter von Schönerer. Schönerer used the title Führer, held impressive rallies and adopted the 'Heil' greeting. This party wanted the 'racially superior' German-speaking lands of the Austro–Hungarian Empire to be reunited with the German Reich. Another major influence was Vienna's racist mayor, Karl Lueger, infamous for calling Budapest 'Judapest'. Hitler's 'ideal' party, bringing together elements that were both 'national' and 'socialist', seems to have been born in his mind through the fusion of these two Austrian parties.

The development of Nazi ideology in the aftermath of war

The First World War ended disastrously for Germany in 1918. This provoked a bitter reaction in Hitler, who had served for four years as a soldier on the Western Front. He believed the armistice to be 'the greatest villainy of the century' – a view typical of many who accepted the myth that the German army had been 'stabbed in the back' by politicians.

The creation of the Nazi Party was part of this nationalist reaction, although the 25-point programme of 1920 included a number of other fundamental principles such as racialism, anti-Semitism, anti-democratic sentiment and the need to work together for the greater good of the community.

Hitler's ideas were brought together in *Mein Kampf*, which was written during his prison sentence in Landsberg Fortress after the failure of the 1923 Munich Putsch. The main messages of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* were:

- Germany had to fight international Marxism (communism) in order to regain her world power status.
- Marxism/communism was the invention of Jews intent on Jewish world domination.

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Fact

Hitler's nationalist beliefs were first roused by his history teacher, Leopold Poetsch, a strong-minded nationalist who entertained his class with stories of Germany's past greatness. As a German-speaking Austrian, Hitler had no doubt that he was part of this great Germanic race and his conviction of German superiority sustained him during his years of drifting in Vienna. Whatever his own condition, Hitler was convinced that he was better than any of the cosmopolitan 'rabble' he was forced to associate with – particularly the Jews.
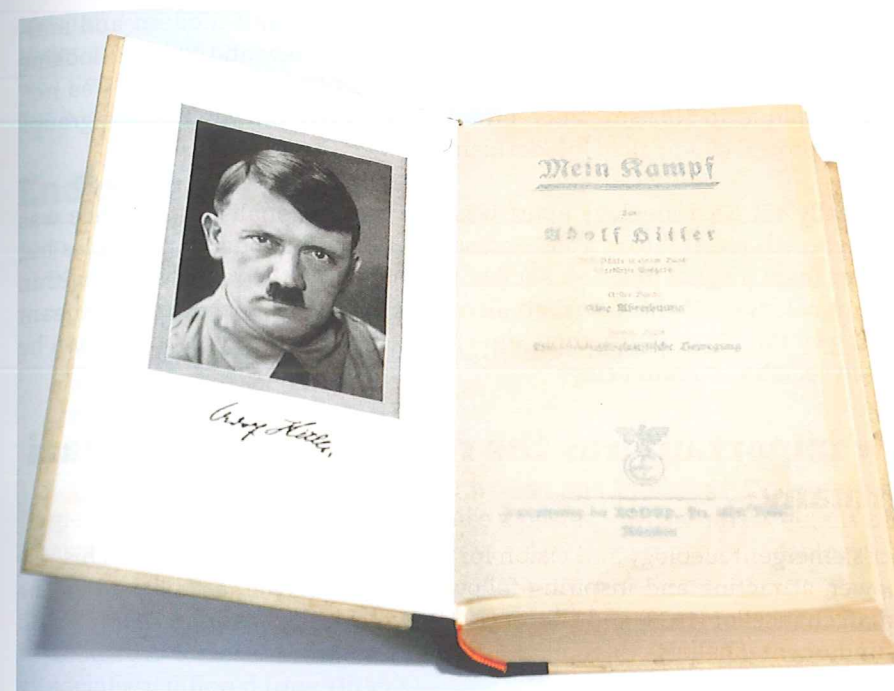
A first-edition copy of Hitler's Mein Kampf (My Struggle), *featuring the Führer on the frontispiece*

- National Socialism was the only doctrine capable of fighting communism. Liberal 'bourgeois' or 'middle-class' democracy was the first stage to socialism and communism.
- Nazism had to prepare the population for war in order to obtain *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east. To achieve this there had to be racial unity, the elimination of Jews, authoritarian control and no tolerance of diversity or dissent.

The ideological principles of the Nazi Party in its early years were broader than those that subsequently dominated. In the early years, the party embraced socialism, with demands for the abolition of unearned income, the nationalisation of businesses and the closure of big department stores in favour of the small trader.

However, these socialist elements did not last long. Once the Nazis decided to contest Reichstag elections from May 1924, Hitler gradually came to realise that it was only by associating with big business and the middle classes that he could hope to win.

By the later 1920s, the nationalist aspects of Nazism were emphasised at the expense of the socialist. The nationalism that formed the core of Nazi ideology had a strong anti-communist element. This came in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the spread of communism in the politically and economically unstable post-war Germany (see page 65).

Anti-communism was also linked to Hitler's racial theories, as he identified prominent communists with Jews. Hitler's other drive – the need to prepare the Germans for war in order to obtain *Lebensraum* (living space) in the lands of the Slavs in the communist USSR – was also a reason for his anti-communism.

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Fact

Nationalised industries were run directly by the state. However, in order to retain support, the Nazis proposed that shareholders and owners of enterprises should be given compensation in return for their co-operation in this process.

Questions

What is the difference between nationalism and Nazism? Was there anything new or unique about Hitler's ideology?

Nazism also became an increasingly anti-democratic, anti-modern and anti-feminist movement. The Nazis regarded all that was new and forward-looking in the Weimar Republic as degenerate and weakening. This attitude was not, however, unique to Nazism, since other conservative and nationalist groups also disapproved of so-called 'modernism'.

What really set Nazi ideology apart was the way nationalist intolerance was combined with racial intolerance. Nazism embraced nationalist principles but added to them a belief in a new society to which only the racially pure within the state belonged. If the 'socialist' element of National Socialism still meant anything by the 1930s, it was this. Hitler himself put it clearly enough when he said 'We socialise human beings.'

How important was the role of ideology in Nazi Germany?

Hitler's emergent ideology and vision for the future played a key role in his rise to power, attracting and inspiring followers. Once he was established as the German chancellor (1933) and Führer (1934), he devised policies in keeping with his fundamental beliefs.

Through *Gleichschaltung* (see page 72) he co-ordinated all aspects of the state to serve his ends, and the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* was spread through youth, community and workers' organisations such as Beauty of Labour and Strength through Joy.

The belief in the importance of competition and the survival of the fittest was seen in the way policies were carried out. Intolerance permeated the regime in its political consolidation and social policies. Nationalism underpinned Hitler's defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, while racialism led to actions against minority groups and virulent anti-Semitism, through a series of anti-Jewish actions and legislation.

However, while policies were shaped in the light of ideology, it was often the case that practical politics prevented ideological principles being carried out immediately, or in their entirety. The growth of Hitler's anti-Semitic policies, for example, displayed no coherent pattern. Persecution remained fairly low-key until 1935, and there was no Holocaust until the years of war. Even then, it did not come immediately. Similarly, it took six years before Hitler led his country to war. When he did so, women, who had been forced out of the workplace in 1933–34, were again encouraged back into factories.

Furthermore, the name of the party itself (NSDAP – National Socialist German Workers' Party) had become meaningless by the 1930s. Although the Nazi regime pursued a persistent 'nationalism', there was, by that stage, no longer any 'socialism' for the benefit of the working class driving their programme. Similarly, although Nazis continued to use the slogan *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) to emphasise the pure racial qualities of the German agricultural worker (see page 108), it had become mere propaganda. The latter received scant consideration and once Hitler was entrenched in power, the Nazis provided little state aid. There was no national revolution in Germany, as had been promised in the early 1920s. Instead, Nazism denied the existence of class differences and channelled people's energy into national expansion.

Ideology was crucial to the success of Hitler as a single-party leader. However, Hitler controlled how ideology was used to further his own political ends. He was not driven simply by the desire to put ideological principles into practice, but had his own agenda and moulded Nazi ideology to fit it.

End of unit activities

1 Draw up a chart with the main characteristics of Nazi ideology on the left-hand side and, when you have studied Units 3 and 4, add the policies that appear to carry out those beliefs on the right.

2 Discuss the following questions. Did Hitler's ideology offer:
   a a new form of society
   b a new social structure
   c new values?

3 Carry out further research into the writers and thinkers from whom Hitler gleaned his views. You might produce a poster with summary details of the authors whose ideas came together in a new form in Hitler's ideology.

4 There were some radicals within the Nazi Party who placed a greater emphasis on the 'socialist' side of National Socialism than Hitler. Find out about the Strasser brothers and make a chart to show how their view of socialism differed from Hitler's.

5 Choose a section of *Mein Kampf* that reveals an important aspect of Hitler's ideology. Explain your chosen extract to the rest of your group.

Theory of knowledge

Ideology and historical motivation
- Is ideology essential for political success?
- Does a firm ideology always bring intolerance?
- What is the main quality that defines an ideology? Should it be revolutionary? Should it be inspirational? (Can you suggest another quality?)
- What ethical issues arise from Hitler's racialist theories? Are we likely to judge such ethical considerations differently today from those living at the time?