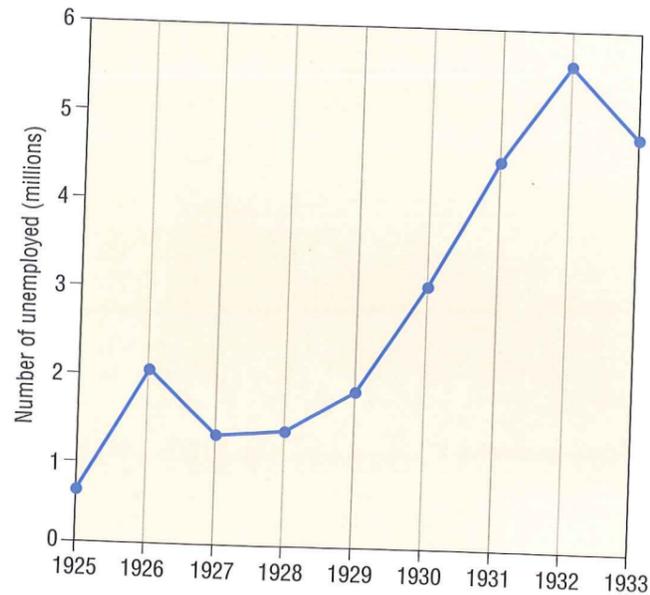
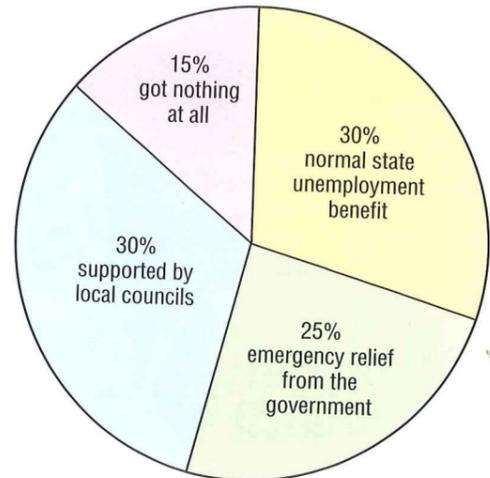


How did the Depression help the Nazis?

IN OCTOBER 1929 the WALL STREET CRASH was the beginning of a worldwide slide into the Great Depression. The effects were felt everywhere but Germany was hit particularly badly because American banks recalled the loans which were the lifeblood of German industry. Businesses had to close. As world trade declined, German exports slumped. Millions of people lost their jobs.



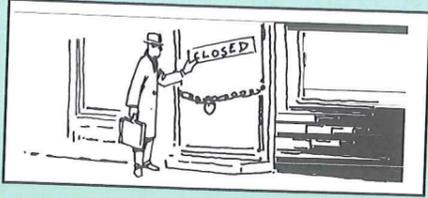
SOURCE 1 Unemployment in Germany 1925-33



SOURCE 2 How the unemployed were supported in 1932. Those on emergency relief from the government received a payment lower than normal unemployment benefit, while the support from local councils was a lower payment still

What was life like in the Depression?

The Depression affected different people in different ways. For those who had lost their jobs there was poverty, hunger and homelessness. Of course not all Germans suffered equally, but even those who were protected from the worst of the Depression felt its impact in other ways.



Businessmen
Businessmen saw their businesses close. If they did manage to survive they saw their income fall – because in the Depression people had less money to spend, even on essentials like food and clothes. To make matters worse the government actually raised taxes to pay for looking after the increasing number of poor people. However, business owners were not hit as badly as either their workers, or farmers.

Young people
In 1933 over half of all Germans between the ages of 16 and 30 were unemployed. Sixty per cent of new university graduates could not get a job.

Farmers
Farmers had not done well in the 1920s. Prices had been falling since 1925. In the 1930s farmers slipped further into debt.

Factory workers
40% of all factory workers were unemployed by 1932. At the same time the government cut unemployment benefit to save money. For the unemployed this was a time of extreme poverty.

WHO SUFFERED?



SOURCE 3 Who suffered in the Depression?

SOURCE 4 The writer Heinrich Hauser describes what he saw as he toured Germany in 1932

“ An almost unbroken chain of homeless men extends the whole length of the great Hamburg-Berlin highway. It is the same scene for the entire two hundred miles, and all the highways in Germany over which I travelled this year.

They walked separately or in small groups with their eyes on the ground. And they had the queer, stumbling gait of barefoot people, for their shoes were slung over their shoulders. Some of them were guild members – carpenters with broad felt hats, milkmen with striped red shirts, and bricklayers with tall black hats – but they were in a minority. Far more numerous were those to whom one could assign no special profession or craft – unskilled young people for the most part who had been unable to find a place for themselves in any city or town in Germany, and who had never had a job and never expected to have one.

There was something else that had never been seen before – whole families who had piled all their goods into baby carriages and wheelbarrows that they were pushing along as they plodded forward in dumb despair. It was a whole nation on the march.

I saw them – and this was the strongest impression that the year 1932 left with me – I saw them, gathered into groups of fifty or a hundred men, attacking fields of potatoes. I saw them digging up the potatoes and throwing them into sacks while the farmer who owned the field watched them in despair and the local policeman looked on gloomily from the distance. I saw them staggering towards the lights of the city as night fell, with their sacks on their backs. What did it remind me of? Of the war, of the worst period of starvation in 1917 and 1918, but even then people paid for the potatoes. ”

1. Why do you think the homeless men in Source 4 carried their shoes rather than wore them?
2. What would be the best way for the government to help the people in Source 4?



SOURCE 5 A camp for the homeless in a Berlin park. There were so many homeless that large camps of tents were set up. The tents were numbered and erected in neat rows which even had names as if they were streets. The camps had children's playgrounds and communal kitchens



SOURCE 6 A soup kitchen providing food for unemployed Germans. The government kept food prices high to protect the farmers from the worst of the Depression. The result was that many unemployed people could not afford to eat

SOURCE 7 Heinrich Hauser (see Source 4) describes the Berlin municipal lodging house where many young unemployed men had to stay

“ Long lines of men were leaning against the wooden walls, waiting in silence and staring. Heavy steam rose from the men’s clothes. Some of them sat down on the floor, pulled off their shoes, and unwound the rags that bound their feet. More people were constantly pouring in the door, and we stood closely packed together. The municipal lodging house means waiting, waiting, standing around. We arrange ourselves in long lines, each leading up to an official. The man wants to know: When and where were you born, and where have you come from? Name of your parents? Ever been in a municipal lodging house before? Where have you spent the last three nights? Where did you work last? Have you begged? My impression is the helplessness of the men. Eight out of every ten men are young fellows and about a third of these are mere boys.

I have been given a night’s sleep and food in the lodging house. The bare walls of the room that we have entered are lined with iron bedsteads. There are no windows but a sloping roof with skylights that reminds me of a factory. They do not make it easy for you to get supper and a bed in a municipal lodging house. ”

SOURCE 8 A woman textile worker describes her weekend in 1930. She worked six days a week, for a very low wage

“ I would be happy if I could properly provide for my household and children, but of the 25 marks a week one and a half marks goes for transport, six marks for childcare and what it otherwise costs to be out of the house all day.

Saturdays and every night are spent washing. If I’m finished with the housework on Saturdays around 9.30, I’m usually too tired to give the child a bath so I have to start up again Sunday morning. Then there are things to mend, and everything else that didn’t get done during the week. Those are the famous weekend joys of a working woman. I often wonder what I live for, and why everything is so unequal. ”



SOURCE 9 Farmers ploughing by hand in East Prussia, 1933 – probably because they could not afford a horse



SOURCE 10 A shop forced to close because of the Depression and sell all its goods ‘for any reasonable price’, 1931

3. Why do you think the woman in Source 8 did the work she did if she was so dissatisfied with it?
4. Who would you rather have been of all the people in Sources 3–10? Explain your choice.

ACTIVITY

Imagine two of the people in Sources 3–10 meet each other. Either role-play or write out a conversation between them in which they talk about what life is like in the Depression.

How did the Depression weaken the Weimar government?

1. Unpopular economic policies

For half a century or more Germans had judged their country by its economic success. So if the economy was failing then the country must be going down the drain! The Weimar government seemed to have no idea what to do about the problems of rising unemployment and growing poverty.

The government did of course try to get Germany out of depression, but with little success. To be fair, no other country affected by the Depression did much better, but the Weimar government faced particular problems. For example, one way out of depression is to print money and increase government expenditure – but all Weimar leaders were aware that these were the policies which had led to disastrous inflation in 1923. What if the same happened again? The government was more scared of what would happen if there was another period of inflation than it was of unemployment. So instead the Chancellor raised taxes, cut wages and reduced unemployment benefit – hardly the policies to win support from the German people.

2. Presidential rule

These policies also caused the collapse of the government because the Social Democrats withdrew from the coalition. In order for his government to survive the Chancellor fell back on Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution (see page 21) which gave the President special powers in an emergency. Germany was now ruled by presidential decree. But who was the President? An 84-year-old war hero, apparently controlled by business and army leaders, and who seemed to be well past his prime.

3. The rise of extremism

To many Germans it seemed that the Weimar government was making a hopeless mess of handling the situation. Some people who had never bothered to vote in elections before – because they were not interested in politics – now became more involved. Politics did matter. Something had to be done!

From right and left they could hear the claims of extremist parties who said they could solve all these problems. The Communists said that the Depression showed that the capitalist system was doomed and that only communism had the answer. The Nazis blamed the Weimar Republic, the Treaty of Versailles, the Marxists and the Jews and promised to get rid of ‘the enemy within’ who was destroying Germany.

As extremism increased, so too did political violence. Nazi and Communist supporters fought regular battles. Five hundred were killed or seriously wounded in a seven-week frenzy of political fighting during the elections of 1932. Town halls were bombed by farmers.



SOURCE 11 Police in Berlin, 1932, on the way to deal with a demonstration

How did these problems help the Nazis?

The Depression was a gift to Hitler and the Nazis. For every problem the Nazis had an explanation or a promise:

- The Weimar government is weak: you need strong leadership. Hitler is your man.
- Unemployment? The Nazis will get people back to work on road-building and public works.
- Worried about the Communists? Look at the Nazis' SA – we are the only ones who really know how to deal with the Communists.

Most importantly, Hitler, standing before a crowd delivering his powerful and moving speeches, seemed to represent strong, decisive leadership in the great German tradition going back to the Kaiser and beyond. While the Weimar Republic appeared simply to be muddling through indecisively, Hitler's strong personality and powerful ideas seemed to be just what Germany needed.

As you can see from Source 12, in the Reichstag elections in 1930 the Nazis made their first great breakthrough, jumping from twelve to 107 seats. They were suddenly the second largest party and were well ahead of the Communists. In the July 1932 elections they advanced to 230 seats and were the biggest party. The Nazi Party was now *the* major force in German politics.

SOURCE 13

Hitler addressing an open-air meeting during the 1932 presidential election campaign



Summary: how did the Nazis do it?

The impact of the Depression can only partly explain the success of the Nazis. All parties claimed they had solutions. Why was it the Nazis and not the other parties who managed to convince Germans they could solve the country's problems?

	Left wing			Right wing			Unemployment	
	Communist Party	Social Democrats	Democratic Party	Centre Party	Conservatives	Nationalists	Nazis	Unemployment figures
1928	54	153	25	61	45	73	12 (2.6%)	1,391,000
1930	77	143	20	68	30	41	107 (18.3%)	3,076,000
Jul 1932	89	133	4	75	7	37	230 (37.3%)	5,603,000
Nov 1932	100	121	2	70	11	52	196 (33.1%)	
1933	81	120	5	74	2	52	288 (43.9%)	4,804,000

SOURCE 12 Reichstag election results, 1928–33, and unemployment figures 1925–33

Organisation

They were very well organised. Many Nazis had been soldiers in the First World War. They brought to party work the same obedience, organisation and teamwork skills which they had needed in the trenches. The local workers were well trained and motivated. They had skilled leaders at almost every level.

Propaganda

Their national leaders were masters of propaganda, and they carefully trained their local groups in propaganda skills. They used every trick in the book to get their message home. They knew that their anti-Communist stance was very popular and their propaganda further whipped up fear and hatred of the Communists. They stirred up violence at election meetings so that the SA could crush it and be seen 'dealing with the Communist threat'. Hitler pointed to the Nazis' ten-year track record in leading the fight against Communism.

Support of the industrialists

One of their aims – which was partly successful – was to earn the support of the powerful industrialists. Traditionally they had voted for the Conservative Party, which lost much of its support after 1930. In 1931 Hitler made a deal with the other main right-wing party, the Nationalists, by which the two parties agreed to co-operate. The Nazi Party also received some financial backing from big business.

Use of technology

The Nazis could now redouble their propaganda. Radio was used for the first time. In the 1932 presidential election, while Hindenburg gave just one election speech, Goebbels chartered planes to fly Hitler all over Germany in order to speak to four or five massive rallies per day. Radio broadcasts, millions of election posters, rallies, parades and marches carried the Nazi message into every town and home in Germany.

Promises to voters

And every sector of German society seemed to hear something it wanted to hear.

Workers were promised jobs (Hitler could point to how the Nazis' SA had taken in the unemployed and fed and housed them). Employers were promised restored profits; farmers higher prices; shopkeepers protection against competition. There was something for everybody.

Flexibility

In fact, one reason for the Nazis' success was that they were flexible. If they found an idea was losing them support they would change it. In one election speech a leading Nazi spoke powerfully for the nationalisation of industry (which had always been one of the Nazis' beliefs). When they found out how alarmed the industrialists were they quickly dropped the idea. In their campaigns it was never mentioned again. In their all-out push for electoral success they realised that it doesn't really matter what you promise as long as people trust you. If all else failed the Nazis simply went for vague promises: they would 'make Germany great again'. In the end, despite the extreme beliefs expressed in the Nazis' 25 Points – of which they made no secret (see page 34) – Germans were actually very unsure as to what the Nazis really stood for.

Hitler the superman

Only one thing really stayed consistent throughout this barrage of electioneering: the unblinking focus on Hitler, the strong leader whom Germany needed and wanted. Posters and rallies built him up into a superman. His physical appearance was adapted (on posters at least). Hitler himself developed his speech-making skills still further. He wore spectacles to read but refused to be seen wearing them in public and so his speeches were typed in large – 12mm high – print. It no longer seemed to matter *what* he said, just *how* he said it. Hitler was the Nazis' trump card. The campaigns focused around his personality and his skills. The opposition had no one to match him.

Weaknesses of opposition

Other parties were very weak and they consistently underestimated the Nazis. The Social Democrats feared they would attempt a putsch, but they thought that the Nazis' electioneering was so absurd that ordinary Germans would see through it. And their own support was constant so they were not eager to change. They quarrelled among themselves rather than uniting to face the Nazis' challenge.

TASK

1. The text describes many factors which helped the Nazis. Explain *how* each one helped them.
2. Which of these factors were also present in the 1920s?
3. Why were the Nazis less successful in the 1920s?