

How effective were Nazi policies?

ACTIVITY

- The overall effectiveness of Nazi policies was mixed and, as we have seen in other areas, the situation became more problematic when the war was underway. Study Sources 15.18–24 and list evidence that suggests that
 - Nazi policies were successful and that men and women accepted Nazi views of the role of women
 - Nazi policies were not so successful.
- Choose three different types of source and evaluate each one as evidence of the success of Nazi policy.

**Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1902–): the ideal Nazi woman**

Scholtz-Klink initially worked for the Berlin Red Cross. Her SA husband died of a heart attack during a demonstration and this inspired her to carry on his work. In 1929 she became the leader of the NSF in Baden and later deputy leader of the Nazi organisation nationwide. In 1934 she was promoted to Reichsfrauenführerin (women's leader) of all Nazi women's organisations (Frauenwerk, Woman's League of the Red Cross, Women's Bureau of DAF, Women's Labour Service). Her leadership was, however, in fact token; although she fronted the organisations, she was subordinate to the top male Nazis.

She was a great supporter of Nazi views on women's role, exhorting women to be enthusiastic breeding machines and beasts of burden for the greater glory of the Reich. She was a good speaker, and was sent abroad to win admiration for the new Germany. Unlike many Nazi leaders, she did actually conform to Nazi ideals: she was blonde, healthy and had four children.

In 1945 she hid from the Allies but was eventually arrested in 1948. She was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for being a 'major offender' as a diehard Nazi, but was acquitted of war crimes. She remained a strong supporter of the Nazi regime whose good she believed outweighed the bad.

SOURCE 15.18 Advertisement in a German newspaper

52-year-old doctor. Fought in World War One. Wishes to settle down. Wants male child through marriage to young, healthy Aryan woman. She should be undemanding, used to heavy work, not a spender, with flat heels, without earrings.

SOURCE 15.19 Advertisement in a German newspaper, 1939

Two vital, lusty, race-conscious Brunnhildes with family trees certified back to 1700 desiring to serve their Fatherland in the form most ennobling to women, would like to meet two similarly inclined Siegfrieds. Marriage not of essential importance. Soldiers on leave also acceptable.

SOURCE 15.20 Letter to Hitler from several women published in a Leipzig newspaper in 1934

Today, man is being educated not for, but against marriage. Men are grouped together in clubs and hostels... Woman stays back further and further in the shadow of loneliness... we see our daughters growing up in stupid aimlessness living only in the vague hope of perhaps getting a man and having children... A son, even the youngest, today laughs in his mother's face. He regards her as his natural servant, and women in general as merely willing tools of his aims.

SOURCE 15.21 Letter of thanks from a woman in a recuperation centre

I would like to thank the Führer heartily with the assurance that I am aware as a German woman and mother of my responsibility to look after my children... and to educate them into being fit, useful people.

[Note by husband] She has put on 14lb, and the strength she was lacking before her trip has considerably come back again... March forward, NSF, flourish, prosper and the nation will be healthy.

SOURCE 15.22 American journalist, 1937

How many women workers did the Führer send home? According to the statistics of the German Department of Labour, there were, in June 1936, 5,470,000 employed women, or 1,200,000 more than in January 1933... The vigorous campaign against the employment of women has not led to their increased domesticity and security, but has been effective in squeezing them out of better paid positions into sweated trades. Needless to say, this type of labour, with its miserable wages and long hours, is extremely dangerous to the health of women and degrades the family.

SOURCE 15.23 A joke told at the time

The father is in the Party; the mother in Frauenschaft [NSF]; the son in the Hitler Youth; the daughter in the BDM. So where does the ideal National Socialist family meet then? At the Reich Party Day in Nuremberg!

SOURCE 15.24 V. Ziemer, *Education for Death*, 1941. An American teacher describes a visit to a Berlin clinic

Hospital beds came and went with methodical precision. The doctors made quick, deft incisions in white abdomen walls.

'What are they doing?' I asked.

'These doctors', he said, 'are sterilising women.'

I asked what type of women... and was informed they were the mentally sick, women with low resistance, women who had proved through other births that their offspring were not strong...

'We are even eradicating colour-blindness,' my SS guide told me. 'We must not have soldiers who are colour-blind. It is transmitted only by women.'

TALKING POINT

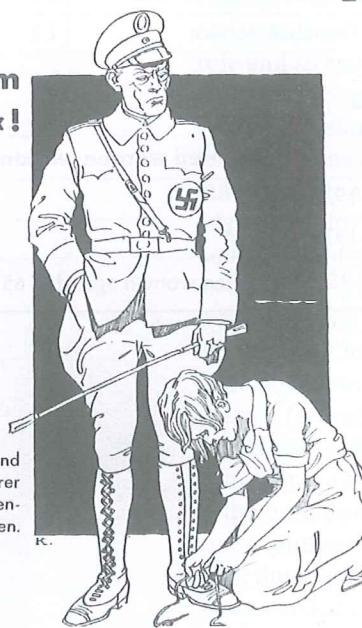
In the 1930s France was one of many countries that banned contraception and abortion, and gave rewards for large families. Some states in America and some Scandinavian countries compulsorily sterilised mentally ill people. Does this affect your view of Nazi policies?

SOURCE 15.25 A Social Democrat poster published in December 1930. It says, 'Women, this is what it will be like in the "Third Reich"! Your reply should be: Fight the Nazi for Social Democracy!'

SOURCE 15.26 A female farm worker ploughing during the war

FRAUEN,

so geht's euch im
»Dritten Reich«!



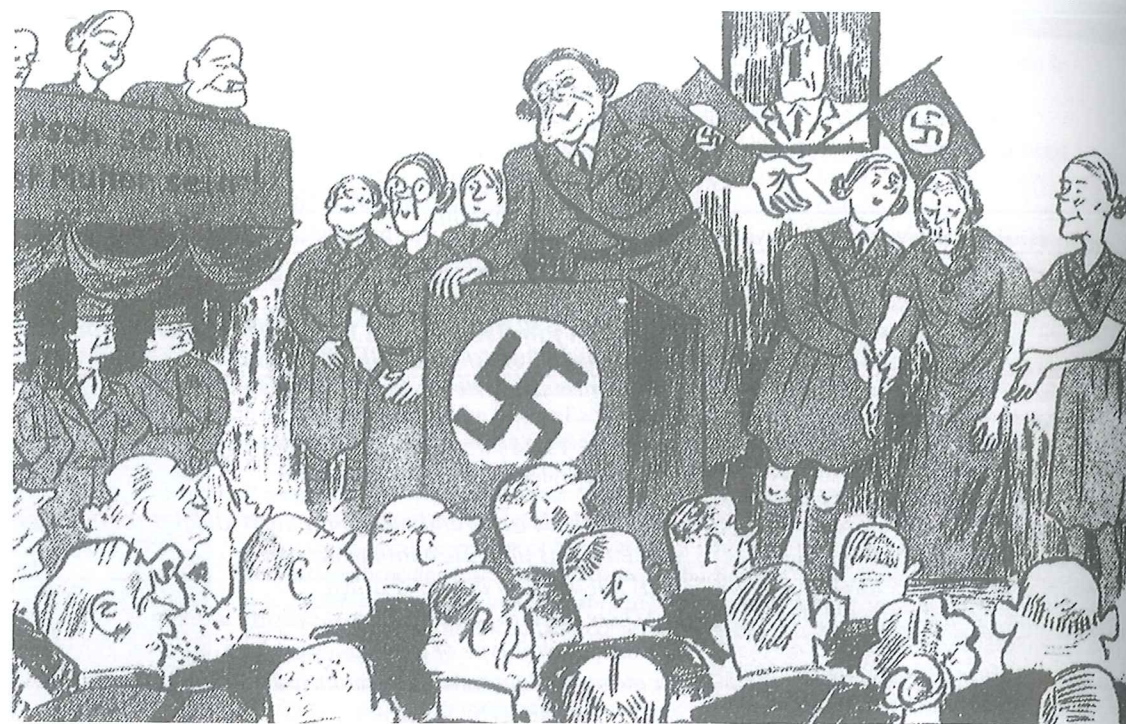
»Die Frau muß wieder Magd und Dienerin werden« sagt der Naziführer Feder. Deshalb ist auch in der Hakenkreuzfraktion keine Frau vertreten.

Eure Antwort:

**Kampf den Nazi --
für die Sozialdemokratie!**



SOURCE 15.27 'Introducing Frau Mueller who up to now has brought twelve children into the world.' A German cartoon from the 1930s



SOURCE 15.28 Marriages, divorces, births and deaths

Year	Marriages	Live births
1929	589,600	—
1931	—	1,047,775
1932	516,793	993,126
1933	638,573	971,174
1934	740,165	1,198,350
1935	651,435	1,263,976
1936	609,631	1,277,052
1937	620,265	1,277,046
1938	645,062	1,348,534
1939	772,106	1,407,490

Note: 1938–9 figures include extended territory

B Divorce statistics after the 1938 Marriage Law

Reasons for divorce	1938–41
Matrimonial offences, including adultery	197,000
Irretrievable breakdown	31,000
Refusal to procreate	1,771
Premature infertility	383

C Average number of children

1933	3.6
1939	3.3

D Mean marriage rate 1933–9

20 per cent lower than 1923–32

SOURCE 15.29 Women's employment (in millions)

Job	1933	1939
Agriculture and forestry	4.6	4.9
Industry and crafts	2.7	3.3
Trade and transport	1.9	2.1
Non-domestic services	0.9	1.1
Domestic service	1.2	1.3

B

	Married women working outside the home
1933	4.2
1939	6.2*

* 35% of married women aged 16–65

SOURCE 15.30 'Join the youth groups': a recruitment poster for Nazi organisations. Membership of DFW and NSF in 1941 was 6 million out of 30 million female adults, i.e. 1 in 5 women



The Nazis' policies towards women suffered from several contradictions, for example over their attitude to marriage and the family. The main burden of their propaganda was to encourage the healthy Aryan family, as a small unit of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, several of their policies undermined the family. The demands of the Hitler Youth took youngsters away from the family and encouraged them to challenge any non-Nazi attitudes of their parents. The quest for a genetically pure race led to the encouragement of divorce and sterilisation for those 'unworthy' of marriage: an approach that aroused the anger of the Catholic Church, as did later the policy of 'euthanasia'.

During the Second World War the quest for a larger population of genetically pure Germans led to encouragement of procreation outside marriage, as in the *Lebensborn* (Life Springs) programme. In what were, in effect, state-run brothels, 'Aryan' women had babies by SS men. The programme was set up in 1935 and by 1944 nearly 11,000 children had been born in these special homes.

The Nazis' attempts to drive women back into the home were even less successful. The number of women in all types of jobs increased, mainly due to the economic recovery. By 1936 the economy was suffering from a labour shortage in key areas, and by 1939 this had become acute. Here ideology conflicted with economic need. Increasing numbers of women were attracted back into work, but the government did not encourage this. When war broke out, several Nazis advised Hitler to introduce female conscription, but he rejected this, partly on ideological grounds, but probably mainly because he was concerned at the effect on soldiers' morale of drafting their wives into factories. Not until 1943 were women aged 17–45 compelled to register for state-allocated work. The 'totalitarian' Nazi state was thus far less effective in utilising its resources than the liberal regimes in Britain and the USA.

The extent to which women absorbed Nazi propaganda is hard to judge. Mason has argued that the regime was more popular overall with women than with men, and that most women preferred to stay at home than work in factories. This was one factor increasing Hitler's reluctance to impose conscription. Middle-class women, who suffered greater restrictions on their careers, were probably less enthusiastic about Nazi policies.

One must also remember to study the regime in context. Many of the Nazis' ideas were just more extreme or explicit versions of views that were widespread well before the Nazis gained power. Thus the Catholic Church and conservative organisations advocated the separate spheres view of women's role and stressed the importance of procreation.

There is considerable debate amongst the growing number of historians of women's history about the impact of Nazism on women. Initial stress by radical feminist historians on the evil impact of Nazi policies has been challenged by other historians arguing that, even if for questionable reasons, there were advantages for women in Nazi Germany. They argue that the benefits of a policy should not be cancelled out by its unattractive aims. In some areas, such as women's organisations and youth groups, the Nazis widened experiences for women. Social services improved. Opportunities to avoid the drudgeries of paid employment had advantages. Furthermore, several historians now stress the ineffectiveness of many Nazi restrictions. This is not to deny that for many women (though proportionately a small number) as well as men their experience of the regime was horrific.

In many ways this account of Nazi policies towards women illustrates some of the limitations on the totalitarian nature of the regime. The Nazis adopted a fairly cautious approach; thus only a few women were actually forced out of jobs; the regime relied more on financial and moral pressure. When in 1939 the Nazis needed female labour contrary to their previous policies, they proceeded very cautiously, partly because they were afraid of the reaction from women and men.

ACTIVITY

Read the historians' assessments in Sources 15.31–4, then answer these questions.

- 1 What contradictions in Nazi policies towards women do De Grand and Frevert identify?
- 2 Which historian stresses the success of Nazi policies most?
- 3 What explanations do Mason and Frevert give for the successes of Nazi policies?
- 4 Why does Pine see Nazi policy towards the family as evidence of the regime's totalitarian nature?
- 5 What conclusions can be drawn from these extracts as to the impact of Nazi policies on women?

SOURCE 15.33 Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy*, 1997, p. 181

The Nazi regime utilised the family for its own ends. Marriage and childbirth became racial obligations rather than personal decisions, as the National Socialists systematically reduced the functions of the family to the single task of reproduction. They aimed to shatter the most intimate human group, the family, and to place it as a breeding and rearing institution completely in the service of the totalitarian state.

TALKING POINT

Is women's history best written by women?

C Review: How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?

We conclude by studying some of the views of historians who have analysed the position of women in Nazi Germany.

SOURCE 15.31 Alexander De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, 1995, pp. 57, 63

The fascist position had always been that class distinctions were artificial and superficial but that biologically determined gender roles were immutable [unchangeable] . . .

The conservative and stabilising elements of Nazi ideology – to keep women in their place and maintain them as a pillar of the traditional, hierarchical society – could not be reconciled with the political, social and racial ambitions of the regime.

SOURCE 15.32 Tim Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925–1940', in *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*, 1995, p. 132

In respect of its attitudes and policies towards women, National Socialism was the most repressive and reactionary of all modern political movements. And yet it seems that the overtly [undisguised] anti-feminist policies of the regime after 1933 were at least partially successful, in that they secured the approval, perhaps gratitude, of many German people, men and women alike; partially successful too in blocking and turning back the social, economic and educational pressures which had been conducive [led] to gradual progress towards emancipation in the preceding decades. At the very least, there is scarcely any evidence that the policies adopted on the family and on women's work were unpopular, despite the fact that they ran directly counter to basic liberal, democratic and socialist principles, principles which seemed to have been widely accepted during the 1920s.

SOURCE 15.34 Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, 1988, pp. 248, 250

Even if most of the twelve million women in the numerous Nazi organisations of 1939 were not themselves ardent National Socialists, twelve years of being educated and bombarded with propaganda by the Volksgemeinschaft cannot have left individual consciousness and collective memory unmarked. In addition the impact of welfare measures . . . reinforced popular loyalty . . .

National Socialism . . . was . . . a highly ambiguous period in history which witnessed a unique confluence of 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' tendencies. In a few areas, such as voting rights, access to the upper echelons [levels] of the civil service, and family planning, the fruits of hard fought battles were destroyed; in many areas (most notably with respect to the labour market), the Nazi state represented but a smooth continuation of existing structures and processes, together with all their unfavourable aspects (lower wages and less upward social mobility). By contrast, where youth policy, divorce laws and social organisations were concerned, the Third Reich offered women novel opportunities for participation and recognition in public life, and, indeed, many women benefited in an unprecedented fashion from such socio-political innovation . . .

The actual outcome of policy was sometimes different, and often diametrically opposed, to its intended effects . . .

The immense ability of the regime to mobilise the population, and the relative rarity of deliberate acts of political resistance, however, suggest that women who satisfied the political, racial and social requirements – and the vast majority did – did not perceive the Third Reich as a women's hell. Much of what it introduced was doubtless appealing, the rest one learned to accept.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Identify the contradictions between Nazi ideology and some of the developments that the government actually assisted, by linking each belief (a–d) with one or more developments (i–vii).

Ideology

- a) Women as producers of babies
- b) Women to stay at home
- c) Support the family
- d) Support traditional, rural society

Conflicting developments

- i) Encouragement of birth outside marriage
 - ii) Development of industrial/military might
 - iii) Compulsory sterilisation for the hereditarily 'ill'
 - iv) Fostering youth assertion in Hitler Youth
 - v) Growth in female employment
 - vi) New organisations for women
 - vii) Encouragement of divorce
- 2 The historian G. Layton has argued (in *Germany: the Third Reich*, 1992, p. 105): 'Nazi policy towards women and the family was contradictory and incoherent, and did little to affect the ongoing sociological trends of an industrialised society.' Do you agree?
 - 3 Hold a debate between two women in 1939, one supporting and one critical of the regime. Give yourself a specific identity, since this could well influence your view of the regime. Consider your class, your age, your religion, your pre-1933 voting behaviour, your home region, etc.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 15: How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?

- 1 Nazis believed women should concentrate on childbearing and supporting their husbands.
- 2 This distinct role for women was seen as important and of equal value to the role of men.
- 3 Many of the Nazis' reactionary ideas were widely held, and many women viewed their policies positively.
- 4 Nazi policies towards women were in some respects contradictory.
- 5 The Nazis stressed the role of the family, but increasingly they were prepared to encourage divorce and extra-marital sex to breed more genetically pure Germans.
- 6 The government provided marriage loans and increased welfare services for mothers.
- 7 The Nazis initially encouraged and forced women to give up some jobs, but this trend was reversed during the Second World War.
- 8 Women's opportunities in universities were initially restricted, but this policy too was later reversed.
- 9 The Nazis set up several women's organisations that involved women outside the family sphere.
- 10 Women's experience of the Third Reich was complex and varied, and was not simply a reflection of Nazi ideology.