

**The Complexities of Hitler's Election and the Schools of Thought Surrounding It**

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The early to mid twentieth century, namely the 1910s to the 1940s, is a time period defined by violence. With back to back world wars and rampant authoritarianism, being in Europe during this time period was most definitely a harrowing experience. No other regime quite demonstrates this violence and horror like Nazi Germany. The Nazi's rule over Germany is likely the most often discussed example of a fascist, authoritarian regime, as it had one of the highest death tolls in human history, especially considering the fact that it was relatively short, only lasting around 12 years.

The Nazi regime is defined mostly by its human rights violations, as it was filled with blood, hatred, violence and prejudice. Furthermore, Adolf Hitler was elected on behalf of the Nazi party as chancellor and was responsible for all of the horrible crimes committed under his rule. To reiterate, Hitler came to power through relatively legitimate means and had the support of a shockingly high number of people.

This is strange, as Hitler wasn't exactly shy about his intentions as he made his hatred of the different very well known and even wrote a whole book titled *Mein Kampf* many years before he would rise to power.<sup>1</sup> This book is essentially Hitler's manifesto on how Germany should be run and what groups of people should be crushed in its wake. This, most notably included Jews and to a lesser extent Slavs.<sup>2</sup> However history would demonstrate Hitler's distaste for other minorities not specifically brought up in *Mein Kampf* like members of the LGBT community, people of color and those with mental illness. Hitler's hatred and massacre of the Jews is easily his most known act of evil.

With Hitler's defining trait being hatred of anybody different, it often causes people to question how he was elected and why would anybody follow him? Going forward, this question

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925).

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925).

is what is answered as it is a very complicated and multifaceted issue with no easy, complete answers. There are many elements to answering this question, some social, some political and economic, but even these complicated topics are complicated even further by the state of Germany at the time.<sup>3</sup>

Answering the question of how Hitler was elected is something that has been tackled in a great variety of ways throughout the years, as it is one of the most studied events in modern history. There are several different schools of thought that aim to understand this event in history. For the purposes of this paper, there are mainly two that will be relevant going forward.

The first school of thought is known as the Sonderweg theory. Sonderweg translates to “special path” in English and is very aptly named as it presupposes the idea that German fascism is something that is inherently unique and was the culmination of all of the strange events going on in German politics up to the point of the rise of the Nazis.<sup>4</sup> Though the idea of the German special path actually predates the rise of the Nazis by a long time, it is utilized more in a way to explain how the Nazis even came to power and its generally unprecedented and convoluted nature.<sup>5</sup>

The other school of thought that is relevant to this argument is that of the European civil war theory. This thesis is an attempt to align many of Europe’s conflicts during the late 19th century and early 20th century as one long running, continent wide civil war of vastly differing ideologies.<sup>6</sup> This idea is relevant to answering the question of how Hitler was elected for two

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<sup>3</sup> William A Pelz, “Chapter Eleven: Against Fascist Terror: War and Genocide, 1933-1945,” in *A People’s History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), pp. 142-156.

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Kocka, “Looking Back on the Sonderweg,” *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): pp. 137-142.

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Kocka, “Looking Back on the Sonderweg,” *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): pp. 137-142.

<sup>6</sup> Enzo Traverso and David Fernbach, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945* (London: Verso, 2017): chap. 1, Kindle

reasons. The first reason is that Hitler's rise and the warpath that followed are almost viewed as a symptom of this continent wide civil war.<sup>7</sup> The second reason is that the European civil war discusses the rampant rise of governments with authoritarian and/or totalitarian elements throughout much of Europe at the time in places like Italy, Poland, Hungary, the U.S.S.R., Austria and, of course, Germany.<sup>8</sup>

This is relevant as it sets a precedent that Germany is in fact, not unique in its horrific governance and is actually merely one of many governments to fall to fascism during this time period. Unfortunately, the idea of the European civil war is something that is somewhat understudied, at least in comparison to other historical arguments. One of the reasons it should be studied more is that it portrays the rise of the Nazis as something that isn't unique, has happened before and can happen again. It is important to view this historic nightmare as something that is repeatable for the purposes of taking preventative political measures going forward. This idea contradicts the previously mentioned *sonderweg* theory, which drove much of the research of both the historiography and actual historic events for this study.

Reconciling these two types of study is nearly impossible as they contradict each other at their fundamental level. However, the European civil war idea seems to hold more weight than the *Sonderweg* in terms of answering how the Nazis came to power, as there are many parallels with other countries. These parallels are both seen in how these governments came into existence as well as the kinds of policies and actions these governments committed against their own people.

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<sup>7</sup>Enzo Traverso and David Fernbach, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945* (London: Verso, 2017): Chap. 3, Kindle

<sup>8</sup>Enzo Traverso and David Fernbach, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945* (London: Verso, 2017). Chap. 3, Kindle

Answering the question of Hitler's election is something that is rather complicated to study and thus, requires a structure for it to make sense, especially when attempting to come to a conclusion about which of two well studied theories of historical research has a stronger argument, especially considering how subjective historic interpretations can be from person to person.

The structure of this study mostly analyzes the specific historic events surrounding Hitler's rise to power as it is necessary to understand the general frame of mind the German people had when they chose to support Hitler. After all, people's opinions and biases were specifically influenced by world events at the time, most notably being the end of the first world war.

With that being said, the structure of this study itself has been divided into three chapters for the sake of cohesion and keeping individual topics from digressing. The first third discusses the socio economic factors of the rise of the Nazis. These include things like how the Treaty of Versailles led to hyperinflation. The middle third discusses the various political maneuvering done by the Nazis during the early 1930s that led to Hitler being elected. This chapter also discusses the various flaws with the German political system at the time that was exploited by the Nazis and the aristocracy. The final third of this study compares and contrasts Nazi Germany to other fascist and authoritarian governments that existed at the time in order to demonstrate why the idea of the European civil war should be studied more than it currently is.

This structure in particular was chosen simply due to the fact that many of these discussions tie directly into one another, while also seeming intrinsically different from one another. Furthermore, if this paper were to be told in chronological order as opposed to topical

order, it would be very difficult to actually make a point due to the constant cross-pollination of issues and events, making for a much more scattered and unfocused study.

As far as actually studying the rise of the Nazis, several unexpected pitfalls were presented. Firstly, this time period is so vast it is incredibly easy to digress. Secondly and more significantly, the sheer volume of scholarship around this topic is unbelievably massive, due to this time period almost being sensationalized, causing many more people to be interested in it than the otherwise might have.<sup>9</sup>

However, this sheer volume of sources does present its own set of positives as well as there are a wealth of sources that were incredibly useful in terms of studying this time period. Most sources used in this study were secondary sources, like books and scholarly journals. This approach was taken due to the fact that a significant portion of this study aims to study the historiography of Hitler's election, not just the specific events themselves. Furthermore, secondary sources are more easily accessible in this case, especially for someone who doesn't speak German. Lastly, this study seeks to answer a multi-decade long question and the benefit of hindsight is very real when it comes to forming a conclusion about a historical event as major as Hitler's rise.

Furthermore, secondary sources are more beneficial to the discussed structure of this study itself. The main reason for this is that the structure is based more on dividing the study into specific aspects or topics related to an event, as opposed to taking a chronological approach. This is benefited by secondary sources due to the fact that secondary sources are mainly trying to argue a point and revolve much more around a specific topic or idea as opposed to primary sources, which are generally just first hand accounts of historical events that seek to inform as

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Betts, "The New Fascination with Fascism: The Case of Nazi Modernism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 4 (October 2002): pp. 541-558.

opposed to seeking to discuss. This allows for a much more streamlined studying experience as it allows for the ability to tailor the sources around the topic being discussed as opposed to having to figure out the implications of what was being said in the primary source as well as how it relates to the topic being discussed.

As previously stated, discussing the rise of the Nazis and the fall of German democracy is studied and discussed in many different ways, with many different starting points. For the purposes of this paper, the best place to start is what set much of the collapse of Germany's economy into motion, that being the very end of World War I and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

## Chapter 1

World War I's end is something that is almost unanimously agreed to have an impact on the beginning of the Nazi's grabbing of power. This is due to the rather controversial way the allies chose to end the war. As many people know, the Treaty of Versailles was the treaty signed to end the war. However, this treaty would have ruinous effects on Germany's economy, government and population as it, seemingly arbitrarily, targeted Germany significantly more than any of the other early combatants in the war like Austria-Hungary or Serbia.

The Treaty of Versailles had many stipulations that essentially guaranteed that Germany would be on the receiving end of significant economic and social damage. Some of these stipulations involved enormous reparations to be paid, as well as forcing Germany to give up significant portions of land that they had been using for mining, which was a significant income stream for Germany. Furthermore, Germany was forced to significantly downsize its military from millions of soldiers to only 100,000, leaving many people without jobs.<sup>10</sup> Hitler was able to gain some of the public on his side much later due to his vehement hatred of the treaty and how it primarily blamed and punished Germany above other countries, calling many of the treaty's clauses "shameful" and acting in favor of disregarding the demands of the allies as opposed to appeasing them.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for Germany and its people, it wasn't just the Treaty of Versailles that completely destroyed the German economy and military. The great depression had hit the world hard and Germany was one of the countries that was hit the hardest by it.<sup>12</sup> Unemployment had

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<sup>10</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>11</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>12</sup> Dieter Petzina, "Germany and the Great Depression," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (October 1969): pp. 59-74.



skyrocketed and the German reichsmark, Germany's currency at the time, was essentially worthless.<sup>13</sup> German hyperinflation was already so rampant, due to the government printing more money in 1923, that obscenely large amounts of reichsmarks were required to purchase something as trivial as a loaf of bread but with the great depression hitting on top of that, essentially guaranteed that the German economy would be crippled. Due to all of these destructive economic factors and hyperinflation, it was clear to the German people some kind of change was necessary. Unfortunately the change that would come would bring untold horrors to the rest of the world.

These punishments in the Treaty of Versailles essentially destroyed Germany, both militarily and economically in a way that seemed arbitrarily aimed at Germany more so than the other members of their alliance. However, the treaty was likely aimed at Germany specifically to make it as weak as possible to avoid Germany being a threat in the future. Unfortunately, this destruction of the German economy would lead to the German population to grow bitter and resentful towards the rest of the world for their perceived prejudice. Of the various demographics of German people, this was most common in World War I veterans. According to historian George Lachmann Mosse, disgruntled war veterans embracing far right ideals were commonplace throughout the world and Germany is no different.<sup>14</sup> There are several examples of veterans of bloody wars feeling embittered and rageful after losing such a bloody conflict. Afterall, a significant portion of totalitarian governments came to power immediately after something horrible happened to the country and Germany is the most well-known example. This

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<sup>13</sup> Dieter Petzina, "Germany and the Great Depression," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (October 1969): pp. 59-74.

<sup>14</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

feeling of disillusionment seemed logical with Germany especially due to their immense pride in their warfare capabilities at the time.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, German soldiers, after fighting and watching their comrades die brutal deaths, were essentially told that the entirety of the war was their fault. To make things worse, like most veterans, German World War I veterans had an extraordinarily difficult time returning to civilian life, due to their inability to find work and mental or physical afflictions they received during the war. All of these problems were made even worse by the enormous sanctions on Germany, the colossal downsizing of their army, rendering an astronomical amount of people jobless, and the global economic depression that would hit Germany especially hard soon after.<sup>16</sup> Naturally, this led to rampant cynicism and bitterness that would lead to a flame of anger present within Germany, a flame which Hitler could fan and utilize to get an enormous amount of angry, bitter people on his side on the basis of making the rest of the world pay.

Not only did the desire for vengeance seem to permeate the ideas of German veterans, they craved stability due to Germany going through sudden and severe changes to their government. Naturally, this chaos would cause something like the new Nazi order to appeal to soldiers who craved some kind of calm in the storm that their lives had seemingly become in the wake of the war, despite all of the horrific things Hitler was advocating that would later come to fruition.<sup>17</sup> After all, ideas like Fascism were built on the ideals of order and made the promise of a more secure country above all else.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>16</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>17</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>18</sup>John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

Hitler wasn't exactly shy about his horribly anti-semitic ideas and hatred of the German status quo, to the point he wrote an entire book essentially ranting about how much he hated the different, this may cause one to question why German veterans would want somebody so openly antisemitic in power or it may cause others to wonder why it appealed to so many people. After all, Nazism had to appeal to a significant amount of the population for it to become the dominant party in Germany.

Part of this willingness to accept Nazism is not just tied to growing resentment of the rest of the world, it is also due to the spread of communism. During the early 1920s, after the Russian revolution, the desire for communism was spreading rapidly throughout much of Europe, which would later lead to totalitarianism. The idea of the marxist promised equality was rather appealing to many people, but it was equally terrifying to others. After all, people saw what was happening in Russia and didn't want to deal with things like starvation and imprisonments without trial in their own countries. This was relatively common throughout the world at the time as it was quite often that a country would seemingly have a communist party appear and gain popularity rapidly and Germany was no different.

This widespread fear of communism throughout Germany, especially its conservative community with a large number of veterans, would lead said demographic to believe that anything was better than communism, which was an ideology that Hitler himself was strongly against. Logically speaking, it would make sense for people who hate communism with a burning passion to follow fascists who would declare communism to be the exact political opposite of their goals for Germany.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, many German veteran organizations such as the Stahlehelm, would eventually begin to conform to more traditional antisemitic values present

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<sup>19</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

in Germany at the time, even going so far as to actively ignore the sacrifices that Jewish soldiers made during the war by claiming, much like Hitler would later, that they were not actually on the battlefield that much.<sup>20</sup>

Hitler would use this false narrative about Jewish veterans and the right's fear of a communist Germany to his advantage as well by attempting to convince the German public that communism was something inherently Jewish and that Hitler coming to power will "save and protect" the Germans from the marxist ideologies that the right especially seemed to fear more than anything.<sup>21</sup> This is just one example of Hitler's greatest weapon in his arsenal that he used to elevate himself to chancellor, lies and half-truths that he would use to get enough of the public on his side.

It is very widely stated that the landscape of the German economy was the perfect breeding ground for Hitler to grasp power and never let go, as Hitler would give the German people something that would guarantee them supporting him, which would be a scapegoat. This scapegoat would be outlined in Hitler's own book that he wrote in prison, the infamous *Mein Kampf*, which means my struggle in English. This book is essentially Hitler blaming everyone other than Aryans for the world's problems and claiming that Semites and Slavic people were responsible for the sorry state of Germany at the time and that they were inferior to aryan.<sup>22</sup> Some of the biggest lies used by Hitler was that the Jews had to be double dealing due to the alleged disproportionate wealth in the hands of the Jews and not the working class, thus creating the previously stated scapegoat he needed to fulfill his wicked desires.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>21</sup> Zosa Szajkowski, "A Note on the American-Jewish Struggle Against Nazism and Communism in the 1930's," *American Jewish History Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (March 1970): pp. 272-289.

<sup>22</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925).

<sup>23</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1925).

With all of these lies, disaffected groups supporting him and his scapegoat sufficiently hated, Hitler and the Nazis had created a scenario that was perfect for them to take power due to growing antisemitism and bigotry throughout Germany. Not only did Hitler manage to use the previously stated fear of communism to his advantage, but he also managed to instill an idea into the German public, that being that Capitalism was only supported by the greedy and the excessive. Furthermore, Hitler blamed the extreme increase in capitalism and its excessive erosion of culture on some kind of nefarious Jewish conspiracy that was designed to eradicate what Hitler thought made Germany unique.<sup>24</sup>

This hatred of capitalism can almost be seen as hypocritical, as Hitler would later use the industrialization of Germany that was previously initiated by Capitalists in other parts of the world to create a kind of genocidal machine, essentially industrializing the destruction of a people. However hypocritical it may be, it does make sense for much of the German people to have an aversion to capitalism due to the fact that the failings of capitalism are what caused many of them to lose their money and livelihoods in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

All of these previously stated factors in Hitler's rise to power are very ubiquitous in the historical community, as they are claims that have been made many times over. After all, it is so easy to trace the Treaty of Versailles and the German economic collapse to something drastic happening, like the rise of the Nazis, that it is an idea that anybody with even a passing interest in the time period has come across. Furthermore, Germany's failure to properly address the needs of its veteran population essentially alienated a significant portion of people, causing them to feel the need for drastic changes. Moreover, Hitler's usage of lies, deceit and telling the public

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<sup>24</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>25</sup> Dieter Petzina, "Germany and the Great Depression," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (October 1969): pp. 59-74.

whatever will get them to hate who he hates, makes it seem that, with the benefit of hindsight, that something extreme like the rise of the Nazis would happen in Germany like in so many other countries.

Unfortunately, these changes took the form of Germany becoming one of many European countries at the time to conform to the rest of Europe's fascist phenomenon that was present throughout many countries at the time.<sup>26</sup> However, these are not the only factors that Germany failed to adequately address to avoid something horrific and drastic from happening, which will be discussed in further detail later.

All in all, the rise of the Nazis was almost a perfect storm of socioeconomic factors but many of them came from the end of the first world war. The treaty of Versailles hit Germany really hard and created mass-disillusionment and frustration which Hitler perfectly took advantage of to take control of Germany. Naturally, Hitler was arguably the biggest player in the second world war and instigated almost all of the conflicts throughout, meaning if Hitler hadn't come to power, the war would have no reason to start. Therefore, the rise of the Nazis through economic and social factors can be traced all the way to the end of the first world war, making the first world war absolutely instrumental in the beginning of the second world war, making the second world war a direct continuation of the conflict, hence creating the idea of the European civil war.

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<sup>26</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

## Chapter 2

Socio-economic factors had some of the most significant effects on the rise of the Nazi party. These factors led to desperation and anger in the German people that Hitler would easily be able to take advantage of. However, these factors were not the only aspect of German disillusionment. After all, German politics were very complex post World War I.

Germany has a relatively convoluted and complicated history. After all, Germany in the 1920s was relatively tolerant at the time, especially when compared to other European countries at the time. This has caused many historians to question how a relatively progressive society embraced fascism so suddenly.<sup>27</sup> As previously stated, there was the German financial crisis, however this alone was not enough to completely transform a country from what it was to a far-right nightmare. After all, it is impossible that every single German simultaneously accepted Hitler's lies and deception relating to the Jews' effect on their nation, no matter how believable he made them seem. The answer to this conundrum can be found in the intricate yet chaotic geopolitical state of the world at the time, as well as the failings of Germany's own government, its various poorly thought out laws and its failure at problem solving.

Shortly after World War I, Benito Mussolini would change the world for the worst when he would become the prime minister of Italy in 1922. Mussolini would come to popularize the ruling system of fascism that greatly inspired Nazism as well as many other fascist governments that would come into existence at the time.<sup>28</sup> The existence of Italian fascism, as well as the existence of several other fascist governments at the time, is primarily why the sonderweg theory of German politics is inherently flawed as it presupposes the idea that German fascism is unique

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<sup>27</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>28</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

despite the fact that, not only was Italian fascism similar to German fascism, it predated and inspired Germany, making it objectively not unique.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, it is somewhat difficult to reconcile the idea that German fascism is unique when so many other countries throughout the whole world, Japan likely being the most notable, had fascist governments around the same time. As a matter of fact, of the three primary countries involved in the axis powers Germany was the last one to embrace fascism in 1933, with Italy becoming fascist in 1922 and Japan's Emperor Hirohito coming to power in late 1926, however the date where Japan actually turned to fascism primarily is somewhat debatable as it was a very slow burn.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Japan's turn to fascism is so unorthodox compared to other countries that some even debate that Japan only had fascist elements, as opposed to being fully fascist.<sup>31</sup>

Not only was fascism extraordinarily popular throughout Europe at the time, totalitarian communism in the Soviet Union has a lot more in common with Nazi Germany than either side would care to admit.<sup>32</sup> For instance, both placed complete and total power in the hands of the government at the expense of everybody else. After all, both governments are characterized as totalitarian due to their harsh governments that would casually kill off its own people for somewhat arbitrary reasons. Furthermore, both came into existence due to a primarily unsatisfied working class that was desperate for change. This demonstrates further the idea that Nazism isn't inherently unique as one of the governments the Nazis hated the most, that being communists,

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<sup>29</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>30</sup> Reto Hofmann, *Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952* (Ithaca, NY: CORNELL University Press, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Reto Hofmann, *Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952* (Ithaca, NY: CORNELL University Press, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Martin Gilbert, "The Rise of Fascism in Europe in the Twentieth Century: Lessons for Today," *India International Centre Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2002): pp. 31-38.



had a lot in common with Nazism to the point where one could argue that they are actually two sides of the same coin.

From 1871 to 1918, Germany was an imperialist monarchy ruled by emperors. This was the form of government during the first World War. However, as was somewhat common in Europe at the time, people were understandably dissatisfied with the Germany government and thus the relatively short, yet extremely impactful German Revolution of 1918 began. The details of which are not necessarily important in this context, however it ended with Germany taking the form of a short lived republic known as the infamous Weimar Republic.

Views on the Weimar republic have been somewhat polarized with hindsight. Some believe it had merit to it and it's a shame Hitler perverted it and took advantage of it for his own ends. On the other hand, others believed it was flawed and ineffectual. The latter has a slightly higher amount of credibility due to the sheer amount of problems with Weimar era democracy that Hitler was able to exploit.

One of Weimar Germany's biggest problems was the extremely short term lengths in government present throughout Weimar Germany. After all, many German chancellors wouldn't even last a full year. This creates a massive problem of chancellors not being able to make any significant changes during their time as chancellor. Furthermore, it creates a revolving door effect where people are already preparing their campaigns when a new chancellor was only very recently elected.

This is only one of the many failings of Weimar era Germany and the specific failings of its democratic republic. Another significant problem with Weimar era Germany was its party system. Germany had dozens of parties, causing votes to be spread relatively thin, creating a problem that the Nazis were able to take advantage of. That problem being that even if the

majority of the people did not want genocide, the Nazi party had the most votes, even though all of the other parties had a greater number of votes put together. This means that, even though the Nazis were technically not the majority of the German population, they did receive the largest number of votes due to all of the other votes being spread between so much thinner than other countries. Also, the reason the Nazi's votes were not split was due to the Nazi's having a very specific ideology, not shared by even the most conservative of German parties.

Another, and arguably the greatest failing of the Weimar republic was its strange approach to solving their previously stated financial hole. Weimar Germany, for some reason thought that printing more money would somehow fix the hyperinflation problem. In fact, this problem had the opposite effect, as the Reichsmark was crippled and devalued simply due to the sheer quantity of its availability, only causing the already out of control German hyperinflation to skyrocket.<sup>33</sup> Naturally, this created even more German dissatisfaction with the Weimar republic due to their solution to this financial problem, quite frankly being poorly thought out and simply exacerbating it further.

Whenever a government fails its people it is very common to see its populace do something rash, often it takes the form of rising up and overthrowing its rulers like in the French Revolution. However, the best option is usually to elect new leaders. Hitler took advantage of this desire for new leadership after all of the failings of Weimar era Germany and the German desire for change. From Hitler's perspective, he already had an advantage when advocating an enormous change, that simply being how angry and frustrated a significant portion of Germany was with the Weimar republic.

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<sup>33</sup> Dieter Petzina, "Germany and the Great Depression," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (October 1969): pp. 59-74.

As everyone knows, the Weimar Republic fell when Hitler came to power and the third Reich came to be. However, this would seem to be impossible due to the fact that Weimar Germany was a republic, which means the power was in the hands of multiple representatives of the people, so how did it collapse so quickly when Hitler was elected chancellor. This failure was due to one colossal flaw of Weimar Germany's structure that could've been easily avoided by reading *Julius Caesar*. That being a law that allowed a rule by decree system in times of war or great need.<sup>34</sup> The reason this is a colossal flaw was that it is very easy to orchestrate a catastrophe or Hitler could've just bided his time for anything remotely adverse that he could label as a catastrophe.

Hitler would use this flaw to his advantage by making sure the right people were in the right place so that when something disastrous happened, he could swoop in and become Germany's dictator.<sup>35</sup> This mild contention would come in the form of the German Reichstag fire, which is something that is often debated to have been perpetuated by the Nazis themselves due to its extraordinary political convenience in Hitler's favor.<sup>36</sup> The German Reichstag was essentially the German parliament and it being burned down was a serious ordeal. Hitler would convince everybody that the burning of the Reichstag was the beginning of a communist revolution.

Germany's volatile political state made it possible for Hitler to grab power. However, despite all of the numerous failings of the Weimar republic, one person cannot completely dismantle a government by themselves overnight as governments are generally very large and

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<sup>34</sup> Anson Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism: The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror," *New German Critique*, no. 103 (2008): pp. 97-126.

<sup>35</sup> Anson Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism: The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror," *New German Critique*, no. 103 (2008): pp. 97-126.

<sup>36</sup> Anson Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism: The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror," *New German Critique*, no. 103 (2008): pp. 97-126.

have a fair amount of contingency plans built into their structure to prevent one person from seizing and maintaining power. As previously stated, the events that created Weimar Germany's downfall took a while to take effect. However, Hitler was not alone in his attempt to take Germany.

Hitler and the Nazis had a disturbingly high amount of support from many people of the upper class, as well as the support of a significant portion of the people. Many members of Germany's aristocracy, motivated either by greed and a lust for power or a desire to return Germany to its former glory, had supported Hitler's rule and had important parts to play in the manipulation of Germany's laws and its people to create the Nazis government.

Potentially the most notable aristocrat to play into the rise of the Nazis was general Kurt von Schleicher. Schleicher is a somewhat unknown historic figure to the layperson, despite the fact that his greed was instrumental in the rise of the Nazis. Initially, Schleicher wanted to use the far-right Nazis as a tool to maintain his lofty aristocratic position and wealth as well as keep the increasingly powerful leftists at bay.

This idea was inspired by the fact that the Nazis, who were initially seen as a group of lunatics who would never gain power, would eventually get a significant portion of votes, at least significant enough for Schleicher to believe they would be a valuable tool in gaining power. Schleicher's end goal was ensuring that a member of the Nazi party, preferably one he felt he could easily manipulate was in the seat of chancellorship. To that end, Schleicher would do his best to befriend German president, Paul von Hindenburg who, as the president, had a significant amount of sway in who was chancellor of Germany.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Hayes, "A Question Mark with Epaulettes"? Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

Schleicher's friendship with Hindenburg would be instrumental in the political maneuvering of the Nazis.<sup>38</sup> This can be seen in the fact that Schleicher was actually the person who introduced Hitler to Hindenburg. While at first, Hindenburg did not seem to regard Hitler as anybody extraordinary, it was Schleicher who would whisper in Hindenburg's ear and attempt to convince him that the Nazis could be a great asset to both of their goals. Moreover, Schleicher would also convince Hindenburg that the current chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, was incompetent and needed to be fired.<sup>39</sup> However, unfortunately for Schleicher, his own arrogance would be his undoing.

Schleicher wanted to form a German coalition government that would serve the aristocracy and the upper class with the Nazis backing them, however, Hitler wanted to portray himself as a man of the people archetype, which would be completely at odds with Schleicher's goals. Furthermore, Hitler's colossal ego would never allow him to compromise on his ideals and demanded he would be in charge. Schleicher attempted to use this to his advantage and manipulate Hitler into being a stepping stone Schleicher could use to gain power.<sup>40</sup> In reality, Schleicher's political machinations would backfire immensely.

Kurt von Schleicher was not the only person who saw the Nazis as a means to the end of power. The other important figure in this era of history, who was arguably almost as important as Schleicher, was a man by the name of Franz von Papen. Schleicher's relationship with Papen was quite fascinating as, from Schleicher's perception, he had already won.

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Hayes, "A Question Mark with Epauettes"? Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Hayes, "A Question Mark with Epauettes"? Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Hayes, "A Question Mark with Epauettes"? Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

With Schleicher's previously stated manipulations of Hindenburg being successful, Hindenburg would fire Brüning and Papen would be made Chancellor.<sup>41</sup> With Papen, who was more right leaning like Schleicher wanted in power, Schleicher was likely ecstatic due also to the fact that he believed that Papen was an easily manipulated tool he could use to keep Nazi support but also have him do whatever Schleicher wanted.

However, unfortunately for Schleicher and Papen, they had both underestimated the support Hitler had gotten from the people of Germany. As previously stated, Hitler had an uncanny ability to get people on his side against their own interests by convincing them he can make the changes that Germany needs and "make Germany great again." The support that Hitler had received terrified Papen, Schleicher and Hindenburg, causing Hindenburg to take advantage of Weimar Germany's previously stated presidential rule by decree system to undercut the Reichstag to prevent Hitler from being elected Chancellor. Unfortunately, their underestimation of Hitler would come to bite them.

While Schleicher was attempting his botched takeover of Germany, Hitler would be doing his own political maneuvering, making sure his close personal friend, Hermann Göring would be elected President of the Reichstag.<sup>42</sup> Göring's position would be instrumental to the dismantling of democracy. This is shown by the fact that Göring was responsible for Papen, Schleicher, and Hindenburg's plans of stopping Hitler failing. Göring, president of the Reichstag, actively ignored Papen when he tried to get his attention so he could issue the presidential rule by decree. Furthermore, Göring would then hold a vote of no confidence against Papen's government.

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<sup>41</sup> Larry Eugene Jones, "Franz Von Papen, Catholic Conservatives, and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1933–1934," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (June 2011): pp. 272-318,

<sup>42</sup>Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Goering: The Rise and Fall of the Notorious Nazi Leader* (London: Frontline Books, 2011): Chap. 5, Kindle

Schleicher, to save his own skin, would do what he does best and whispered in the ear of Hindenburg more and would betray Papen by convincing Hindenburg to fire yet another chancellor. Not only would Schleicher get Papen fired, but he would get Hindenburg to make him chancellor with the primary goal of making sure Hitler doesn't come to power as well as getting many of Hitler's own Nazis to work for Schleicher instead of Hitler so they can get the power they wanted.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, Hitler once more demonstrates his boldness and political skill by allying himself with Franz von Papen.<sup>44</sup> Papen was furious at Schleicher for betraying him and desperately wanted to bring down Schleicher's chancellorship and regain power from him. While Hitler got to demonstrate his own political prowess, Schleicher, once more demonstrated his arrogance by not viewing Papen and Hitler as threats.<sup>45</sup> What Schleicher did not take into account is that Papen had replaced him and acquired Hindenburg's ear from him, allowing him to convince Hindenburg to make Hitler chancellor on the condition that Papen is made vice Chancellor.

As it is commonly known, Hitler would be made chancellor and the world would never be the same. All of this convoluted political maneuvering demonstrated Hitler's greatest tool in his arsenal, his cunning. After all, having the support of the people is not enough to make yourself a dictator. However, having the guile and the cunning to navigate Germany's inherently flawed political structure that could be completely uprooted on a whim took both initiative and ambition.

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Hayes, "A Question Mark with Epauettes"? Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

<sup>44</sup> Larry Eugene Jones, "Franz Von Papen, Catholic Conservatives, and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1933-1934," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (June 2011): pp. 272-318,

<sup>45</sup> Larry Eugene Jones, "Franz Von Papen, Catholic Conservatives, and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1933-1934," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (June 2011): pp. 272-318,

All of this convoluted political history demonstrates one thing quite clearly, that being that Weimar Germany's political structure was a complete and utter mess. Chancellor's changing multiple times in a single year based solely on the whim of who the president favors is a recipe for disaster, as it could lead to leaders that don't necessarily represent the people, just whoever the president feels would do a good job which could change on a whim. Naturally, people savvy enough and devious enough, like Schleicher and Papen would take advantage of this flaw to make a grab for power.

All in all, the politics surrounding Hitler's rise to chancellorship is, quite frankly, some of the most convoluted events in modern history. With constant political backstabbing and the messy political structure of Weimar Germany, it is easy to see why this particular area of Hitler's rise to power is often talked about in broad strokes as opposed to getting really in depth with Hitler's political opponents. Moreover, many other countries were in similar situations around this time or just before it, demonstrating that the rise of the Nazis is not inherently unique to Germany and is, instead, the most visceral and horrifying example of the state of the world at the time.

Despite Hitler becoming the German Chancellor, democracy wasn't completely destroyed in Germany yet. After all, Autocracy does not simply spring up overnight. The true fall of German democracy at the hands of Hitler and the Nazis only began when Hitler was elected, but was completed shortly after.



### Chapter 3

As previously stated, there are two seemingly unrelated factors that greatly impacted Hitler and the Nazis' rise to power, those being the machinations of ultra conservative aristocrats attempting to undermine democracy for their own political and economic power, as well as the fallout, both social and economic, of Germany's defeat in World War I as well as the Treaty of Versailles. However, these two factors are actually tied to one another and are further influenced by the rapidly increasing continent wide spread of totalitarian governments around the time of the Nazis ascension.<sup>46</sup>

Firstly, it is important to discuss the fact that many of the previously discussed figures involved in undermining Weimar era German democracy, had relatively successful military careers. As previously discussed, there was a large number of veteran groups that would slowly embrace Nazi ideology.<sup>47</sup>

As previously stated many of these significant figures in the attempted destruction of German democracy, like much of the German people, were essentially disillusioned veterans with Schleicher being a general and Papen and Hindenburg also having relatively successful military careers themselves.<sup>48</sup> However, unlike many German veterans, these people were much more selfishly motivated. For instance, Schleicher seemed to mostly be after more wealth and power, hence why he would seemingly use as many people as possible to gain power.

As previously discussed, Hitler was able to get many veterans on his side by perpetuating the lie that the Germany that they had been fighting for was destroyed by some Jewish conspiracy that aimed to steal everything from them. This was obviously a lie that is easy to

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<sup>46</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (Random House USA Inc, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> John Horne, "The Origins and Nature of Fascism and Nazism in Europe," *History Ireland* 13, no. 1 (2005): pp. 36-41.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Hayes, "'A Question Mark with Epaulettes'?" Kurt Von Schleicher and Weimar Politic," *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (March 1980): pp. 35-65.

disregard as nonsensical with the benefit of hindsight. However, at the time, the German people were desperate and many Veterans especially felt betrayed by their country for failing to take care of them after the first World War.<sup>49</sup> This desperation would make it significantly easier for Hitler to convince just enough people that the Jews were responsible.

After all, it is an incredibly common thing for people in lower financial classes to hate the upper class and Jewish people in the 1920s, in general, were perceived as relatively successful. With an already enraged and desperate veteran population, Hitler was able to convert correlation into causation by claiming that the fact that many Jews being successful in spite of Germany's financial ruin was actually a conspiracy of some sort.<sup>50</sup> This was in spite of more simple explanations like savvy business, small scale nepotism or just simple coincidence. This form of thinking allowed people to rationalize their anti-semitism by claiming the existence of Jews was an economic "problem".<sup>51</sup>

Naturally, not all German veterans were angry enough at the Jewish population to advocate for genocide, however enough of them were to create immense amounts of problems. In terms of Nazi groups, there are few as notorious as Sturmabteilung, otherwise known as the Stormtroopers.<sup>52</sup>

The Stormtroopers were essentially a gang of thugs that would clandestinely act on the behalf of the Nazi party without officially being affiliated with said party, allowing the Nazis to

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<sup>49</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>50</sup>William W. Hagen, "Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (June 1996): pp. 351-381.

<sup>51</sup>William W. Hagen, "Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (June 1996): pp. 351-381.

<sup>52</sup>Sven Reichardt, "Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers," *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 275-297.

organize crimes that would benefit them.<sup>53</sup> These crimes often included intimidating political opponents but they would commit all sorts of crimes on the Nazi's behalf. This lack of official connection would allow the Nazis to claim they had nothing to do with the crimes that the stormtroopers would commit, which mainly involved violence against Nazi enemies.<sup>54</sup> Most notably, the stormtroopers would actually engage in violence with communist groups like the Wanderfalke as well as attempting to intimidate people into voting for the Nazi party during elections.<sup>55</sup>

The stormtroopers' actions, combined with the far right aristocrats, preexisting antisemitism and general German anger, helped contribute to what seemed like the perfect storm.<sup>56</sup> However, this perfect storm is not unique to Nazi Germany, as a shockingly significant portion of Europe had converted to authoritarian governments, many of which were fascist in some way.

This leads into the primary point of everything so far, which is potentially the most overlooked aspect in the Nazis and their rise to power that being the idea of the European civil war. This idea seems to be as overlooked as it is due to the fact that all of the other aspects like poverty and a political conspiracy are something people are much more likely to deal with in their life. On the other hand, the collective disappearance of European parliaments in such a

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<sup>53</sup> Sven Reichardt, "Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers," *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 275-297.

<sup>54</sup> Sven Reichardt, "Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers," *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 275-297.

<sup>55</sup> Sven Reichardt, "Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers," *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 275-297.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April 2004): pp. 169-188.

short period of time is something that has not been repeated in the many decades since the end of World War II.<sup>57</sup>

The idea of the European civil war is an attempt to contextualize and reinterpret both World Wars as one continuous continent-wide civil war.<sup>58</sup> This idea is actually extraordinarily relevant to the Nazis' rise to power in general as the election of the Nazis is almost completely contingent on the end of the first World War, making it an aspect of the greater idea of the European civil war.

Furthermore, the European civil war idea also attempts to string together the extremely similar ideologies between both primary factions in both World Wars and how they would inevitably collide.<sup>59</sup> To elaborate, these ideologies can best be described by the various powers' visions for the world once the war was over. These ideologies, though not always fitting neatly into these categories, are either spreading democracy to the rest of the world, spreading totalitarian communism to the rest of the world, and in many fascist government's cases, placing the needs of their desired people above the needs of and at the expense of every other group of people.<sup>60</sup>

With such large ideologies, Germany is bound to have similarities with other countries' governments who had also become authoritarian or even fully fascist before or around the same time that Germany had. As a matter of fact, countries that had quite successful fascist movements were not even limited to the axis powers initially.

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (Random House USA Inc, 1998) pp. 7

<sup>58</sup> Enzo Traverso and David Fernbach, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945* (London: Verso, 2017) chap. 2 Kindle

<sup>59</sup> Enzo Traverso and David Fernbach, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945* (London: Verso, 2017) chap. 2 Kindle

<sup>60</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York , NY: Random House USA Inc, 1998) pp. 4

For the sake of drawing parallels between Germany and other countries' fascist regimes, it would be prudent to quickly lay out and demonstrate the political ideals that all totalitarian and fascist governments have as fascism is something that most people have a vague understanding of, however they often may not understand the nuances of it. According to an expert on fascism, Roger Griffin, fascism is rather hard to define as the term is constantly misused for the sake of winning arguments or demonizing an unpopular authoritarian politician.<sup>61</sup>

However, fascism can be characterized by three important tenets. Firstly, a fascist government has one person who holds complete and total control over the government. Secondly, fascist governments place a heavy emphasis on suppressing the individual freedoms so that said leader will maintain their seat in power, usually through using the military for oppression. Lastly, fascist governments will often prop themselves up by persecuting one or more minorities to keep some chosen people on top.

The first country's government to have a dictatorship that is often characterized as modern day fascism, was that of Italy, spearheaded by Benito Mussolini, who created the modern idea of fascism.<sup>62</sup> Mussolini's rise to power likely has the most in common with Hitler's as both involved them gathering a rather large support base and strong-arming their countries' leaders into giving them power.<sup>63</sup> With the power given to them by their government's leaders both Hitler and Mussolini would make strong usage of propaganda, media censorship and their

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<sup>61</sup> Roger Griffin, *Fascism (Key Concepts in Political Theory)* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018). Chap. 1 Kindle

<sup>62</sup> Philip Morgan, "The Trash Who Are Obstacles in Our Way': the Italian Fascist Party at the Point of Totalitarian Lift Off, 1930—31," *The English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (April 2012): pp. 303-344.

<sup>63</sup> Philip Morgan, "The Trash Who Are Obstacles in Our Way': the Italian Fascist Party at the Point of Totalitarian Lift Off, 1930—31," *The English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (April 2012): pp. 303-344.

populist status to destroy their countries' democracy and successfully grab absolute power and rule their countries' with an iron fist.<sup>64</sup>

One of the more lesser known fascist movements was that of Józef Piłsudski, who had a very turbulent time in the seat of Polish power.<sup>65</sup> Whether through legitimate methods or a coup, Piłsudski would inevitably be considered the de facto dictator of Poland for a very long time. During this time, Piłsudski would also commit several actions against political opponents along the lines of what fascist rulers would commit.<sup>66</sup> Most notably, Piłsudski would do things like imprison political opponents, orchestrate heavy persecution of minorities as well as placing a heavy emphasis on the Polish military industrial complex, which are some of the core tenets of fascism.<sup>67</sup> These actions bear a striking resemblance to the various actions that Hitler would do, as Hitler would also heavily develop Germany's military and would send political opponents to concentration camps.

Lastly, another country that had parallels that could be easily drawn with the Nazi's rise is that of Hungary.<sup>68</sup> Hungary especially is very similar to the rise of the Nazis as both forms of fascism had arisen from the economic ruin of World War I, as the Austria-Hungarian empire was split up, leaving its economy in an awful state.<sup>69</sup> This led to the rise of the Arrow Cross party,

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<sup>64</sup> Philip Morgan, "The Trash Who Are Obstacles in Our Way': the Italian Fascist Party at the Point of Totalitarian Lift Off, 1930—31," *The English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (April 2012): pp. 303-344.

<sup>65</sup> Patrice M. Dabrowski, "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski," *The Polish Review* 56, no. 1/2 (2011): pp. 73-109.

<sup>66</sup> Patrice M. Dabrowski, "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski," *The Polish Review* 56, no. 1/2 (2011): pp. 73-109.

<sup>67</sup> Patrice M. Dabrowski, "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski," *The Polish Review* 56, no. 1/2 (2011): pp. 73-109.

<sup>68</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

<sup>69</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

which constituted Hungary's aggressive right-wing population.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, both fascist parties constantly battled with the communist population of both of their countries at the time as well as constantly brutalizing and executing whoever they deemed as a threat to their fascist government.<sup>71</sup> The violent nature of Hungarian fascism can be traced back to World War I's end through an event known as the White Terror.<sup>72</sup> The White Terror was a violent political struggle in Hungary that involved the fall of Hungarian communism, as well as a massive increase in right-wing violence.<sup>73</sup> While the White Terror did not directly lead to Hungarian fascism, its effects still led to a more conservative government, which, in turn, would eventually become fascist in the 1930s.<sup>74</sup>

With all of this in mind, it may cause one to question why these countries never turned to democracy and instead had fascism be what was perceived as their perceived solution to their problems. One thing is seen throughout all of these countries' fall to fascism and that was that democracy was actively undermined in some way. While some countries had sought to undercut their democratic governments from within or overthrow them by force, the existence of democracy was not enough to protect these countries from fascist rulers asserting themselves as rulers.

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<sup>70</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

<sup>71</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

<sup>72</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

<sup>73</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

<sup>74</sup> Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010): pp. 703-724.

This contradicts the previously mentioned idea of the Sonderweg theory, which is the idea that German fascism is completely unique.<sup>75</sup> The reason this contradicts the Sonderweg theory is that this theory presupposes the idea that German fascism wasn't repeated anywhere. In reality, German fascism and totalitarianism is merely one of many countries to fall to totalitarianism and is the most often discussed likely due to the sheer scale and brutality of it in such a short period of time. After all, the Nazis were only in power for around 12 years compared to other dictatorships that were around for significantly longer or cropped up more in recent memory.

The previously mentioned countries were not the only ones to embrace fascism either, and even countries that weren't specifically fascist, would still contain many elements of fascism, like Austria and the Soviet Union who had both had extremely authoritarian governments that restricted freedoms. However, these countries do demonstrate many similarities with the Nazis rise to power, with Italy's invention of fascism even inspiring Hitler. With all of this in mind, it can be somewhat difficult to see how this is relevant to the question of, "how was Hitler elected?" This is seen by how it demonstrates that, throughout much of Europe, the precedent was already set for more and more people to become enticed by ideas of authoritarianism and fascism as an easy answer to their societal problems. Moreover, it is this generalized acceptance of fascism that is the backbone of the European civil war idea as the collective increase in right-wing totalitarianism did not become as rampant as it did until after the first World War, with Hungary especially echoing Germany's transition from poverty to authoritarianism.

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<sup>75</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "Looking Back on the Sonderweg," *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): pp. 137-142.



### Conclusion

In the end, Hitler's rise to power is incredibly multifaceted and had many different causes, leading to no simple and easy way to answer the question of how he was elected aside from referring to his election as one of the many horrific, authoritarian "perfect storms" that were present in Europe throughout much of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Despite this, it will always be important to analyze this time period considering how much history has set a precedent for repeating itself.

Analysis of historic events is something that can be tackled from a multitude of different angles, all of which have some level of validity. Whether it is exploring the rise of the Nazis through the perspective that Nazi fascism is unique or that it was just one of many countries to fall, there is no way to argue against the fact that the rise of the Nazis and Adolf Hitler's election is a very complicated historic event with many different ways to interpret what can be learned from it.

Regardless of these many interpretations, it is important to realize just how widespread and common countries fell to fascism in an incredibly short time period. After all, if people interpret Nazism as something that was only isolated to Germany for 12 years, it may cause people to not be as observant and protective of their civil liberties, as if people assume that it will only happen once, they may not consider the possibility of a repeat. Hitler only being one of several fascist rulers demonstrates that the rise of fascism is something that can happen anywhere at any time and is something that must be guarded against at all times, after all, no sane person wants this era to repeat itself.

This era being repeated is actually quite possible due to the sheer commonality of the circumstances that caused the Nazis to rise to power. The first, and likely most influential aspect

of their rise to power is their intense amounts of poverty and hyperinflation, as it created the rampant desperation present throughout Germany for some kind of widespread and drastic change. Furthermore, said desperation would cause increased jealousy and unplaced rage that would allow for someone sufficiently devious and cunning enough, like Hitler, to take advantage of for his own goals.

This misplaced rage being placed on the Jews was extremely easy for Hitler as well, due to them generally being in better financial situations.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, antisemitism was already somewhat present throughout Germany at the time. Therefore, when some German people already don't like the Jews, and when impoverished people generally don't like it when people are doing astronomically better than them, it created this scenario where antisemitism began to self-perpetuate.<sup>77</sup> This self perpetuation was increased even further and faster when Hitler would convince people that it was actually a part of some grand conspiracy at the hands of Jewish people.

Not only would Hitler be able to take advantage of preexisting hatred of both Jews and the rich, he would also be able to take advantage of people's general fear and distaste of communism. Hitler would use things like the burning of the Reichstag building to paint the communists as an enemy.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the Nazi's stormtroopers would also be used to beat the communists into submission, both metaphorically and literally, in acts of gang violence, thus

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<sup>76</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>77</sup>George Lachmann Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 254-265.

<sup>78</sup>Anson Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism: The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror," *New German Critique*, no. 103 (2008): pp. 97-126.

creating even more hatred for the communists through means of intimidation and threats of physical violence.<sup>79</sup>

Another aspect present in the fall of German democracy could be seen with the fact that several members of the German aristocracy were actively attempting to dismantle the German government for their own personal gain. Whether it was President Hindenburg choosing a new chancellor at an unreasonably rapid rate, Schleicher seemingly betraying his allies or Papen creating an alliance with Hitler, there is only one outcome to this many powerful figures attempting to undermine the government and that is complete democratic collapse from the inside.

Weimar Germany's government was a colossal mess, making it incredibly easy to manipulate and contort. After all, as previously stated, chancellor's were constantly being changed and rule by decree in a state of emergency is something that any aspiring autocrat like Hitler would greatly desire. Furthermore, Germany's political system was even more chaotic simply due to the sheer volume of political parties, causing votes to be more spread out, making it possible for a high concentration of those with impure intentions to take control just by the sheer value of the fact that their votes were not spread between an obscene amount of parties and could concentrate and consolidate their votes into one party, allowing for the Nazi party to get the highest concentration of votes.

Hitler's rise to power is something that can be viewed as a cautionary tale, as all of the aspects to his rise are far more common and easy to understand than some people might consider. After all, there are quite often parallels that can be felt in the modern day that were present just before the rise of the Nazis. With rampant poverty, pre existing cultural distaste, and powerful

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<sup>79</sup> Sven Reichardt, "Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers," *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 275-297.

upper class aristocrats attempting to circumvent German democracy for their own political and economic gain, it is rather easy to see how the fall of democracy in Weimar Germany almost seemed like it was inevitable.

Moreover, there are many consistencies between these elements in other countries as well that had led to rightwing, authoritarian uprisings. Italy, Hungary and Poland all had authoritarian regimes that would rise and all of them had several parallels with the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany. This further demonstrates how the Nazis were not necessarily unique in their evil and said evil can be repeated as it already has in a similar way to how many of these countries had their authoritarian governments rise in a similar way.

With all of this being said, studying the rise of the Nazis is something that can be deeply depressing and put someone in a dark place. However, studying how a countries' democracy can fall is incredibly important as it allows us to learn to prevent it in the future. The time of the Nazis is defined by constant war in Europe, a bizarrely high concentration of fascist governments rising all at once, great prejudice and even greater violence.

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