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The Rise of the Nazis, 1929-33

In the 1928 elections, the Nazis polled just 2.6% of the parliamentary elections and won just 12 seats. In many respects, Hitler was as far away from power as ever. However, within just five years, he was the Chancellor of Germany and the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression, ended the 'Golden-Years' of the Weimar Republic and paved the way for political, economic and social instability. Into this 'post-crash' context, Hitler and the Nazi Party could gain political traction. The Nazis had a formidable propaganda machine, a network of Gauleiters, the SA and SS, as well as the figure of Hitler as leader. Which causes - or hierarchy of causes - best explain Hitler's election as Chancellor in January 1933? Elliott and Patrick examine these causes while incorporating the arguments of *structuralists* and *intentionalists*.

Patrick's arguments that Hitler and the Nazis positioned themselves best to <i>take advantage</i> of the problems associated with the Great Depression.	Elliott's arguments that the environment created by the Great Depression <i>allowed</i> for the rise of Hitler and the Nazis.
The Great Depression certainly helps to explain why democracy waned and extremists flourished; but cannot solely explain why Hitler came to power. Hitler and the Nazis offered the electorate " national redemption " (Kershaw); an alternative vision of the future based on racial unity rather than class distinctions – the Volksgemeinschaft – that appealed to many, not least the young and the 6 million unemployed. The Depression made the middle classes fear the lure of Communism and look towards the Nazis as the guarantors of private property and order.	Up until the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, the NSDAP were " ...were still very much on the fringes of politics " (Evans), polling only 2.6% in the 1928 parliamentary elections. In fact, over the course of the preceding six years, the Nazi Party had actually <i>lost</i> support. " It would need a catastrophe of major dimensions if an extremist party like the Nazis was to gain support " (Evans). The Great Depression <i>was</i> that catastrophe.
Following the Munich Putsch, Hitler was pragmatic enough to realise that he needed to take power democratically to succeed. Thus, the Nazi Party completely remodeled itself in the 1920s, which laid the platform for their success when the opportunity presented itself; a network of Gauleiters made it a national Party, it courted funds from big business, employed energetic functionaries and grew the SA, while forming the SS. The Nazis were thus judiciously placed to exploit the Depression.	The Weimar Republic's inability and unwillingness to deal with the problems associated with the Great Depression meant that the people of Germany looked to those parties that offered solutions, no matter how extreme they may have been. As coalition government after coalition government spent their time squabbling instead of addressing the problems, support for the Nazis grew: 280 seats in the July 1932 Reichstag elections.
The Nazis fostered the notion that they were a 'mass movement' rather than a 'political party', based on <i>action</i> rather than <i>rhetoric</i> . The uniformed SA disrupted the opposition while presenting an image of discipline and strength against a backdrop of chaos and despair. Hitler offered easy solutions to the problems faced by each strata of society, such as 'work and bread' to the working class.	With 6 million Germans unemployed, major bank closures (Danat Bank, 1931), the appointment of three chancellors (all of whom rule using Hindenburg's Article 48) who fail to gain support in the Reichstag, catastrophic farming debt, American loans recalled, unemployment & pension benefits reduced, and industry grinding to a halt, Hindenburg is pressured into <i>giving</i> the Chancellorship to Hitler.
The Nazis effectively harnessed the power of propaganda during the Depression under the guidance of Dr Goebbels to disseminate their message to the masses. This meant that their message gained traction with a desperate electorate.	In the November 1932 election, the Nazis actually <i>lost</i> seats. It was only due to the political machinations of Hindenburg, von Papen, and von Schleicher, that Hitler found himself in the second highest seat in German government by January 1933.

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