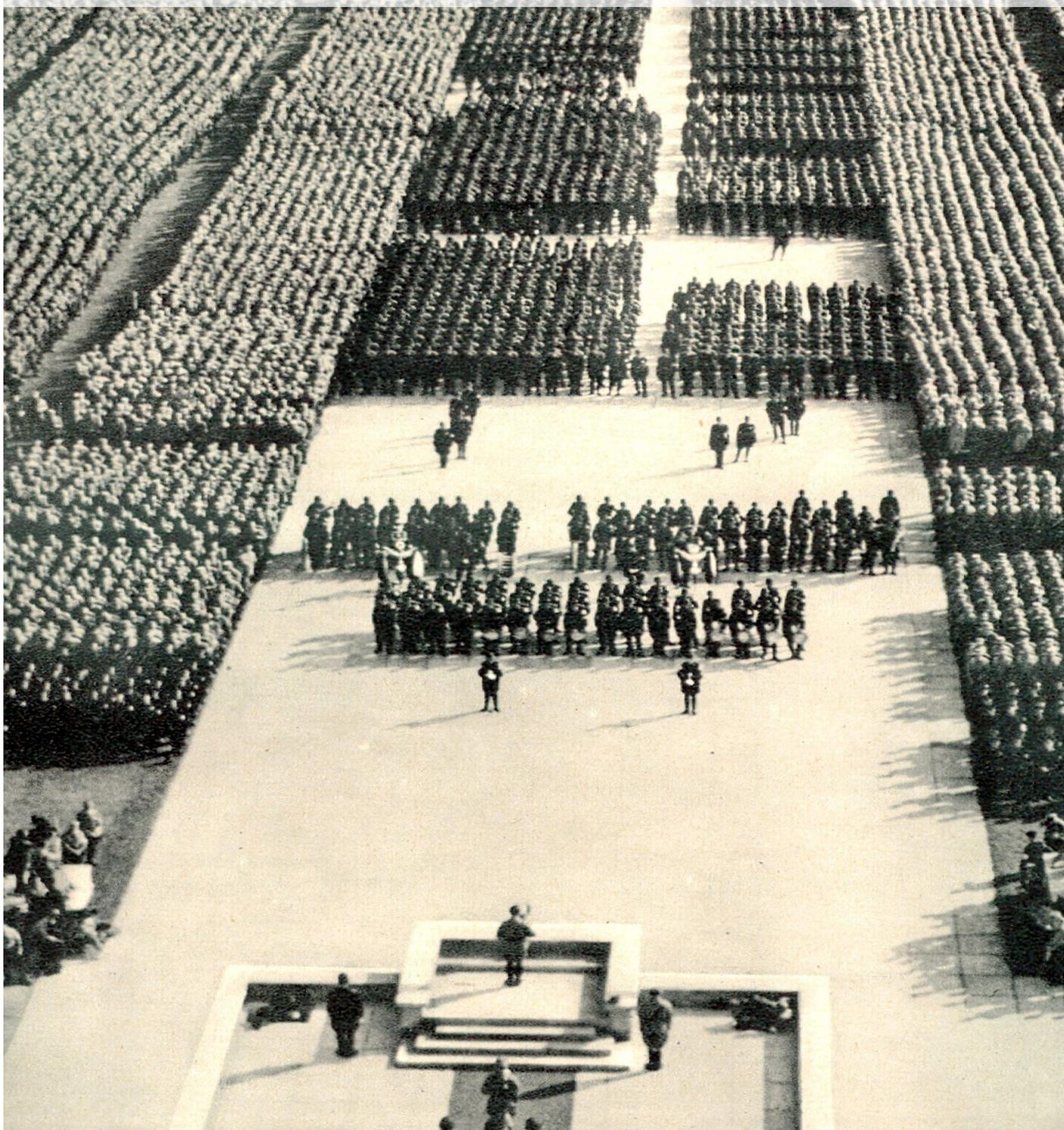


# The development of Germany, 1919-1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany



# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

### 1. Introduction: Germany before 1919

Until 1871 there were many separate states that were German-speaking but there was not a country called Germany. In 1871, however, the German empire was created: this was largely the work of the Prussian chief minister, Otto von Bismarck. Prussia was one of the largest German-speaking states and in 1871 Prussia and its allies had just won a war against France. The King of Prussia became the ruler of the new Germany: he became the first German Emperor or **Kaiser**. Germany also had a Parliament, the **Reichstag**, but its powers were limited. By 1900 the new Germany was one of the most important countries in the world with powerful industries, a strong army and a newly created navy.

**Kaiser**  
German Emperor

**Reichstag**  
the German Parliament

As a result of the growth of its industries a new class of industrial workers had been created in Germany. The standard of living of many of these workers was quite low. A new socialist **political party** called the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was formed to champion these workers. **Socialism** was an important and fairly new left-wing political idea which proposed that ownership or control of the economy should rest with society as a whole. The Social Democratic Party in Germany thought that the Kaiser had too much power while the Reichstag did not have enough. By 1914 the Social Democratic Party was the single largest political party in the Reichstag.

**political party**  
A group of politicians holding similar views and taking part in elections on the same programme with the aim of forming a government

**socialism**  
A political belief meaning ownership of, and control of, the economy should be with the community or society as a whole, not with individuals or companies.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Social Democratic Party at first supported the Kaiser's government and the German war effort. However by 1918 it became clear that Germany had no hope of winning the war and the Kaiser's rule collapsed. The German army commanders advised the Kaiser to end the war and give more power to the Reichstag. They did this in the hope that the politicians in the Reichstag would get the blame for ending the war and that the army could escape responsibility for Germany's defeat. The Social Democratic Party, as the largest party in the Reichstag, formed a new

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government under the leadership of Friedrich Ebert in November 1918. Meanwhile the outbreak of a naval mutiny in the port of Kiel and violent protests in several German cities persuaded the Kaiser to abdicate on 9 November 1918. The monarchy was finished: Germany was now a **republic**. On 11 November the German government signed an armistice with Germany's enemies: the war was over.

### republic

A country which has an elected leader, not a king or queen.



Source 1: Kaiser Wilhelm II

The impact of the First World War on Germany was far-reaching:

- The Kaiser's government had collapsed.
- Over 2 million Germans had died.
- Germany was close to bankruptcy as the war had lasted far longer than most people had expected.
- There were serious food shortages.
- There were serious political divisions between socialists, **communists** and other left-wing groups on the one hand and other political groups on the right wing. These divisions often led to violent protest in the new German republic. Historians use shorthand terms like left-wing or **right-wing** to classify political groups or political parties.

### communism

movement or political party based on the theories of Karl Marx that aims at abolishing all private property and putting land and business in the ownership of the community or government

### left-wing

Shorthand for radical or socialist ideas.

### right-wing

Generally shorthand for conservative ideas or wanting to keep existing institutions.

### Key learning points: Germany before 1919

- Germany's government before and during most of the First World War was headed by the Kaiser.
- Germany was a powerful industrial and military state in 1914.
- Political parties had very different ideas about how Germany should be governed after the First World War.
- There were considerable differences between left-wing and right-wing political groups and parties.
- The First World War ended with Germany becoming a republic.

## 2. The impact of the First World War on Germany's government

### *The establishment of the Weimar Republic*

The new government decided to hold elections for a new Reichstag in January 1919. This was a time of serious violence on the streets of Berlin; there was an attempted communist uprising, inspired by the Russian revolution. It was decided, as a result, that it would be safer for the new Reichstag to meet in the city of Weimar. This city therefore gave its name to the new government of Germany, even after the Reichstag had returned to Berlin. The new **constitution** was created by August 1919 and was called the Weimar constitution. It made Germany one of the most advanced **democratic** countries in the world. Afterwards Germany's new government was known as the Weimar Republic.

#### **constitution**

A set of rules setting out how a country should be governed

#### **democracy**

The whole voting population takes part in elections; government by the people.

### *The Weimar constitution*

The key points of the new constitution were:

- All German men and women over the age of 20 were given the vote. This was a considerable change as before only men over 25 could vote.

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- The Reichstag was given the right to make laws and control the government.
- The Reichstag was to be elected by **proportional representation** (each party would receive a number of seats in proportion to its total vote, so if a party won 20 per cent of the vote it would get 20 per cent of the seats).
- Power was to be shared in the new constitution between the President and the Chancellor. The head of the government was to be the Chancellor who needed support from over half of the Reichstag.
- The head of the country was to be the President who was elected every seven years by the German people. The President had control of the armed forces and the power to dismiss the Reichstag and hold new elections. The President also had power in an exceptional emergency, under Article 48 of the constitution, to suspend the constitution and rule on his own.

**proportional representation**  
System in which political parties gain seats in proportion to the **total** number votes cast for them.

Although these were important changes in the way Germany was now governed there were also some problems with the new constitution:

- The system of proportional representation could result in no political party having a majority of seats in the Reichstag. Governments often had to be made up of several parties – these were called **coalitions**. Although this could work well, when there were serious problems coalition partners could disagree about what to do and leave the government. This led to weak, unstable government at crucial times.
- When coalitions broke or could not be formed, the only person who could govern effectively was the President and this resulted in democratic government being suspended under Article 48. Germany's first president, Ebert, used Article 48 on 136 separate occasions and many Germans worried that this excessive use was a threat to democracy.
- Not all Germans welcomed the new constitution. There were left-wing opponents, such as the communists, who believed that the Weimar government was too moderate and not left-wing enough. On the right wing

**coalition government**  
A government of two or more political parties.

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there were political parties who wanted to see the return of the Kaiser and stronger government than the Weimar government could provide.

- Democracy of the sort provided by the Weimar constitution was new for Germany. There was little experience of the practice of democratic government before 1919.

### *The January 1919 elections to the Reichstag*

The results of the 1919 elections showed that Germany had a variety of political parties. It was a country divided by class, politics and religion.

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF SEATS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF VOTES</b>	<b>% VOTES</b>
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (Socialists)	163	11.5 million	38
CENTRE PARTY	91	6 million	20
DEMOCRATIC PARTY	75	5.5 million	19
NATIONAL PARTY	44	3 million	10
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PARTY	22	2.25 million	8
GERMAN PEOPLE'S PARTY	19	1 million	4
COMMUNIST PARTY	0	0	0

The German Communist Party had abstained from taking part in the 1919 election. It believed in revolution and thought that the political parties in Germany were too moderate and not supportive of the industrial working classes.

The largest of the parties was the Social Democratic Party which was made up of socialists and reformers with the support of the working class and trade unions.

The Independent Socialists had broken away from the

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Social Democrats during the war as its members had been opposed to Germany's participation in the First World War. Most of them later joined the Communist Party.

The Centre Party was a party based on the Roman Catholic religion. Originally it had been formed to protect Roman Catholics from persecution but now had support from Roman Catholics from all parts of German society. The party supported the new republic but often disagreed with socialist ideas.

The Democratic Party was slightly smaller and it was prepared to introduce moderate reforms. It was a party that was largely supported by the German middle classes.

The National Party and the People's Party were opposed to the Weimar Republic and most of their supporters wanted to restore the monarchy. They were strongly anti-socialist and anti-communist. The National Party was strongly supported by the rich landowners and industrialists who were afraid of communism and socialism.

As no single party had an overall majority, the Weimar Republic's first government was a coalition of Social Democrats, the Centre Party and the Democratic Party.

The new government had to deal with very serious problems straight away:

- violent protests from both left-wing and right-wing political groups;
- a very unpopular peace treaty (the Treaty of Versailles) which ended the First World War;
- a massive economic crisis which was to destroy the German currency and bring ruin to Germans who lost savings and saw the value of their wages fall dramatically.

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Source 2: Children making a pyramid of banknotes

### Reactions to the Treaty of Versailles

Although Germany agreed to the **armistice** of November 1918 which ended the fighting of the First World War, the peace treaty was mainly decided by the victorious Allies (Britain, France and the USA). Germany was in no position to resist the Allies as its army had been defeated and its economy was weak. The terms of the treaty were drawn up in a former royal palace at Versailles, near Paris.

The German government was not allowed to take part in the negotiations at Versailles and it was presented with a dictated peace (a **Diktat**), which meant that the German government had either to take the terms on offer or to refuse them and face the war starting again. Many Germans were outraged as they had agreed to the armistice in the hope that any peace would be based on the **Fourteen Points**, put forward early in 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson of the USA, as a plan to end the war. For example, Germans had hoped that they would be given the right to **self-determination**. This had been an important part of the Fourteen Points and Germans now felt betrayed as they were not given this right.

#### armistice

A truce; the end of fighting in a war.

#### Diktat

German word for a dictated peace.

#### Fourteen Points

Peace plan proposed by US President, Woodrow Wilson, in January 1918.

#### self-determination

Process by which a country gains independence, decides its own future and runs its own affairs

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The terms of the treaty came not only as a shock but also as a huge blow to German expectations. Many had expected that, by removing the Kaiser and setting up a modern democratic government, Germany would be treated fairly and leniently by the Allies. A wave of protest followed the publication of the terms of the treaty. The army commanders made it clear to the government that further military operations would be a disaster and there was no choice but to accept the terms of the treaty. The majority of Germans felt bitter resentment at the terms and the new government was widely criticised for agreeing to them. The republic had got off to the worst possible start. Many Germans believed that they had been ‘stabbed in the back’ by politicians who signed the unpopular treaty.



Map of Versailles Treaty

The main terms of the treaty were:

### **War guilt**

Under Article 231 of the treaty, Germany was forced to accept complete responsibility for causing the First World War. The main reason for this clause was so that the allies could justify making Germany pay for the war (**reparations**).

**reparations**  
Payment or  
compensation for war  
damage

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### **Reparations**

Germany had to pay for the damage caused by the war. The payments to the allies totalled £6,600 million.

### **Loss of land**

Germany was to lose 10 per cent of its population and 13 per cent of its territory, including valuable areas of coal, iron and steel production. For example, the Saar region, rich in coal, was given to France for 15 years, after which the inhabitants would vote on which country to belong to. Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, Belgium gained Eupen and Malmedy, Denmark gained northern Schleswig, Upper Silesia was given to Poland, which was also given a portion of German land called the Polish corridor so that the new country of Poland had access to the Baltic Sea. Germany also lost all its overseas colonies.

One of the most damaging terms, which Germans saw as a great betrayal of the idea of self-determination, was a ban on the idea of **Anschluss**, the union of Germany and Austria.

**Anschluss**  
Unification of Germany  
with Austria

### **Military terms**

These terms were severe and a blow to the prestige of a country which had previously had a powerful army and navy. The army was reduced in size to 100,000 volunteers. The navy was reduced to six old battleships, six light cruisers and a few smaller craft. There were to be no submarines. Germany was not allowed to have an air force.

The Rhineland, an important area of western Germany, was demilitarised which meant that no German soldiers were allowed within 50 kilometres of the right bank of the River Rhine. The allies were to occupy the zone for 15 years.

It was not only the right-wing parties that were humiliated by this treaty; opposition to it was widespread. The Weimar Republic was always going to be linked to defeat and humiliation. The army could now, however, claim that it

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was all the politicians' fault: those who had signed the armistice in November 1918 were frequently referred to as the 'November Criminals'.

### Key Learning Points: The impact of the First World War on Germany's government

- The idea of a constitution.
- The idea of democracy.
- The new Weimar constitution.
- Proportional representation.
- Germany had several important political parties.
- Many governments in Germany in the 1920s were unstable coalition governments.
- The terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
- The war guilt clause.
- Reparations.
- The unpopularity of the Treaty of Versailles.

## 3. Challenges to the Weimar Republic

### *Opposition to the new government*

The first important threat came from the German Communist Party. To begin with, it called itself the Spartacus League (named after Spartacus, a Roman who had led a revolt of slaves against Rome in 71BC), and its members were known as Spartacists. They were communists who believed in violent revolution to seize power for the working classes. The leaders of the communists were Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. They opposed the new republic and in January 1919 led a revolt in Berlin. Similar revolts took place in other German cities and in Bavaria Dr Kurt Eisner, an independent socialist, also led an uprising. The recent communist revolution in Russia caused enormous fear with its violence, confiscation of property and threats to spread revolution throughout the world.

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Ebert's government acted quickly to end these revolts. With the help of the army, volunteers were recruited and trained to attack the communists. The recruits were mostly war veterans and junior army officers, who were violently anti-communist. They were known as the **Freikorps** (Free Corps). In Berlin the *Freikorps* put down the Spartacist revolt with brutality – Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were killed along with thousands of others. In Bavaria the *Freikorps* restored order with similar violence. A further communist uprising in Berlin in 1920 was also destroyed by the *Freikorps*. One result of this violence was to ensure that in the future the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party would never cooperate because of the bitterness and bloodshed of 1919–20.

**Freikorps**  
Armed volunteer units,  
fiercely anti-communist.

The other major threat to the Weimar Republic came from right-wing Germans, many of whom were used to violence, having been members of the *Freikorps*. They bitterly resented the Treaty of Versailles, blamed the Weimar Republic for the humiliation of the treaty and were strongly opposed to socialism and democracy. In 1920 rebel members of the *Freikorps* under Dr Wolfgang Kapp disobeyed the government's order to disband and tried to seize power in Berlin. Although badly organised, Kapp's supporters did manage to seize power for four days and Ebert's government fled Berlin. The army was reluctant to deal with many of its ex-members but in the end a general strike of workers in Berlin and the refusal of civil servants to obey Dr Kapp destroyed the so-called 'Kapp **Putsch**'. The leniency with which those involved in the Kapp Putsch were punished and the lack of full support from the army for the new Weimar Republic were important signs of weakness in the new republic.

**putsch**  
Violent attempt  
to overthrow a  
government.

Although the *Freikorps* units were broken up after the Kapp Putsch, some of their members formed assassination squads to murder politicians with whom they disagreed. Matthias Erzberger, a prominent social democrat, and Walter Rathenau, the Foreign Minister, were murdered in 1921 and 1922 respectively for supporting the Treaty of Versailles.

### *Economic problems*

As a result of the First World War Germany already had serious debts. The Treaty of Versailles affected Germany's industrial output with the loss of many valuable areas where iron and coal were mined. This made recovery and the payment of reparations even more difficult. Fatally, the government decided to print more money to pay off debts. As a result, the value of the German currency began to fall and Germany fell behind with her reparations payments. In January 1923, France reacted by sending troops into the Ruhr, the main industrial area of Germany, so that they could take the coal for themselves. The German workers in the Ruhr were ordered to strike by the German government and more money was printed to pay their wages. Inflation spiralled out of control – this is called **hyperinflation** – and an already weakened German economy collapsed. Here is an example of how the price of a basic food, bread, was affected:

**hyperinflation**  
Very high rates of price and wage inflation.

Year	Price of a loaf of bread
1918	0.6 mark
Jan 1923	250 marks
Sept 1923	1.5 million marks
Nov 1923	201 million marks

The experience of hyperinflation was terrifying. The savings of German people became worthless and wages lost all value. Starvation and malnutrition were common. Only the most wealthy who owned land escaped the misery as the price of land kept pace with prices. The political effect of this was that Germans lost faith in the Weimar Republic which became very unpopular. Many Germans now turned to more extreme political parties to provide solutions to Germany's problems.

### *The Munich Putsch, 1923*

Adolf Hitler was the son of an Austrian customs official. Before the First World War his attempt to train as an artist came to nothing and he experienced poverty and hardship in pre-war Vienna. Serving in the German army in the First World War changed his life: he won medals for bravery (the Iron Cross) and was selected by the army after the war to take part in a propaganda unit to prevent the spread of communism in the army. The army had recognised his gift for persuasive public speaking. Like many veterans he was horrified by the armistice of 1918 and the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

As a result of his work in the propaganda unit Hitler became involved in right-wing politics. In 1919 Anton Drexler had founded the German Workers' Party, a nationalist party for the working classes. The party had a shortened name by which it became better known – the Nazi Party. It was not long before Hitler took over control of the party himself and Drexler was removed in 1921.

The party wanted to overturn the Treaty of Versailles and unite all German-speaking people, especially those in lands lost by treaty, in a greater Germany. The party was openly racist and **anti-Semitic**. Under Hitler's leadership the party became more violent and intimidating: a **paramilitary unit** was set up, called the **SA**, to protect the party's meetings and disrupt those of other parties, especially left-wing parties. A young air force hero, Hermann Goering, became the first leader of the SA or 'Brownshirts' as they were commonly known. A law unto themselves, the SA attacked all who might oppose the Nazis and quickly gained a reputation for thuggery and menacing behaviour. The Nazi emblem was the swastika.

By 1923 the occupation of the Ruhr and the hyperinflation had created a crisis atmosphere in Germany. Hitler believed the moment was right to attempt to seize power by launching a revolution in Bavaria, in its capital Munich. Hitler hoped that the right-wing government of Bavaria

#### **anti-Semitism**

Hatred and persecution of Jews.

#### **paramilitary**

An organisation which is run on lines similar to the armed forces.

#### **SA**

'Storm troopers' also known as Brownshirts, the paramilitary unit of the Nazi Party

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could be persuaded to join him. Hitler was supported by General Ludendorff, one of Germany's war heroes, and on 8 November 1923 Hitler and the SA surprised a meeting of the Bavarian government in Munich by striding into the meeting, firing a pistol into the ceiling and bullying the Bavarian leaders into joining what Hitler called 'a national revolution'. The attempted putsch quickly lost support in Munich and a march headed by Hitler and Ludendorff was fired on by police: 16 people were killed. Hitler and Ludendorff were put on trial for treason. The trial was an opportunity for Hitler to make himself well known throughout Germany by making long speeches which were then reported in newspapers. The trial proved to be a superb propaganda platform for Hitler. In the end Ludendorff was acquitted, much to his disgust, and Hitler was given the comparatively light sentence of 5 years' imprisonment. In Landsberg prison, Hitler used the opportunity to write his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) which set out his main ideas. His good behaviour in prison persuaded the Bavarian government to release him after only nine months. Hitler now had to rethink his strategy to gain power; he realised after the experience in Munich he could not just rely on violence to obtain it.



**Source 3: Nazi Stormtroopers outside Munich City Hall, November 1923**

#### 4. The golden years of the late 1920s

Although Germany's economy was in a desperate state in 1923, it started to recover in the next few years mainly due to the policies of Gustav Stresemann. He became Chancellor of Germany for a few months in 1923 and was Foreign Minister until 1929. So successful were his policies that this period is often known as the 'the Golden Years of the Weimar Republic'. His policies will be looked at in more detail in later sections ([Part 2, page 2](#)) but Stresemann's work ensured that:

- Germany was allowed to enter into and make agreements with other countries to make payment of reparations easier and to settle some differences.
- Germany's currency was replaced to stop the ruinous hyperinflation.
- Germany was allowed to join the League of Nations.
- Germany's economy recovered well between 1924 and 1929.



**Source 4: Gustav Stresemann, German Foreign Minister**

As a result of Stresemann's success, the Weimar Republic enjoyed a period of political stability in which

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coalition governments lasted longer and more extreme political parties like the Nazis did less well in elections. Stresemann's premature death and the start of the Great Depression in 1929 effectively ended this period of prosperity and stability.

### Key Learning Points: Challenges to the Weimar Republic and the golden years

- The Spartacist uprising, brutally put down by the Freikorps.
- The division between social democrats and communists.
- The spread of right-wing ideas and violence.
- The failure of the Kapp Putsch.
- The causes of hyperinflation and its effects.
- The rise of Adolf Hitler.
- The failure of the Nazi attempt to seize power in Munich.

## 5. Rise of Hitler and the Nazi party

### *Impact of the Great Depression*

After his release from prison Adolf Hitler had to re-establish control over the Nazi Party and reorganise his party's structure:

- Hitler was recognised as undisputed party leader who required complete obedience to his orders.
- The Nazi Party was reorganised on a regional basis with each branch (*Gau*) placed under the control of a party leader (*Gauleiter*).
- The Hitler Youth movement was set up in 1926 to attract support from the young.
- The SA was reorganised and a smaller unit, the SS, was introduced to provide personal protection for Hitler.
- An able propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, was made *Gauleiter* of Berlin, an important development.
- The Nazis made a huge effort to improve their performance in elections, although street violence, organised by the SA, was still common.

#### **depression**

a severe decline in a nation's economy, with low production and high unemployment

#### **SS**

Originally Hitler's private bodyguard, but which eventually grew to have very wide-ranging powers

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In spite of all this effort, the performance of the Nazi Party in elections can only be described as disappointing. The party only won 19 seats in the Reichstag election in December 1924 and 17 in 1928. Now a severe economic and political crisis was dramatically to change Adolf Hitler's fortunes and those of the Nazi Party. In October 1929 the **Wall Street Crash** shattered the economy of the USA and plunged the world into economic depression.

**Wall Street Crash**  
Panic selling of stocks and shares in the New York Stock Exchange leading to a collapse of prices and profits

Germany's economic recovery in the 1920s had been dependent upon foreign loans, mainly from the USA. It had also been dependent on trade with the rest of the world. Even before the Wall Street Crash some of the loans had ended when investors began to have doubts about how strong Germany's recovery had been. As a result, unemployment began to rise in 1929. The Wall Street Crash and Stresemann's death came as an additional and fatal double blow to confidence in the economy. Without financial support from other countries, especially the USA, German industry and agriculture cut back on their production and more workers were sacked. This added to the unemployment figures which climbed to 3.5 million in 1930, over 5 million in 1931 and a staggering 6 million in 1932.

In these circumstances support for the Communist Party and the Nazi Party increased as, one after another, the Weimar governments were increasingly blamed for Germany's situation. In 1930 the Communist Party won 77 seats and the Nazis 107. In July 1932 the Communists won 89 seats and the Nazis 230. By July 1932, therefore, the Nazi Party was the single largest party in the Reichstag.

The German Chancellor, Brüning, was head of the Centre Party and leader of a coalition with the Social Democratic Party. The government, faced with the growing threat of bankruptcy, could not agree on economic measures. Brüning wanted to cut government spending on unemployment and welfare benefits. The Social Democrats would not agree and withdrew from the government.

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President Hindenburg decided in this crisis situation that, under article 48 of the constitution, the Brüning government could rule by emergency decree as it had no majority and the economic situation was serious. This was deeply unpopular and showed that Germany was no longer a true democracy.



**Source 5: Hitler bows to Reich President von Hindenburg**

Hitler's position was now very strong and he challenged President Hindenburg in the 1932 presidential election, coming a respectable second with 13,400,000 votes to Hindenburg's 19,400,000 votes. As leader of the single largest party in the Reichstag Adolf Hitler had made an enormous political comeback in less than nine years. Why were Hitler and the Nazis so apparently successful?

- Adolf Hitler's own political ability has to be recognised. Although a deeply unattractive personality, he had the ability to speak with passion and connect with the fears and beliefs of many Germans. In particular he could play on the fear of unemployment, outrage at the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, and the terror of communism and economic disaster.
- His ability to hold an audience, to seize opportunities and exploit the difficulties of the Weimar governments were key factors in his success. He had masterminded the

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growth of the Nazi Party from one of the smallest in the Reichstag in 1924 to the largest by 1932.

- The Nazi Party made huge gains with those Germans who resented the unpopular Versailles settlement and had suffered in the hyperinflation of the early 1920s and the onset of the Great Depression of 1929. It was enough to make the party the single largest party by 1932.
- The SA's violent campaigning was on a truly massive scale and did much to intimidate Hitler's opponents.
- Successive Weimar governments could not provide solutions that were acceptable in the 1930s. Stresemann had provided a few years of stability in the 1920s but for the rest of the time the governments could not provide the stability necessary to deal with Germany's economic problems. In the end Brüning's government in the 1930s resorted to ruling by emergency decree, which was hardly a vote of confidence in democracy.
- Germany's more moderate political parties were damaged beyond repair by the experience of economic catastrophe and the popularity of the more extreme parties.
- The Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were hopelessly divided because of earlier events. Together they outnumbered the Nazis in the November 1932 elections 241 to 196, but they would not cooperate with each other.

### *Hitler becomes Chancellor*

The generals who commanded the German army had become very worried about the crisis and had supported President Hindenburg's use of emergency powers after 1930 in an attempt to provide some sort of order in a Germany suffering from severe economic problems and political instability. The leading general who was very influential was Kurt von Schleicher and he was to play a key role in Hitler's rise to power.

Von Schleicher thought that he and the army could put together a deal with Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1932

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which would provide Germany with a new and strong government. Von Schleicher had fallen out with Franz von Papen, a rival right-wing politician who had been made Chancellor by Hindenburg in June 1932.

Much of what happened next is explained by the rivalry between von Schleicher and von Papen. Von Schleicher briefly became Chancellor in December 1932 but was dismissed by Hindenburg who was persuaded by von Papen to consider a von Papen/Hitler government. This took some doing as Hindenburg did not like Hitler and was appalled by the violence and intimidation of the SA. In the end the elderly Hindenburg was persuaded that if Hitler was made Chancellor (as leader of the largest party – even after a slight fall in the number of seats in the November 1932 election), von Papen as Vice-Chancellor would be able to control and moderate Hitler's policies. In the government of twelve ministers, only three were Nazis. The calculations of von Papen and Hindenburg were to prove catastrophically wrong. Hitler had played his cards well in all of these negotiations, refusing to consider any coalition unless he was Chancellor. On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. The government he led was a coalition and one of his first tasks was to rid himself of his coalition partners. He decided to call new elections to the Reichstag in 1933 so that he could govern with a clear majority.

### Key Learning Points: Rise of Hitler and the Nazi party

- Hitler's new ideas about winning elections.
- The impact of the Wall Street Crash 1929 and the Great Depression.
- Reasons why Hitler and the Nazi Party were popular.
- Intrigues between generals and politicians failed to bring the Nazi Party under control and led to Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany.

## 6. How Germany was turned into a dictatorship

### *The 1933 election campaign*

The campaign proved to be violent and the Nazi Party also used its position in government to hinder its opponents. Communists were not allowed to demonstrate and their newspapers were restricted. The SA terrorised left-wing opponents and Hitler's Nazi colleague, Hermann Goering, now controlled most of the police forces in Germany as a minister in the new government. As many as 50,000 members of the SA were drafted in as additional police officers. There were over 2 million Brownshirts by 1933, and violence towards and intimidation of the opponents of the Nazis were common.

The most spectacular event of the election campaign, however, came on 27 February when the Reichstag building in Berlin caught fire and was severely damaged. The Nazis claimed that Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch communist, was responsible. Hitler seized the chance to blame all left wingers for the fire and persuaded President Hindenburg to issue an emergency decree which suspended basic rights such as freedom of speech, prevented the Communist Party from campaigning, closed the Social Democratic Party's newspapers and gave the police (now controlled by the Nazis) the right to arrest anyone without a fixed trial. Once again the emergency decree element of the Weimar constitution played a key role in undermining the rule of law and the chances of fair and free elections.

The voting on 5 March 1933 gave the following results:

#### **dictatorship**

Government by a ruler with absolute or complete authority over a state

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## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

	Votes	Seats
Communist Party	4.8 million	81
Social Democratic Party	7.2 million	120
Centre Party	5.5 million	92
National Party	3.1 million	52
Nazi Party	17.3 million	288
Others	1.4 million	14

Although the Nazis were clearly the largest party, the campaign of intimidation and violence plus all the emergency measures still had not given Hitler the decisive outright majority he wanted. Hitler, however, had two advantages:

- He used the emergency decrees to ban the elected Communist Party members from taking their seats in the Reichstag.
- He made a deal with the Centre Party and the National Party to gain a working majority in the Reichstag. The Centre Party was afraid that unless it made a deal with Hitler, the Catholics in Germany would be threatened by the Nazis.

Hitler now used this majority to make the Reichstag pass a new law, the Enabling Act, which would give him the power to make laws without the approval of the Reichstag for four years. The SA and SS were on hand to ensure that Reichstag members voted Hitler's way in their temporary building, the Kroll Opera House. The Enabling Act was passed by 441 votes to 94 in March 1933.

From now on Hitler and his ministers could rule by decree, using President Hindenburg as a rubber stamp. The experiment with democracy in Germany was over: Hitler was to use his emergency powers in the next few months to crush opposition to his rule and to ensure that Germany became a one-party state. Although the vote in the Kroll Opera House was technically legal, in reality violence,

intimidation and rule by emergency decree had destroyed the Weimar constitution.

### ***The Night of the Long Knives 1934***

The SA had played a major role in the Nazi climb to power. Its leader Ernst Röhm wanted to make more of the socialist part of the Nazi Party's programme by nationalising Germany's industries. Hitler had never been very interested in this and now that he was in power he was suspicious of the power and influence of the SA. He was also worried that Röhm had plans to merge the German army with the SA. Not surprisingly the German generals were anxious to get rid of the SA, and Hitler had already decided that he needed the support of the army more than he needed the support of the SA. Some of Hitler's closest allies, Hermann Goering and Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS, were also very jealous of Röhm's influence and persuaded Hitler that the SA needed to be destroyed.

On the night of 30 June 1934, on Hitler's instructions, the SS moved swiftly against the leaders of the SA. Hundreds were murdered, including Ernst Röhm, in a brutal attack. Hitler took the opportunity to remove other potential rivals like General Schleicher, who was also murdered that night which became known as 'The Night of the Long Knives'. The Brownshirts or SA were now replaced by Himmler's SS, which became even more powerful. The army was also pleased at the outcome of 'The Night of the Long Knives' and supported Hitler. The events of 30 June 1934 sent shock waves around the world; it was now realised that the ruthless new leadership of Germany had no qualms about murdering its opponents.

### ***Hitler becomes Führer***

A few months after this, in August 1934, the elderly President Hindenburg died. Hitler had a law passed which made him not only Chancellor but also President in the new single position of Führer (leader). This allowed him to become supreme commander of the armed forces.

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## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

On 19 August all members of the armed forces had to swear a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler as Führer. All government officials soon had to do so as well. Hitler was to rule simply by issuing Führer decrees: Germany was now a total dictatorship.

### *Methods of political control*

The Nazi dictatorship was based on:

- full power being in the hands of Hitler, as Führer, who ruled Germany by decree;
- only one political party being allowed (the Nazi Party);
- the lives of German people being controlled by an organised police state and an effective propaganda machine.

### ***Gleichschaltung***

An important part of the dictatorship was a process known as ***Gleichschaltung*** (coordination). This meant that the concentration of power in Berlin was in the hands of the Nazi Party:

- Regional governments were abolished, except in Prussia.
- All political parties except the Nazis were banned in a law passed in 1933.
- Trade unions were destroyed.
- Civil servants, lawyers and teachers were ‘coordinated’, ensuring that most were loyal to the Nazi Party.
- Boys from the age of ten were pressured to join the German Young People (Deutsches Jungvolk) and then at the age of fourteen the Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend), and all other boys’ organisations were banned;
- similar organisations were set up for girls, young men aged 18 to 25, industrial workers and farmers.

So within months of becoming Führer, Hitler had managed to control or heavily influence most of the key organisations in German government and society.

### **Gleichschaltung**

The process of unifying Germany under Nazi rule

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

### ***The police state***

The destruction of the SA in the 'Night of the Long Knives' saw the SS become a vital part of Hitler's dictatorship. Originally a bodyguard for the Nazi leaders, by 1934 it had become a powerful force in its own right under Heinrich Himmler. Now that the SA was destroyed, Himmler's SS took over all of Germany's police forces.

The police were split into two groups under Himmler: the ordinary police force and the political police, which included the **Gestapo**, under the command of Reinhard Heydrich. Between them Himmler and Heydrich controlled a vast security operation which dealt ruthlessly with any opposition to the Nazi dictatorship. The Gestapo had the power to arrest people without trial and put people into what they called 'protective custody'. What this really meant was putting people into specially organised '**concentration camps**'. There were 18 of these to start with, organised by the SS. These were known as 'Death's Head units' and the treatment of prisoners was brutal. Many of the first inmates of the concentration camps were political opponents of the Nazis, such as communists and social democrats. Later, the concentration camps were to be used to put into practice Hitler's policies towards the Jews and other groups whom the Nazis hated.

### **Gestapo**

The secret state police set up in 1933 by Goering, and supervised by Reinhard Heydrich

### **concentration camp**

To start with, a secure camp for political prisoners.



**Source 6: The first concentration camp, 1933**

### ***Propaganda***

The Nazi dictatorship relied on propaganda to influence the way German people thought. This was organised by Hitler's propaganda minister, Dr Josef Goebbels.

Goebbels set up the Reich Chamber of Culture in 1933 to check everyone who wanted to work in newspapers, film, radio, art, literature, theatre and music. Obviously only those who were Nazis or sympathetic to Nazism were allowed to work in these areas.

Radio stations were of great importance and by 1939 the majority of German families had a radio. Radios were placed in workplaces so that important messages could be heard during working hours. There were more radios per head of population in Germany than in any other country. Goebbels made sure the Nazi message was constantly put out on the radio and Hitler was also a frequent speaker on the radio.

A Nazi press agency controlled the news and any newspapers opposed to the Nazis were quickly closed down.

Books were censored on a massive scale – the works of over 2,500 writers were banned. It was quite common for Nazi supporters to ransack libraries and burn banned books on large bonfires in the streets.

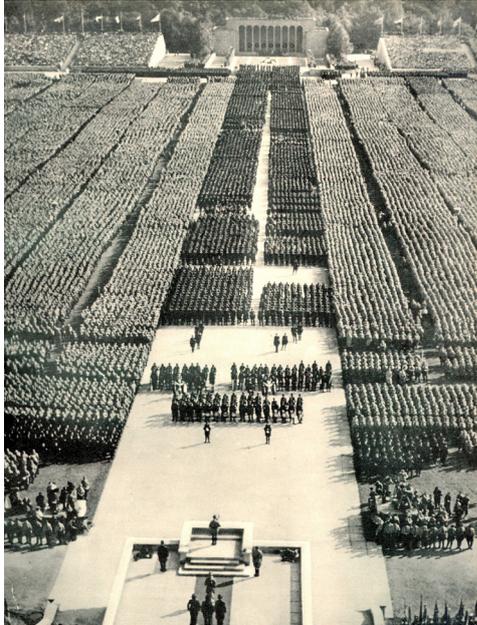
Goebbels allowed the film industry to make comedies and adventure films which were very popular, but he also made sure that political films made the Nazi message clear. One of the most famous of these films was *Hitlerjunge Quex* about a youth who ran away from his communist family to join the Hitler Youth and was later murdered by the communists.

Another very powerful form of propaganda used by the Nazis was the rally. The most spectacular of these public displays of support for the Nazi dictatorship was the Nuremberg Rally – an annual event which took place in

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

a huge stadium housing over 100,000 people. Hitler also used the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin for propaganda purposes.



**Source 7: panoramic view of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg, September 1934**

This incessant exposure to propaganda had a huge impact on the way people thought about the Nazi government: the German people had few opportunities to see or hear an opposing point of view and the achievements of Hitler's government were constantly praised and put in the best possible light. Over 17 million German men were conscripted into the German armed forces during the Second World War and fought a huge Allied coalition with determination and loyalty to the German state – some measure of the success of Nazi propaganda and leadership.

### ***Economic development in Nazi Germany***

When the Nazis gained power they had no detailed plans for Germany's economic problems. Indeed Hitler was never much interested in economics and left it to others to work out the details of what he wanted. Hjalmar Schacht, the president of the Reichsbank, was given the task of

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

controlling the economy from 1934. He was a skilled financial expert and had some success in meeting Hitler's policy demands. These demands were:

- to reduce unemployment;
- to expand and rearm Germany's army, navy and air force;
- to make Germany self-sufficient (this is sometimes called autarky) and not too dependent on foreign trade. Hitler was haunted by the memory of the effect of the blockade of Germany during the First World War.

Schacht's policies did bring unemployment down. Public works like the construction of the *Autobahnen* (motorways), generous marriage bonuses which were given to keep women at home and free up jobs for men, the thousands employed by the Nazi Party and government, and the drive to rearmament all helped to bring down the numbers of unemployed from six million in 1933 to one million by 1935. The Nazis had also destroyed the trade union movement which was replaced by a Nazi-controlled Labour Front headed by Dr Ley. This made sure not only that workers were disciplined but also that wages were kept low.



**Source 8: Hitler digging the first spade of earth for the motorway system in 1933**

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

In 1936 Hitler put Hermann Goering in charge of a Four Year Plan to make Germany self-sufficient; Schacht's cautious economic policy was now rejected by Hitler who wanted faster progress on rearmament and autarky. The plan was not successful and, in 1939, Germany was still importing one-third of her raw materials. One of Hitler's main aims in his secret instructions to Goering was to have the armed forces and economy ready for war within four years. Germany's economic policy was to have a major influence on its increasingly aggressive foreign policy, as will be seen in a later section.

### Key Learning Points: How Germany was turned into a dictatorship

- The Nazis use of intimidation to increase their vote share in the 1933 election campaign.
- The Reichstag Fire and its effect on the 1933 election.
- The Enabling Bill giving Hitler the powers of a dictator.
- The SA destroyed in the 'Night of the Long Knives'.
- Coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) destroys opposition to the Nazis.
- The SS was an important part of Hitler's dictatorship and becomes a powerful organisation.
- The media was totally controlled by the Nazis.
- The Nazis wanted Germany to be economically self-sufficient.

## 7. The impact of The Second World War on the government of Germany

### *The Yalta and Potsdam Conferences 1945*

By the spring of 1945 it was clear that Germany would be defeated and the Allied powers had to decide what would happen to Germany after the war. In February 1945 the leaders of the USA (Roosevelt), USSR (Stalin) and Britain (Churchill) met in a conference at Yalta to decide. They reached agreement on the following points:

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

- Germany and Austria would be divided into four zones of occupation: Russia would control the east, Britain the north, USA and France the south and west. Special arrangements were made for Berlin – all the Allies were given a sector of Berlin to control although it was in the middle of the Russian zone of occupation.
- Those responsible for war crimes would be put on trial.
- New borders would be created for Poland.



**Source 9: The 'Big Three' at Yalta**

The Allied leaders met again at Potsdam in July 1945 after Germany had surrendered. It was agreed that at some point the occupation would end, when it was decided that Germans could govern themselves again. Then there would be a final peace treaty between Germany and the Allies. It was agreed that Germans living in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary would be moved back to Germany.

As a result of the end of the war and the redrawing of the eastern frontier there were expulsions of Germans from east European countries on a massive scale: some estimates place the number of Germans killed at over half a million. The transfers were not conducted in the humane manner agreed at Potsdam. By October 1946, 9.5 million Germans had been forced to leave eastern Europe and return to Germany.

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

During 1945–6 the Allies cooperated to put the main Nazi leaders on trial for war crimes. Twenty-two Nazis were tried at Nuremberg: eleven, including Hermann Goering, were sentenced to death, seven were jailed and three found not guilty.

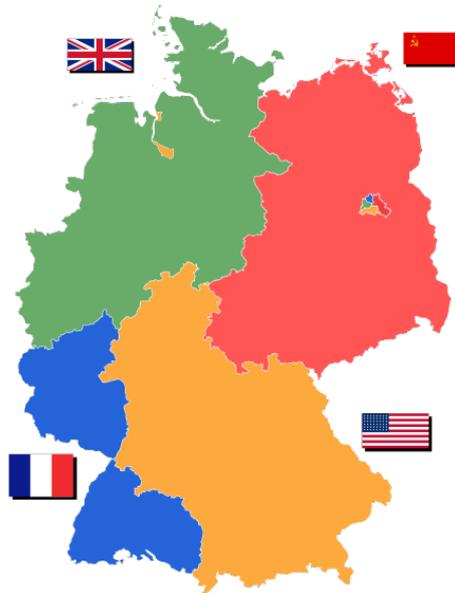
### *The division of Germany*

Quarrels between the USA and Britain on one side and the USSR on the other meant that the plans for Germany changed dramatically. The threat of atomic weapons, the USSR's reluctance to hold free elections in the east European countries and western fear of communism all contributed to a climate of suspicion and lack of trust.

Britain, France and the USA decided that it was in their interests to revive the economy of the German areas they occupied. In 1947 the American and British zones were united into a single economic unit called Bizonia. They also introduced a new currency called the Deutschmark. The leader of the USSR, Stalin, viewed these developments with mounting horror and regarded them as breaking the promises made at Potsdam. This led to the blockade of Berlin and the Berlin airlift in 1948 which will be looked at in (Part 3, page 29). Following these events, the western Allies (Britain, USA and France) jointly made arrangements for their combined zones separately from the Russian-controlled zone. Germany was divided into two parts which would last for over 40 years.

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany



Source 10: Map of Germany Divided

### *The Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic*

The western powers decided to form a new country out of their three zones in 1949. This country would still be under occupation but would have extensive powers of self-government. A revived West German economy was seen as a useful barrier against the spread of communism. The new country would be called the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), with Bonn as its capital.

- A federal structure was adopted to avoid any danger of dictatorship. The new country was divided into eleven **Länder** which would be represented in a new Federal Parliament in Bonn.
- The Parliament would have two sections. A lower house called the **Bundestag** would be directly elected by the people. The upper house was the **Bundesrat** which would contain representatives of the eleven Länder.
- The main political leader would be the Chancellor who was elected by the **Bundestag**. The Chancellor was given stronger powers than in the Weimar Republic, such as the right to choose ministers.
- There would be a President who was to be elected for

#### **federal**

A government system in which power is divided between a central government and regional governments

#### **FRG**

Federal Republic of Germany; West Germany, 1949–90

#### **Länder**

Provinces or regions

#### **Bundestag**

The lower house of the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

five years and would only be allowed to stand once for this office. The President would not be allowed to control the armed forces and would have no power to declare a state of emergency or appoint and dismiss chancellors. These were very important changes from the Weimar constitution.

Meanwhile, the USSR made arrangements for its zone in the east to become a separate country which was called the German Democratic Republic (**GDR**). The USSR set up a one-party communist state there in 1949, led by Walter Ulbricht. East Berlin was the new capital. Opponents of the new government were arrested and imprisoned: old Nazi concentration camps were brought back into use for political prisoners. It has been estimated that at this time 120,000 people were put into these camps, over a third of whom died.

**GDR**  
German Democratic  
Republic; East  
Germany, 1949-90

Two very different political systems had been set up in the divided Germany: a communist, one-party state in the East (GDR), and a federal, democratic state with an elected Chancellor, President and Parliament in the west (FRG).

## 8. Developments in East and West Germany

### *The political systems of East and West Germany*

The German Democratic Republic in East Germany faced many problems. It had only one-third of the population of West Germany and its industrial output was barely 20 per cent that of West Germany. Poor living and working conditions encouraged thousands of Germans living in the GDR to move to the west. This movement made the shortage of skilled workers even worse and the economy did not prosper, especially as the USSR was still demanding reparations. Although the border was closed by the East German government in 1952, thousands still escaped through the free city of Berlin. In 1952 182,000 left for the west through that route.

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## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

The pressure on the East German government was shown in June 1953 when hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike, attacking Communist Party buildings and demanding free and secret elections. The Soviet army was called in to restore order: many thousands were arrested and it has been estimated that 125 people were killed. Although wages were increased, after this uprising the government took steps to double the size of its secret police force, the **Stasi**, to ensure that a similar protest would not occur. Many voted with their feet and in 1953 alone 408,000 people emigrated from East to West Germany. The one-party police state continued, with the Soviet army in reserve to ensure its safety.

### Stasi

The secret police in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany)

In West Germany the first Chancellor, from 1949 to 1963, was Konrad Adenauer. He intended to:

- restore the West German economy and repair the damage done by war;
- work for increased independence for West Germany and end the occupation by Allied military forces;
- restore democracy and denazify West Germany.

In nearly all these aims he was successful and the economic success of West Germany will be explained in the next section (**Part 2, page 26**). By 1955 Germany was part of **NATO**, and the Allied occupation had ended, although British, American and French forces remained on German soil as allies. A new German army, the **Bundeswehr**, was formed. A parliamentary democracy worked well, providing stable governments in the 1950s and 1960s. There was some criticism that ex-Nazi officers were employed in the army and intelligence services, and some posts in the civil service and judiciary were occupied by those who had served under Hitler. The Soviet Union in particular was critical of these appointments but the success of the West German economy and its democratic system overshadowed those criticisms.

### NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a military defence alliance

### Bundeswehr

The German army after the Second World War

The two main political parties in West Germany were

the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. The Christian Democrats were the main winners in the 1950s and 1960s but the Social Democrats became more electorally successful after rebranding themselves in 1959 so that they became more moderate and less left-wing. Nationalisation and radical socialism were rejected by the new Social Democratic Party.

There were extreme threats to the West German governments, notably some local success for the neo-Nazi party, the National Democratic Party, which began to win seats in local government, but it never became a major threat. The left-wing Baader–Meinhof terrorist gang threatened stability with bomb attacks, kidnapping and murders of leading politicians and businessmen. By the mid 1970s this threat had passed, especially after the government passed anti-terrorism laws.

### *Differences in economic development*

The industrial expansion of West Germany in the 1950s has sometimes been described as an ‘economic miracle’. This was because West Germany in the 1950s experienced:

- the highest annual growth rate in western Europe;
- full employment;
- high productivity;
- very low inflation.

Industry benefited from the latest technology to replace war damage. Investment from the Marshall Aid programme (\$1,300 million) provided a massive boost to the economy (**Part 2, page 28**). West Germany’s Economic Minister, Dr Ludwig Erhard, pursued policies that encouraged investment, research, a strong central bank and currency stability. The economy was also helped by demand from the Korean War (1950–3) for industrial equipment. Another factor which helped was a moderate trade union movement which tended to avoid strikes and worked with governments and employers to solve problems in a

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## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

mixed management model. The West German economy performed consistently strongly into the 1960s. There was a **recession** in 1967 but growth resumed in 1968 with the help of government loans and an agreement with unions to keep wages under control. Growth resumed, although, perhaps not surprisingly, it was never as high as in the 1950s.

**Recession**  
Temporary decline in economic activity.

By contrast, East Germany could not control the movement of refugees from east to west in search of higher living standards. Between 1949 and 1961 3.5 million East Germans had moved west. Compared with other east European countries, East Germany had reasonable employment and living standards, but they were a long way behind those of West Germany and the police state was very unpopular. By 1961 the East German government and the USSR decided they had to take action to prevent any more East Germans leaving through Berlin. It was decided to construct a wall through Berlin to prevent any more movement. The Berlin Wall was started in 1961 and caused tensions with the USA and the other western Allies. In the years that followed, 900 people were to die whilst trying to escape over the wall, most of them shot by East German border guards. Thousands more were arrested for trying to escape. The East German government strengthened its one-party police state even more in the 1960s, becoming one of the most repressive countries in Europe. The *Stasi* became even more powerful.

### **The ECSC and EEC**

The idea of a united western Europe became more popular as the division between east and west became more important. Chancellor Adenauer, in particular, saw great advantages for the new West Germany in a united Europe. European countries had become used to the idea of cooperation in 1948 with the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) which implemented the Marshall Plan.

In 1950 Jean Monnet, a leading French politician and

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

believer in western European cooperation, persuaded the foreign minister of France, Robert Schuman, to propose a plan for French and German co-production of coal, iron and steel. The plan was designed not only to make economic cooperation easier by removing customs duties but also to improve relations between France and Germany after being at war so frequently. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) started in 1951 and by 1953 included France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Italy. It proved an amazing success. By 1958 the trade in steel was 151 per cent above 1950 figures. The surge in economic activity helped the recovery of the West German economy in the 1950s.

The success of the ECSC persuaded the six countries that a common market which reduced, and later eliminated, customs duties and brought about free movement of goods, labour, services and capital was in every country's interest. The common market or EEC (European Economic Community, later known as the European Union) was formed by the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

### Key Learning Points: Developments in East and West Germany

- The importance of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements.
- How the political division of Germany came about.
- The federal constitution of Western Germany.
- The one-party state in East Germany.
- Differences between East and West Germany in the 1950s and 60s.
- The West German 'economic miracle'.
- Moves towards a united Europe (ECSC and EEC).

## 9. Reunification of Germany

### *The fall of the Iron Curtain*

In 1982 Helmut Kohl became the Chancellor of West Germany and under his leadership the economy began to recover from the recession of the late 1970s. His period in

**perestroika**  
Economic and political reforms in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

office coincided with the end of the cold war (**Part 3, page 34**). Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the USSR not only ended tensions between east and west but also relaxed the ban on other political parties in eastern Europe. The Polish and Hungarian governments changed into coalition governments where communists were either in a minority position or non-existent. The new Hungarian government dismantled the Iron Curtain, opening up its borders to Austria in March 1989.

**glasnost**  
Policy of more open government in the Soviet Union.

This had a dramatic impact in East Germany where thousands now had a new route to move west. By June 1989 12 per cent of the entire population of East Germany had placed applications to emigrate. In September 1989 alone, 33,000 people moved west from East Germany. The East German economy was heading for bankruptcy. Gorbachev had already announced that he would not order the Red Army to crush opposition in eastern Europe as had happened on so many previous occasions in the past.

On 9 November 1989 the East German government had no option left, without Russian support, but to open its borders and allow free travel. Thousands marched to the Berlin Wall and pulled it down in one of the most momentous events in post-war history. In the next few days hundreds of thousands of East Germans crossed the remains of the wall and visited the west.

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany



**Source 11: Taking down the Berlin Wall**

Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of West Germany, now seized the opportunity to lead the reunification of Germany:

- Huge loans were made by the West German government to bail out the bankrupt state of East Germany.
- By March 1990, 300,000 East Germans had left for the west. At this rate of emigration, coupled with its poor economy, the GDR had no long-term future as a country.
- Gorbachev assured Kohl he would not oppose reunification in return for West German loans to the USSR: by 1997 133 billion marks had been paid to the USSR and the countries that replaced it.
- There was overwhelming support for reunification in East Germany as was shown in free elections in March 1990.

Germany now became a complete federal democracy. The two currencies were merged in May 1990 and East Germans found that their mark could be exchanged at a value of one for one with the West German Deutschmark when its market value was only a fraction of the West German mark. This was an important factor ensuring that unification was popular in the east.

# The development of Germany, 1919–1991

## Part 1: Political developments in Germany

The treaty of unification followed in August 1990, Berlin became the capital of the new Germany and Helmut Kohl easily won in the new election for a new German government, becoming Chancellor of a united Germany, forty-one years after the country's division.

### Key Learning Points: Reunification of Germany

- New policies in the USSR.
- The end of the Berlin Wall.
- Helmut Kohl's leadership.
- Reasons for the reunification of Germany.

## Summary of Political Developments in Germany 1919–91

Before **1918** Germany was a monarchy. The Reichstag (parliament) had limited power

In **1918** Germany became a republic and a democracy – The Weimar Republic

By **1932** the government was ruling by emergency decree – democracy was failing

In **1933** Adolf Hitler became Chancellor and Germany became a dictatorship by **1934**

After defeat in the Second World War in **1945**, Germany was controlled by the Allied powers (USA, UK, USSR, France)

In **1949** Germany divided into two



A one-party communist state in the East



A federal democracy in the West

In **1990** Germany was reunited into a federal democracy

## Acknowledgements

**Source 1:** Kaiser Wilhelm II - Wikipedia Public Domain ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaiser\\_Wilhelm\\_II\\_of\\_Germany\\_-\\_1902.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kaiser_Wilhelm_II_of_Germany_-_1902.jpg))

**Source 2:** Children making a pyramid of banknotes – AKG Images

**Source 3:** Nazi Stormtroopers outside Munich City Hall, November 1923 – Getty Images

**Source 4:** Gustav Stresemann - Wikimedia Creative Common by the German Federal Archive ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_146-1982-092-11,\\_Gustav\\_Stresemann.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_146-1982-092-11,_Gustav_Stresemann.jpg))

**Source 5:** Hitler and President Hindenburg – Rex Shutterstock

**Source 6:** The first concentration Camp, 1933 – AKG Images

**Source 7:** Nazi rally in Nuremburg, September 1934 – Rex Shutterstock

**Source 8:** Hitler digging the first spade of earth for the motorway system in 1933 – Rex Shutterstock

**Source 9:** The 'Big Three' at Yalta – Rex Shutterstock

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