1919 – 1923: A period of instability

1923 – 1929:
- Gustav Stresemann was the leading politician
- 1924: Dawes Plan - USA provided huge loans
- Germany was recovering from her defeat and was enjoying an industrial boom
- More stable governments
  - In 1928, the Social Democrats for the first time since 1923, joined a government coalition

October 1929 – January 1933:
- Economic crisis (Wall Street Crash) → 6.5 million unemployed
- Government unable to cope and Weimar Republic on the verge of collapse

Before First World War

- Good jobs, young population, best welfare systems
- Anything that might cause conflict or division in Germany was swept under the carpet – criticism of authority was not allowed, obedience was regarded highly
- Proud and ambitious

Kaiser William

- Intelligent, well-informed but short-concentration on projects/ideas
- Wanted to make all the decisions but did not want to look at details
- Ambitious, disliked people who disagreed with him, made use of full power

First World War

- Reichstag was weak
  - Many had little say in the way Germany was run
  - No effective opposition to the Kaiser
  - Military dictatorship
- Armed demobilized soldiers
  - Returning home and joining violent demonstrations against the war and Kaiser
- Farming was disrupted
  - Drafted into armed forces
  - Many faced starvation and diseases
  - Three quarters of a million German citizens died
- Experiences of war made people angry and bitter → Increase in conflicts

Getting rid of the Kaiser

- Sent out ships to fight the British in one last suicidal bid for glory → Sailors mutinied
  - Kaiser did not send the army to crush this mutiny
  - Resulted in strikes and demonstrations
- The Social Democrats were afraid the extremists would gain controls
  - Hence, announced the abdication of the Kaiser and setting up of a German Republic which they would run in coalition with other socialist parties
- Kaiser fled into exile in Holland and armistice was agreed between Germany & Allies

**The Spartacist**

- Organized ex-soldiers into Freikorps which crushed many left-wing uprisings
- At a high price: Put government into the hands of the army and Freikorps, neither could be trusted

**Treaty of Versailles**

- Colonial losses
  - Lost territory of economic and symbolic importance
- Rhineland was to become a demilitarized zone to act as a buffer between France and Germany. It was to be occupied by the Allies for fifteen years.
- Germany’s military capability was destroyed – army limited to 100,000 men
- Fully responsible for war and reparations
  - Forced to agree to the sale of German property in Allied countries
  - To build 200,000 tons of shipping a year for the Allies
  - Hand over all merchant ships

**Results of the Treaty of Versailles**

- Psychological damage ➔ Germany was humiliated, scarred, defeated
- Germany was not that weakened
  - Treaty of Rapallo in 1922: Germany and Soviet Union cancelled any reparations between them
- ‘Stab in the back’ accusation became widely accepted
  - Simple and gave many a reason to explain defeat
  - Reduce support for the Republic
  - Greatly weakened the new government of Germany

**THE KAPP PUTSCH (1920)**

- Many from the political right wished to see the new Republic overthrown by force
- The Treaty required various army units to be disbanded
- Conspirators were able to find support for an uprising
- Worsened division between right-wing groups and the Republic

**Weimar Constitution**

- Parliamentary democracy with Chancellor and cabinet needing majority support in the Reichstag
- President could dissolve Reichstag and block new laws
- Article 48: President could suspend the Reichstag and rule by decree in the case of ‘national emergency’

**DID THE CONSTITUTION WEAKEN THE REPUBLIC?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes it weakened</th>
<th>No it did not weaken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The constitution was formed by several parties. No election after 1919 did they poll close to the number of votes they got in 1919. Constitution’s base was narrow and unrepresentative.</td>
<td>Reflected a broad spectrum of political opinion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of its main features were not accepted, e.g. proportional representation.

Article 48 allowed government sufficient flexibility to overcome the main problems facing the Republic between 1919 and 1923 e.g. in November 1923 when Ebert gave power to the army to putdown the Munich Putsch.

Reflected successful constitutional practice with checks and balances built into it.

Proportional representation:
- Coalition governments that represented continuity in party politics
- Allowed these interests to continue to be represented

Not its design but misuse by the new Republic’s opponents

1919 – 1923: A period of instability

Growing financial crisis

- Currency was unstable and national debt was 144,000 in 1919
- Passive resistance (refusal to work or collaborate with France and Germany forces)
  - Government had to pay out millions of marks to those who had lost revenue as a result
  - Other financial pressures resulted in issuing of more banknotes
  - Hyperinflation

Great Inflation

- Old people on fixed pensions/savings now found them worthless
- Workers who had jobs were to some extent protected
- Those who had debts benefited, paying back the money at a fraction of the real cost
- The rich were protected with land, possessions, foreign currency, etc.
- Rich businessman took over smaller companies which were going bankrupt

The middle class suffered the most as their savings and businesses were destroyed.

In August 1923, a new government led by Gustav Stresemann.

- Stabilization of the currency
  - In November 1923, Rentenmark was established.
  - Printing of it was strictly limited
- In Sep 1923, Stresemann ended the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr and gave in to France
  - This decision was seen as a betrayal
- The Munich (Beer Hall) Putsch
  - Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist (Nazi) Party launched an attempted revolution in Munich but was easily crushed by the army and the police
  - The Nazis were humiliated
  - His trial for high treason in February/March 1924 gave him and his comrades a nationwide platform to speak for his beliefs, transforming the whole event into a propaganda coup
The trial established his reputation as the leader of extreme right-wing nationalist elements
Example of the violent political extremism beneath the surface of Weimar Republic

WR was brought out of the crisis but his fragile coalition government could not keep the support of the Reichstag

Foreign policy

Stresemann was Foreign Minister from 1924 – 1929

- 1925: Germany signed the Locarno Treaties with Britain, France and Italy
  - Guaranteed Germany’s frontiers with France and Belgium
- 1926: Took Germany into the League of Nations
  - Status as a great power was recognized and was given a permanent seat on the League’s Council
- 1929: Young Plan produced a final agreement on reparations
  - Allied occupation forces were withdrawn from the Rhineland area
  - Failure to rectify the structural political defects of the Weimar state
    - These weaknesses contributed to the breakdown of democracy → Political instability

Political Problems

- No single party ever won a majority of seats in the Reichstag
- Many nationalists opposed Stresemann’s policies as too cautious
  - They wanted to reject the whole TOV not just have it revised

In 1925, Hindenburg was elected President

Dawes Plan (1924) - Germany was lent 800 million marks by the USA to invest in industry and commerce

However:

- Depended on American loans which could be withdrawn any time
- Unemployment was serious. The economy though growing, was not creating jobs fast enough for the rising population.
- Employers complained about the money the government spent on welfare benefits for the poor and unemployed and taxes were too high.
- Income from agriculture went down and farm workers’ earnings were low
- Extremes of wealth and poverty in Germany
- There was still a concentration of power in the hands of just a few industrialists who ran more than half of the country.

The strict pre-war censorship was removed but in the eyes of many right-wing critics, its artists were undermining traditional German values.

Painting: Tried to show everyday life, portray society in an objective way
Theatre: Set in the society of the time and included greater realism
Architecture, Cabaret and nightlife, Cinema

- May seem vibrant, creative society.
- There was tension and conflict just below the surface
GERMANY 1918 TO 1945 -- THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND HITLER

- The daring lifestyle and ideas which characterized 1920s Berlin were not to be found in other parts of Germany, where people were shocked by the liberal attitudes
  o Seen as sleazy, corrupt and sex-obsessed
- By the 1930s, the artists had been forced to flee from Germany, despised or threatened by the Nazis

Hitler

- Joined the German Workers’ Party in September 1919
- Put in charge of propaganda
- Rose quickly up the ranks of the party
- Wanted to turn the party into a mass movement to overthrow the Weimar Republic

The Party aims

- Union of all Germans
- Equality of rights in its dealings with other nations
  o Hated Treaty of Versailles
- Demand land and territory to feed people
- Only embers of the nation may be citizens of the state. Only those og German blood.
  o Nazis were jealous of Jews’ success in business and commerce

Hitler organized a series of armed groups: Sturm Abteilung (SA) or Stommtroopers

- Attracted many soldiers especially from Freikorps which had been disbanded in 1920
- They felt betrayed by the Treaty of Versailles
- They were formed to protect speakers at Nazi meetings but in actual fact, they often started the violence.

EARLY LEADERS

Hermann Goring

- Close ally of Hitler
- President of Reichstag in 1932
- Drew up the death list for the Night of the Long Knives in August 1934
- Responsible for removing Jews from German economic life and the exploitation of conquered territories
- He was blamed for the failure to prepare the economy for total war

Joseph Gobbels

- Minister of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment
- Took control of newspapers, films, radio and the arts
- Master of publicity – carefully exploiting the Reichstag fire in Feb 1933, burning of books in May 1933 and berlin Olympics in 1936
- Violently anti-Semitic

Heinrich Himmler

- Thirst for power and organizational ability
Main role was to secure Hitler’s dictatorship through state terror
- He set up the first concentration camp and masterminded the Night of the Long Knives
- Believed that Aryan racial superiority could only be achieved with the elimination of inferior social and racial groups

**Nazi Growth**
- Published their own newspaper to help spread their ideas
- The Nazis gathered support among extreme nationalists and anti-Communists during the tense and strained period
- Hitler reorganized the party and tried harder to win the support of the working class
- Realized that their anti-Jewish propaganda appealed most to the working classes
- Mein Kampf became a best-seller in 1925
  - Extracts: There must be no majority decisions. The decisions will be made by one man, only he alone may possess the authority and right to command.
  - Blood mixture and the resultant drop in racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures. All who are not of good race in the world are chaff.

The Nazis began to focus on the middle classes and farmers.

**Public meetings**
- The only party to run evening classes for their members to train them in public-speaking skills

**The Great Depression (1929) – The Wall Street Crash**
- American banks recalled the loans which were the lifeblood of German industry
- German exports slumped and millions lost jobs
  - Poverty, hunger and homelessness
  - Businessmen saw their businesses fall with people having less to spend
  - Government raised taxes
- 60% of new university graduates could not get a job
- 40% of all factory workers were unemployed by 1932
  - Government cut unemployment benefit
- Farmers had not been doing well and prices fell so they slipped further into debt

**Weaken Weimar government**
- Unpopular economic policies
  - The government seemed to have no idea what to do about rising unemployment and poverty
  - Germans had judged their country by its economic success
  - One way out was to print money and increase government expenditure
    - Aware that these were the policies which led to the disastrous inflation in 1923
    - Hence, instead they raised taxes, cut wages and reduced unemployment benefit
- Presidential rule
  - In order for his government to survive, the Chancellor fell back on Article 48 so Germany was now ruled by presidential decree
  - But President Hindenburg was old and apparently controlled by business and army leaders
GERMANY 1918 TO 1945 — THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND HITLER

- The rise of extremism
  o More people became involved in politics
  o Extremist parties claimed they could solve all these problems
  o Political violence increased too

Nazis

- For every problem the Nazis had an explanation or a promise
- Hitler seemed to represent strong, decisive leadership
  o While Weimar Republic seemed to be muddling through indecisively

Organization

- Obedience, organization and team work skills
- Skilled leaders at almost every level

Support of industrialists

- Earn the support of powerful industrialists
- Received some financial backing from big business

Use of technology

- Radio broadcasts, potters, rallies, parades and marches

People heard something they wanted to hear: Workers were promised jobs

Flexibility

- If the idea was not well received, they changed ideas
- Made vague promises

Weaknesses of opposition

- Underestimated the Nazis
  o Thought that their electioneering was so absurd that Germans would see through it
- Quarreled among themselves than uniting to face the Nazis

Propaganda, Hitler was strong

Why was Hitler invited to become Chancellor?

The Collapse of Weimar Republic

- Moderate parties of the Weimar Republic could not agree on how to deal with problems of the depression
  o Coalition governments broke-up
  o Chancellors made more use of Article 48, by-passing the Reichstag, undermining its importance
- With Hindenburg’s presidency, there was a rightwards shift from parliamentary to presidential power (democracy replaced by dictatorship)
- Nazis got a chance to promote themselves on the national scale when they joined with a conservative alliance to oppose the Young Plan
  o Nazis made a favourable impression
- The Social Democrats were unwilling to support Bruning because of his deflationary policies but were even more unwilling to unseat him because it might open the way for the Nazis
- Hinderburg’s anti-republican friends claimed that Bruning had not moved the government sufficiently to the right → An excuse for his removal

July 1932 Elections
- The Nazis gained 230 seats in the Reichstag and became the largest single party
- The Nazis and Communists both sworn enemies of the Republic now controlled 52% of the Reichstag
  o Weimar Republic was effectively dead
- Hitler demanded that either the Nazis would enter government with him as chancellor, or not enter at all
- Hindenburg looked for a chancellor who could provide a right-wing majority in the Reichstag

Schleicher convinced Hindenburg that a continuation of Papen’s chancellorship might lead to civil war

Hence, Schleicher became chancellor in 1932
- Wanted to split the Nazis by persuading Strasser, the leader of the left, to come into Alliance but Hitler found out and dismissed Strasser, maintaining the unity of the party.
- Schleicher’s plans were foiled and now ruled by emergency decree but was refused
  o He was having difficulty in keeping a Reichstag majority
- Papen now persuaded Hindenburg of the necessity of accepting a coalition with Hitler as chancellor, but surrounded by experienced conservatives such as Papen (as vice-chancellor) and Hugenberg.
  o Would be able to push Hitler to one side
  o Provide right-wing government that the president and advisers had been seeking
  o General von Blomberg agreed to serve as defence minister thus removing Hindenburg’s fear of Reichswehr revolt against the new government
  o As long as the number of Nazis in the Cabinet is limited, extreme Nazi policies can be resisted

Hitler had never been able to secure a majority of votes in the electorate or seats
- He was only successful because the old elites were determined to replace the Weimar democracy with an authoritarian system

Hitler consolidated his power in 1933 and 1934

New Reichstag elections
- He got President Hindenburg to pass a decree supposedly to ensure free and peaceful elections
- All election meetings had to be notified to police
- In theory: To ensure that meetings were adequately policed
- In actual fact: Allowed Nazi-controlled police to come and break up the meetings themselves
  o Police had the authority to prohibit any election meeting where danger to public security was feared
  o They disrupted opposition meetings and beat up opponents
- 5 March 1933 Election
  o The Nazis won more Reichstag seats than ever but still did not have a majority
Hitler persuaded the Nationalist Party to join forces

The Reichstag Fire

- A communist called Marinus van der Lubbe was caught at the scene of the blaze
- Hitler claimed that it was the start of a Communist plot against the government
- He asked President Hindenburg for extra powers to deal with the plot
  - Believing that Germany was in danger, he issued ‘Law for the Protection of the People & State’
  - Suspended parts of the constitution
  - Allowed the Nazis to smash the Communist election campaign
  - Arrested 4000 Communists, shut down newspapers and broke up meetings

Enabling Law

- Allowed him to make laws without having to ask for approval for the next 4 years
  - Give Hitler the power of a dictator
- This would require a change in Germany’s constitution
  - Persuaded more of the Reichstag until slightly over two-thirds

Hitler’s power was increased by the passing of laws.

- Workers were no longer allowed to join trade unions
- Opposition politicians were arrested and imprisoned
- Enemies of the Nazis, especially Communists, could be executed
- The SA could search and ransack the homes of suspected opponents
- Many opponents were driven into exile
- The Nazis intimidated voters by watching over them as they crossed their ballot papers

Bringing Germany into line

Political system

- Hitler reorganized the German political system so that every part of it was under Nazi control
  - Gleichschaltung
- Closed down state parliaments & reorganized to have the same composition as the Reichstag
  - Largest party in all the state parliaments
- All 18 governors were Nazis

Trade unions

- Nazis broke into trade-union offices and arrested thousands of union officials
- All unions merged into a ‘German Labour Front’. At its head was a Nazi.

Parties

- Occupied the offices of the Social Democratic Party, destroyed its newspapers and confiscated its funds
- Confiscated property and funds of Communist Party
- Made a law that the Nazi Party was the only party allowed in Germany

Life
The risk of being denounced altered people’s behaviour at home and in public. Hitler’s only rivals left were in the Nazi Party and in the SA – the Stormtroopers.

**SA or the army?**

- Many of the SA helped Hitler take power by terrorizing his opponents
- Many of the SA expected to benefit from Nazi rule
  - The unemployed wanted jobs, leaders wanted positions of power
- Ernst Rohm, the leader of the SA, wanted to merge SA with the regular army with both under his control
  - This alarmed Hitler as the merger would make Rohm the most powerful man in Germany
  - Alarmed generals of the army as it would reduce their power
  - Rohm and other SA leaders were arrested and taken to prison and shot
  - Other possible rivals to Hitler were also murdered by black-shirted SS
  - The Night of the Long Knives

**Hitler had wiped out the only real threat to his power.**

In so doing he had gained the support of the army generals. He was now stronger than ever.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Supporting the SA</th>
<th>Reasons for Supporting the army</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rohm was an old friend of Hitler</td>
<td>Well trained, organized and disciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SA had fought for Hitler in the 1923 Munich Putsch and in later fights against the Communists</td>
<td>Only organization which had the power to remove Hitler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were committed Nazis</td>
<td>Had the support of big business and conservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SA had grown to over 2,500,000 men, much larger than the army</td>
<td>An efficient army was needed for Hitler to retake the land lost in the TOV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Against SA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting army</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning to get out of hand, interfering in the running of the country and the law courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Hitler used SA to control the army, he would have to go along with their other demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not agree with many of the SA’s anti-capitalist policies and working-class aims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The SA brought Hitler to power using violence

- Once in power, Hitler had less need of violent methods
- They continued to act violently though, embarrassing Hitler

**Hitler the Fuhrer**

When President Hindenburg died, Hitler combined the posts of President and Chancellor

*18 months after becoming Chancellor, Hitler had supreme, unchallenged power in Germany.*