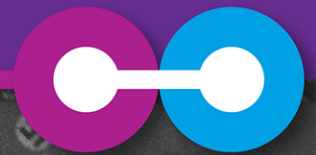


Hitler and Nazi Germany

1919–1939



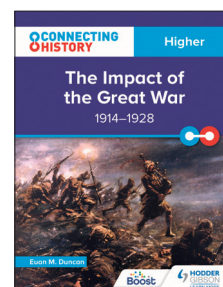
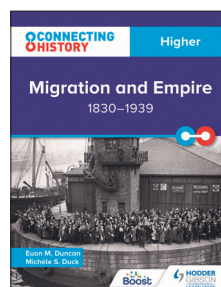
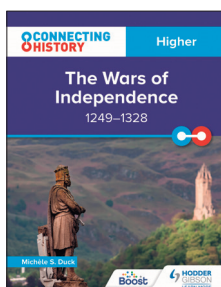
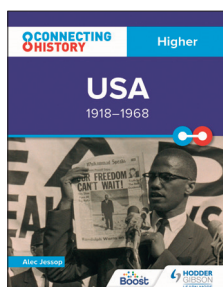
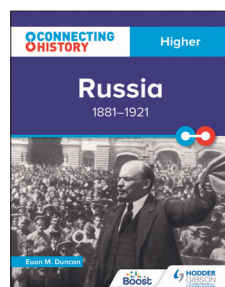
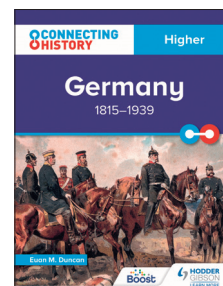
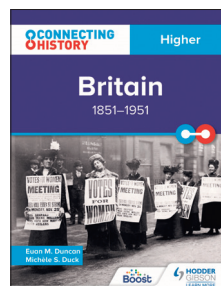
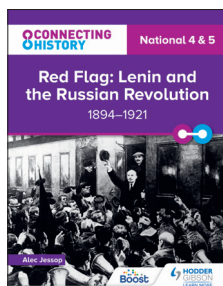
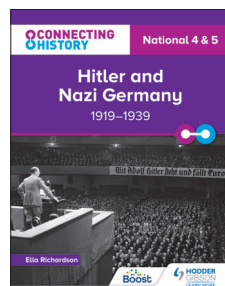
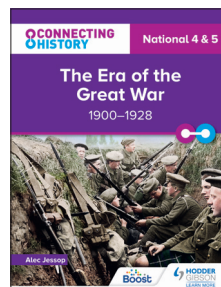
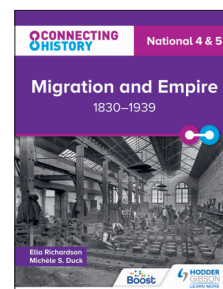
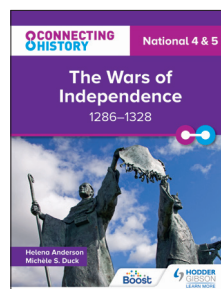
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First published in 2023 by
Hodder Gibson, an imprint of Hodder Education
An Hachette UK Company
50 Frederick Street
Edinburgh, EH2 1EX

Impression number	5	4	3	2	1
Year	2027	2026	2025	2024	2023

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Illustrations by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd., Pondicherry, India
Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd., Pondicherry, India
Produced by DZS Grafik, printed in Bosnia & Herzegovina

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 3983 4542 3



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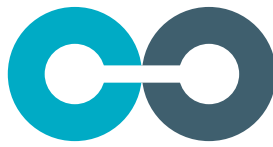
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Introduction

The rise of Hitler and the Nazis is one of the most studied and analysed periods of modern history. The events of this period of history are often the subject of film, TV and popular culture in general. Many of these sources point to a weak and failing German democracy, easily cast aside by a united, effective and powerful National Socialist Party led by Adolf Hitler. However, the reality is perhaps a little more nuanced.

The end of Hitler and the Nazis, as well as the cruel and murderous regime they created, is also well known. The word 'Nazi' and the symbols used by the group are synonymous with murder, racism and hate. To many of us it is inconceivable that a leader like Hitler could rise to the forefront of democratic politics. How was this possible? Was it because the Germans were uniquely racist? Or their democracy fundamentally weak? Or was it something else?

In many ways, the beginning of the story of the Nazi rise to power begins with the end of the First World War.

The impact of the war was felt keenly in Germany. The German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, abdicated and fled to the Netherlands. A new, democratic government – Weimar – was formed, but this was soon faced with numerous challenges and crises. Economic depression, unemployment, hyperinflation, political assassinations and instability plagued the early years of the new Weimar government.

The government survived these challenges and entered a 'Golden Age' in 1924. However, this stability would not last. By 1929, economic problems were returning to Germany, and the 'old guard' of civil servants, military personnel and business leaders turned away from Weimar. So too did those middle-class and older Germans who viewed the economic crises of the late 1920s and early 1930s as the fault of democracy. Governments came and went with alarming regularity, and support for pro-Republic parties waned.

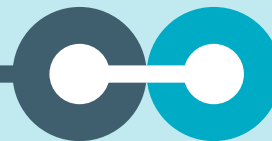
It was in this political and economic crisis that support for Hitler and the Nazis soared. Hitler was unpopular with the elite in Germany; however, he was eventually offered the role of chancellor because President Paul von Hindenburg feared the Nazis would disrupt parliament and prevent post-war recovery. Hitler acted decisively and, by 1934, he was secure in his position as the supreme leader of Germany.

The Germany Hitler created was exclusionist, violent and repressive. He was able to control Germany effectively from 1933 to 1939, and we will discuss this in Chapters 3 and 4 of the book.

In an age where democracy can be seen as under more pressure than ever before, with rising populism and waning confidence in liberal institutions, this unit is arguably more important than ever.

This book will examine all of these areas in greater detail and allow you to gather the knowledge and skills needed to write strong assessment responses for this unit.

Good luck!



Chapter 1

Weimar Germany, 1919–33

The aim of this chapter is to establish what the government of Germany was like following Germany's defeat in the First World War.

It will discuss the emergence of the new 'Weimar Republic', the democratic government that emerged after the German Kaiser, or emperor, abdicated following Germany's defeat and eventual surrender in the First World War.

Link to the assessment

National 4 and 5

Key issue one: Weimar Germany, 1919–33

- The effects on Germany of the end of the First World War
- The Peace Settlement
- Opposition to the Treaty of Versailles
- The formation and characteristics of the Weimar Republic
- Attempts to overthrow the Weimar Republic: the Spartacist Revolt and the Beer Hall Putsch
- Economic problems of the Weimar Republic, 1919–33

This chapter sets out the nature of the new democratic German government. It highlights not only what the government was like, but also the challenges it faced. There are case studies focusing on specific revolts and challenges to the Weimar government, as well as an assessment of how well the government handled these events.

Together, this will allow you to respond to questions from key issue one, Weimar Germany, 1919–33.

Note

Democracy is a system of government where citizens elect politicians to represent them.

Today we take this system of government for granted. In 1918, however, it was a new concept in Germany.

Background

The First World War started in 1914 and ended in 1918. The war was a global one, with fighting happening in countries like France, Belgium, Russia and Turkey. All countries that fought suffered terrible damage and loss. Much of the fighting took place in France and Belgium. The Allies called this the 'Western Front'.

By late 1918 it had become clear that Germany was going to lose the war. The early stalemate of the first half of the war was a distant memory. New technology and tactics had led to military breakthroughs that ended the stalemate. In the final year of battle, the advantage had tipped in the Allies' favour. The entry of the USA to the war effort helped to secure Allied victory on the Western Front.

Seeing the balance of power shifting, the Germans launched an offensive, or military campaign, on the Western Front in the spring of 1918. German troops were successful in breaking through the British and French lines, but they soon ran out of ammunition and supplies. They then faced a huge Allied **counterattack** that successfully pushed German troops out of France and Belgium and back to Germany's borders.

Note

- The Allied powers in 1918 included Britain, France, the USA and Italy.
- The Axis powers included Germany and Austria.



Figure 1.1 German soldiers prepare for attack in 1918. Although the initial gains in the German 'spring offensive' were impressive, the army soon ran out of supplies.

The situation became increasingly desperate in Germany. The country was ruled by an emperor, **Kaiser** Wilhelm II. The Kaiser had near total control of all political decisions in Germany. He appointed the chancellor, who was the head of government. The Kaiser was also the head of state and head of the military.

In 1918, German naval commanders ordered a naval attack against the **blockading** British Royal Navy. This was a desperate move and it led to the Kaiser losing control. Soldiers and sailors refused to follow these orders. Instead, they set up Russian-style '**soviets**', or councils, to make decisions for themselves.

Seeing that he had lost control, Wilhelm II **abdicated**. Germany became a **republic**. This meant that Germany would have a **democratic** government, run by elected politicians, for the first time in its history. It also meant that it would not have a monarchy, or royal family. This was a huge departure from the traditional way that Germany had been governed.

The first action of this new, provisional government was to ask the Allied powers for peace.

In November 1918 an **armistice** was signed. Democratic elections were held in January 1919 and a peace treaty was concluded in June 1919 at the Palace of Versailles, outside Paris, France.

The new German democratic government was given the name 'Weimar Republic'. This is because it met in the city of Weimar, rather than the traditional capital, Berlin. Berlin was considered too dangerous a location for a government to meet.

This new government was disliked by many Germans and faced many early challenges to its existence. Yet, it managed to survive these challenges. By 1924, the Weimar Republic was entering a so-called Golden Age.

This chapter examines the impact of the war on Germany, including the Treaty of Versailles that formally ended the war. It also discusses what the Weimar Republic was like, and the challenges it faced between 1919 and 1933.

1.1 The effects on Germany of the end of the First World War

The First World War took place between 1914 and 1918. It was the result of years of tension between powerful empires. The war resulted in around 40 million casualties worldwide. It had a dramatic impact on all of the countries involved. Germany saw a large number of negative impacts from the war. Some of these impacts are explained below.

1.1.1 Social effects

Britain maintained a food blockade of Germany. This was carried out by the Royal Navy. It meant that food could not be shipped into Germany. This resulted in large-scale starvation.

While we do not know the true number of casualties, at least 426,000 German civilians died during the war. Some estimates have placed the figure at over 700,000. Most of these people died of starvation, hypothermia or disease.

There is also clear evidence that the diet of German civilians became more limited. By 1918, meat consumption had fallen to 12 per cent of pre-war levels. The winter of 1916–17 was called the 'turnip winter'. During that period, many crops failed or could not be grown in large enough supply, meaning turnips were almost the only food available.

1.1.2 Economic effects

Living conditions became much worse for the average German. Most families earned less money as a result of the war. For example, earnings fell by around 20 to 30 per cent. Moreover, the German currency (the mark) became less and less valuable. Between 1913 and 1918, the German mark lost around 75 per cent of its value. This process, when there is a general increase in prices and a fall in the purchasing value of money, is called **inflation**.

The war put a huge financial strain on the German government. It cost Germany around £8.4 billion, with only around 16 per cent of this money being recovered through tax. The German government had relied on winning the war, and paying its debts by acquiring money from defeated opponents. This plan failed, leaving Germany almost bankrupt.

Some sectors of the German economy did gain from the war. Certain industries made huge profits, especially heavy industry, which had been working to meet wartime demands. However, this caused resentment among ordinary Germans, who saw their living conditions getting progressively worse.

1.1.3 Military and political effects

Germany suffered very high losses in the war. It is estimated that around 2 million German soldiers were killed and over 6 million wounded, although precise figures are hard to come by.

The war also caused political tensions in Germany. Many left-wing Germans joined together to form the Independent Socialist Party (USPD). They wanted to start a communist revolution in Germany, much like the one in Russia the year before.

Other, more centrist, Germans strongly believed in democracy. They felt the war had been encouraged by nationalistic rulers who cared more about prestige than doing what was right for the country.

Some right-wing Germans believed Germany should push for a 'peace of victors', meaning the victor in the conflict dominates. They felt that Germany should try to keep possession of the lands the German army had captured during the course of the war.

These divisions, resulting from the conflict, had a significant impact on German politics in the aftermath of the First World War.

Key fact summary

The effects on Germany of the end of the First World War

- Millions of German military personnel were killed or wounded.
- Hundreds of thousands of German civilians died from starvation and hypothermia due to the British Royal Naval blockade.
- Falling earnings combined with rising inflation caused living conditions to worsen during the war.
- The war bankrupted Germany, and the government spent billions of marks that it could not repay.
- Some industries gained from the war, especially if they made materials in high wartime demand.
- The war caused political tension among Germany's citizens, who had differing opinions on how their country should be run.

Activity

- 1 Write down a bullet point list of the effects on Germany of the First World War. Aim to come up with four effects, though you may be able to find more.
 - a) Rank the effects in order of how serious they were for the German government. 1 = most serious, 4 = least serious.
 - b) Justify why you chose to rank the effects in the order you did.

1.2 The Peace Settlement

In 1919, the leaders of the victorious Allied powers (Britain, France, Italy and the USA) met at the Palace of Versailles to discuss terms of surrender for Germany and its allies.



Figure 1.2 A session of the representatives during the Paris Peace Conference – the result of their work was the Treaty of Versailles, which formally ended the First World War

Some Germans were quietly optimistic about the potential terms for a peace agreement. The Kaiser, whom many blamed for contributing to the outbreak of war, had fled Germany and was in exile. Germany had replaced its military **autocracy** with a democratic republic and people expected the Allies to treat the country less harshly as a result.

However, the terms of the treaty were far harsher than many had expected. The details of the treaty are included here. The reaction to the treaty is covered in the next section.

Table 1.1 Treaty of Versailles, summary of terms

Area	Summary of treaty terms
Territorial losses (Europe)	<p>Losses without a plebiscite:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alsace-Lorraine to France ● Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium ● Posen and West Prussia to Poland ● Memel to Lithuania ● City of Danzig became a Free City. <p>Losses following a plebiscite:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Northern Schleswig to Denmark ● Upper Silesia and the Hlučín region ● The Rhineland region was demilitarised. ● The Saar region was placed under League of Nations control and administered by the French.



Area	Summary of treaty terms
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Army restricted to 100,000 soldiers ● No conscription ● No tanks or heavy artillery ● Limited to 6 battleships, 6 cruisers, 12 torpedo boats and 12 destroyers. Remaining naval vessels to be surrendered to the British.
Colonies	All colonies lost, to become League of Nations mandates .
Reparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Article 231 of the treaty held Germany responsible for starting the war and therefore liable to pay for all damage. ● The initial total sum due was £6600 million (132 billion marks).



Figure 1.3 A visual representation of the land that Germany lost due to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles

The terms of the treaty had a big impact on Germany. They meant that Germany lost:

- around 13 per cent of its land and 12 per cent of its population
- around 48 per cent of its iron production
- a significant amount of coal resources
- millions of Germans, who became minorities living in other countries, such as Poland.

According to Article 231 of the treaty, Germany also had to declare that it had been solely responsible for causing the war. While current historians generally agree that the war was the fault of several countries, the victorious Allies in 1918 did not see it this way.

This meant that Germany had to officially accept responsibility for all loss and damage during the war. It also meant that Germany had to pay reparations to repair the damage. Article 231 was also the basis of the principle of war guilt.

Note

Article 231 of the treaty said:

Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany ... for causing all loss and damage to which the [Allies] ... have been subjected.

This became known as the 'war guilt clause'.

Key fact summary

The Peace Settlement

Germany was forced to accept the Treaty of Versailles, even though some Germans thought that the treaty was more of a diktat (an enforced, or dictated, peace).

Germany was forced to give up a considerable amount of land to neighbouring countries.

The German armed forces were limited, including limits to the size of the army and the number of naval ships, and a ban on having an air force.

Germany was forced to give up all its colonies.

Germany was forced to pay huge reparations to the victorious Allies.

Germany was forced to accept responsibility for starting the war under Article 231, commonly known as the 'war guilt clause'.

With the loss of land came a significant reduction in the natural resources that Germany needed to rebuild its economy.

Activity

2 a) Create a list of each of the following:

- i) the economic impacts of the Treaty of Versailles
- ii) the social impacts of the Treaty of Versailles (social factors are those that affect people's day-to-day lives)
- iii) the military and political impacts of the Treaty of Versailles.

b) Turn these lists of impacts into an illustrated mind map. Aim to find at least four impacts per stem.



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Hitler delivering a speech in Frankfurt in 1936. Events and rallies like this one were one of the ways he secured Nazi power in Germany between 1933 and 1939.

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ISBN 978-1-3983-4542-3



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