



Hitler. CREDIT: akg-images / Universal Images Group / COPYRIGHT: © akg-images

### The July 1932 elections

In July 1932 the Nazis polled 230 Reichstag seats, in contrast to their previous 107 at the election of December 1930. This made them the largest single party in Germany. Despite this, Hitler failed to become chancellor in 1932.

This was party because the Nazis lacked an overall majority (they had 230 seats out of 608 in the Reichstag) – but it was also because Hitler was not yet quite ‘respectable’ enough. Conservative President Hindenburg viewed him as an arrogant upstart and refused to have him as Reich Chancellor.

So what changed to allow Hitler to become Chancellor just 6 months later?

### A cunning right-wing plan – Winter 1932/33

A small clique of right-wing politicians, with support from the Reichswehr (army), decided they could tap into Hitler’s wide public appeal by bringing him into a coalition government with the Nationalists. The main conspirators in this plan were Franz von Papen and General Kurt von Schleicher.

They thought this plan would allow them to:

- dilute Hitler’s power and influence
- prevent another Nazi putsch
- strengthen the Nationalists (who had only 37 seats) by adding the Nazis to their total seats
- restore the monarchy and end the Weimar system
- defeat their Communist opponents (who were also gaining strength).



Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher CREDIT: akg-images / Universal Images Group / COPYRIGHT: © akg-images

In January 1933, after complicated negotiations involving von Papen, von Schleicher, the Reichswehr and wealthy industrialists, President Hindenburg was persuaded to re-appoint von Papen as Chancellor with Hitler as vice-chancellor. But Hitler would settle for no less than Chancellor, so the roles were reversed. Hitler was to be Chancellor with von Papen his deputy. Hindenburg reluctantly agreed – von Papen soothed his worries commenting, ‘In two months we’ll have pushed Hitler into a corner so hard he’ll be squeaking’.

### Hitler as Chancellor

Of course, Hitler was not as easy to control as von Papen had hoped. Once in power Hitler wanted to ensure he stayed there. He called another election for March 1933 in the hope of winning an overall majority for the Nazis. The election campaign was extremely violent – the Nazis could now use all the state media, police force, SA and SS to attack any opposition. The campaign climaxed on February 27<sup>th</sup> 1933 when the Reichstag building burnt down.

Hitler blamed this on the Communist party (although much evidence suggests the Nazis themselves were responsible). Whether or not the Nazis had set it up, it enabled Hitler to whip up yet more fear of a Communist conspiracy.

Even after all this, the Nazis still failed to get an overall majority (and they never did!) However, they combined with the Nationalists to form a government. Only 44% of Germans had voted Nazi.



Reichstag Fire / Berlin / 1933 Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher  
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On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1933 Hitler forced through the Enabling Law. This stated that the government could introduce laws and sign treaties with foreign countries, without the approval of the Reichstag, for four years. Any law written by Hitler would become operational the very next day. This law, which destroyed the Weimar system, was passed by intimidating German MPs with the SS and SA as they entered the temporary Reichstag building. SA members shouted 'We want the bill, or fire and murder!'. Only the Social Democrat party voted against the bill. It was passed by 441 to 94 votes.

### Tasks

1. Use the information above to fill in details of each of the events on the 'Steps to power' worksheet.
2. Read through the information once more and highlight examples of each of the following factors in Hitler's rise to power:
  - ❖ Hitler's own political skills
  - ❖ the worries of right wing groups in Germany
  - ❖ Hitler's popular appeal
  - ❖ Nazi violence
  - ❖ the growth of Communism
  - ❖ the world-wide economic depression
  - ❖ the weaknesses of the Weimar system.

Extension: Can you add further evidence to these factors from what you have already learned?

3. Using the information above, and your own knowledge, answer the following essay question.

'The strengths of the Nazi party were the main reason that Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933'. How far do you agree with this statement?

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## Steps to Power

