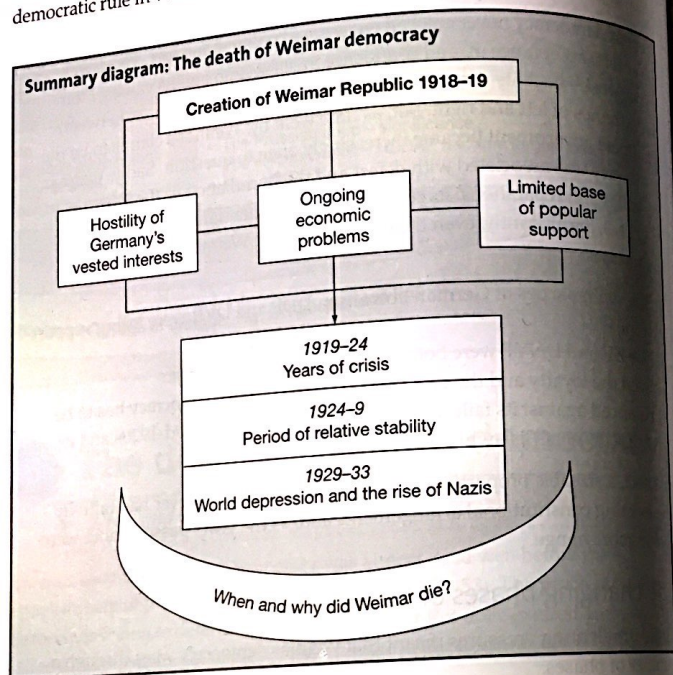
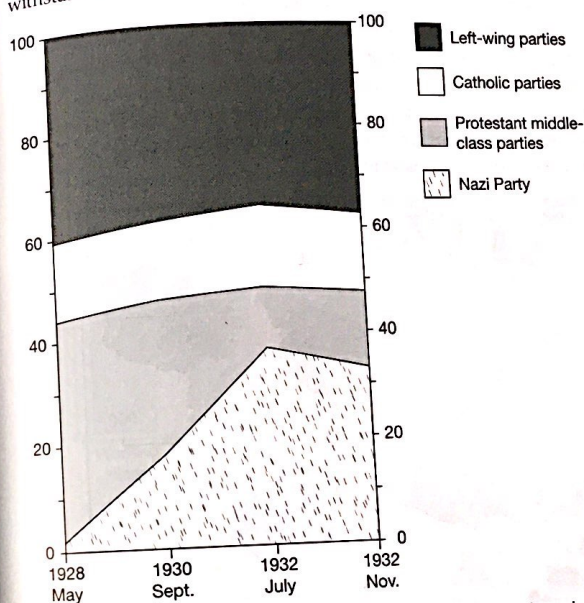


chance of surviving was very slim indeed. Democracy lived on with ever increasing weakness before it reached its demise in July 1932. However, in truth, democratic rule in Weimar Germany was terminal from the summer of 1930.



The results of the elections in 1928-32 show the changing balance of the political parties (see pages 122 and 130), although really these figures on their own are limited in what they show us about the nature of Nazi support. The graph and table in Figure 5.2 reveal a number of significant points about the kind of people who actually voted for the Nazis. From this, it seems fairly clear that the Nazis made extensive gains from those parties with a middle-class and/or a Protestant identity. By contrast, it is apparent that the Catholic parties, the Communist Party and, to a large extent, the Social Democrats were able to withstand the Nazi electoral gains.



**Figure 5.2** Percentage of vote gained by each major political grouping in the four Reichstag elections 1928-32.

### Geography and denomination

These political trends are reflected in the geographical base of Nazi support, which was generally higher in the north and east of the country and lower in the south and west. Across the North German Plain, from East Prussia to

## 6 The Nazi mass movement

### Who voted for the Nazis and why?

The point is often made that Hitler and the Nazis never gained an overall majority in Reichstag elections. However, such an occurrence was very unlikely because of the number of political parties in Weimar Germany and the operation of the proportional representation system. Considering this, Nazi electoral achievements by July 1932 were very impressive. Only one other party on one other occasion had polled more: the SPD in the revolutionary atmosphere of January 1919 (see page 17). Nazism had become a mass movement with which millions identified and, as such, it laid the foundations for Hitler's coming to power in January 1933. Who were these Nazi voters and why were they attracted to the Nazi cause?

Schleswig-Holstein, the Nazis gained their best results and this seems to reflect the significance of two important factors: religion and urbanisation.

In the predominantly Catholic areas (see Figure 5.3) the Nazi breakthrough was less marked, whereas the more Protestant regions were more likely to vote Nazi. Likewise, the Nazis fared less well in the large industrial cities, but gained greater support in the more rural communities and in residential suburbs.

The Nazi vote was at its lowest in the Catholic cities of the west, such as Cologne and Düsseldorf. It was at its highest in the Protestant countryside of the north and north-east, such as Schleswig-Holstein and Pomerania. Therefore, Bavaria, a strongly Catholic region and the birthplace of Nazism, had one of the lowest Nazi votes. Such a picture does not, of course, take into account the exceptions created by local circumstances. For instance, parts of the province of Silesia, although mainly Catholic and urbanised, still recorded a very high Nazi vote. This was probably the result of nationalist passions generated in a border province, which had lost half its land to Poland.

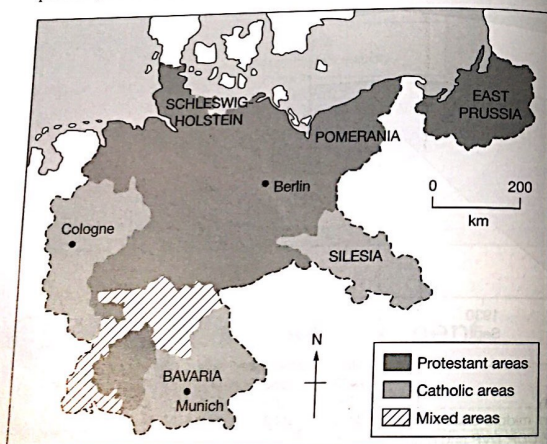


Figure 5.3 Electoral split by religion.

### Class

Nazi voters also reflected the rural/urban division in terms of their social groupings. It therefore seems that the Nazis tended to win a higher proportion of support from:

- the peasants and farmers
- the *Mittelstand* (the lower-middle classes, such as artisans, craftsmen and shopkeepers)

- the established middle classes, such as teachers, **white-collar workers** and public employees.

Also, actual Nazi membership lists (see Figure 5.4 and Table 5.7) reveal clearly that a significantly higher proportion of the middle-class subsections (government officials/employees, self-employed and white-collar workers) tended to join the Nazi Party than the other classes. However, it is worth bearing in mind two other points. First, although the working class did join the Nazi Party in smaller proportions, it was still the largest section in the NSDAP. Secondly, although it seems that the peasantry tended to vote for the Nazis, the figures show they did not join the NSDAP in the same proportion.

**KEY TERM**  
**White-collar workers**  
Workers not involved in manual labour.

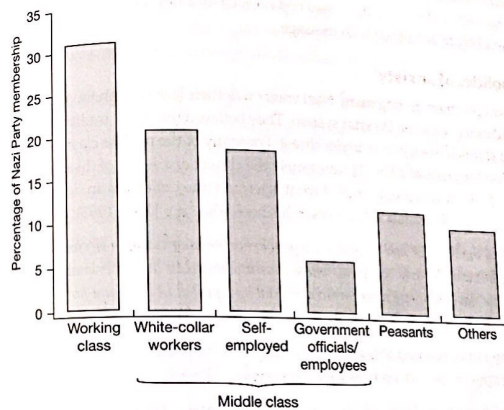


Figure 5.4 Nazi Party members in 1932.

Table 5.7 German society as a whole in 1933 (percentage)

	Middle class				
Working class	White-collar workers	Self-employed	Government officials/employees	Peasants	Others
46.3	12.4	9.6	4.8	20.7	6.2

### The appeal of Nazism

It is clear that more of the Protestants and the middle classes voted for Nazism in proportion to their percentage in German society. The real question is: why were Catholics or socialists not so readily drawn to voting for the Nazis?

- First, both Catholicism and socialism represented well-established ideologies in their own right and both opposed Nazism on an intellectual level.
- Secondly, the organisational strength of each movement provided an effective counter to Nazi propaganda. For socialism, there was the trade union structure: for Catholicism, there was the Church hierarchy, extending right down to the local parish priest.
- Thirdly, both movements had suffered under the Imperial German regime. As so often happens, persecution strengthened commitment. It was, therefore, much harder for the Nazis to break down the established loyalties of working-class and Catholic communities, and their traditional **associationism**, or identity, remained strong. In contrast, the Protestants, the farmers and the middle classes had no such loyalties. They were therefore more likely to accept the Nazi message.

**KEY TERM**

**Associationism** Having a strong identity or affiliation with a particular group.

**The 'politics of anxiety'**

What was common among many Nazi voters was their lack of faith in, and lack of identity with, the Weimar system. They believed that their traditional role and status in society was under threat. For many of the middle classes (see Figure 5.4) the crisis of 1929–33 was merely the climax of a series of disasters since 1918. Hitler was able to exploit what is termed 'the politics of anxiety', as expressed by the historian T. Childers in his book *The Nazi Voter* (1983):

*[By 1930] the NSDAP had become a unique phenomenon in German electoral politics, a catch-all party of protest, whose constituents, while drawn primarily from the middle class electorate were united above all by a profound contempt for the existing political and economic system.*

In this way Hitler seemed able to offer to many Germans an escape from overwhelming crisis and a return to former days.

The observations of individuals reinforce this explanation. For example, in a letter in Source D a school headmaster gives an account of his thoughts at the time.

**SOURCE D**

**From a letter by the headmaster of a school written after the war in 1967, quoted in John Laver, *Nazi Germany 1933–45*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. 6.**

*I observed many things in Berlin which could not be noticed – or only to a degree – in small towns. I saw the Communist danger, the Communist terror, their gangs breaking up bourgeois meetings, the bourgeois parties being utterly helpless, the Nazis being the only party that broke terror by anti terror. I saw the complete failure of the bourgeois parties to deal with the economic crisis ... Only National Socialism offered any hope. Anti-Semitism had another aspect in Berlin: Nazis mostly did not hate Jews individually, many had Jewish friends, but they were concerned about the Jewish problem ... Nobody knew of any way to deal with it, but they hoped the Nazis would know.*

According to Source D, what were the main motives for supporting the Nazis?

**Young people**

Another clearly identifiable group of Nazi supporters was the youth of Germany. The depression hit at the moment when young adults from the pre-war baby-boom came of age and, however good their qualifications were, many had little chance of finding work. In a study of Nazi Party membership, 41.3 per cent of those who joined before 1933 had been born between 1904 and 1913, despite this age group representing only 25.3 per cent of the total population. Equally striking, of the young adults aged 20–30 who became members of political parties, 61 per cent joined the Nazis. Thus, it was the young who filled the ranks of the SA – often unemployed, disillusioned with traditional politics and without hope for the future. They saw Nazism as a movement for change, not a source of respectability. Equally, the SA activities gave them something to do. All ages were prepared to vote for the Nazis, but the younger members of society were actually more likely to become involved by joining the party.

**Nazism: the people's party**

The previous analysis should not obscure the fact that the Nazis still boasted a broader cross-section of supporters than any other political party. Unlike most of the other parties, the Nazis were not limited by regional, religious or class ties. So, by 1932 it is fair to say that the NSDAP had become Germany's first genuine Volkspartei or broad-based people's party. This point was made in a recent study of voting habits that suggests the Nazis became a mass party only by making inroads into the working-class vote. Hitler, therefore, succeeded in appealing to all sections of German society; it is simply that those from Protestant, rural and middle-class backgrounds supported the party in much greater numbers.

**Summary diagram: The Nazi mass movement**

