

Why did hindenburg appoint hitler as chancellor in 1933? essay sample

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The reasons for Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933 have been debated heavily by a number of Historians. Causes, ranging from Germany's authoritarian historical background and the effects of World War One on German Society to Hitler's very own charisma as a leader and speaker, have all been considered as reasons for his lucky ascent into power. Yet there is no denying that for all Hitler's charm, Nazi support by late 1932 was flailing and the people never actually elected him as Chancellor. So, this begs the question; why would Hindenburg (The German president at the time) choose to put Hitler, a man he had claimed to strongly dislike, into a position of power over the Reichstag and the German people? Although there are many long term reasons for Hindenburg's decision; a shared miscalculation by certain groups of people in power can be seen as a very important cause. One famous explanation (favoured by the Nazis) for Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933 (and his later position as dictator) was that it had simply been his and Germany's inevitable destiny.

Although, this could first be dismissed as propaganda by the Nazis, looking at the authoritarian nature and history of Germany and the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in the 1920s and 30s, there is some truth to it. In German History; there is this theory of Sonderweg (special path); a belief that Germany was unique, distinct from other European nations and was therefore destined to follow a different transition from Aristocracy to Democracy. This course could include violence if necessary; past German Chancellors such as Otto Von Bismarck who was famous for his Blood and Iron Speech during the unification of Germany are an example of that. Germany had a history of

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Authoritarianism and a strong belief in Militarism and the army. The days of the Kaiser and the Second Reich, during which there had been little liberalism, had not left people's minds and there were still those that were nostalgic for those days. Hitler drew on Germany's past ideologies because the people's belief in Authoritarian and military traditions had not faded. They lacked a commitment to democracy and seemed to have lost faith in it; it wasn't working for them so Hitler's message... appealed to them.

According to William Shirer ' Acceptance of autocracy, of blind obedience to the petty tyrants who ruled as princes, became engrained in the German mind'. Hitler was offering extreme change and a goodbye to the democratic mess they had found themselves in, he was offering to bring back some of the old ways from the days of the Kaiser and the German People seemed to prefer Order over Freedom. Their vote for Hindenburg as president, an old war leader from World War One is proof of their nostalgia. Perhaps Hitler was simply the Authoritarian leader that Germany wanted and had been destined to have. As Taylor would put it ' There was no mystery to Hitler's victory; the mystery was that it had been so long delayed'. Another explanation for his rise could simply be the appeal of Adolf Hitler. Hitler had not been destined to become chancellor of Germany; his political skill had gotten him there. Hitler said things the German people wanted to hear and his ideologies seemed to be shared by a lot of Germans anyway. In the aftermath of World War 1 and the Paris Peace Conference; there was a general hatred for the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler's message (in Mein Kampf, for example) was filled with a Pan-German, anti-communist, anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic ideas

and this appealed to the German public who mostly seemed to share his ideas.

Hitler built on this appeal by forming the SA in 1921 in order to make the Nazi look more impressive; using his political skill in 1925 he overcame his political rivals and re-founded the Nazi party, becoming their undisputed leader. With Joseph Goebbels (In charge of Propaganda) at his side, Hitler was more enabled to emphasise his appeal through propaganda and a nationwide reorganisation of the Nazi party; subordinate groups were set up for different members of the community in an attempt to attract more voters; youth groups, groups for women, teachers etc. Although the Nazi Party did not do well in the 1920s (they had 12 seats in 1928), there was definitely growth in support for them in 1930 after the Great Depression; their seats increased from 12 to 107 while the KPD (Communist Party) had only 77 seats. Hitler was able to capitalise on the fears of the German public from 1929 onwards to 1932 during the depression. His anti-Semitic views became secondary to his economic policy because it promised a more hands-on approach (unlike the Laissez-faire attitude of Capitalism), an approach that would help solve the problem of depression and offer more jobs to the large masses of unemployed.

A few business men sponsored him as well; they preferred their workers in the SA rather than the Communist party because it was more disciplined and ordered; plus Hitler's anti-communist ideas brought them to his side. With the Nazi subordinate groups gaining voters through propaganda, financial support from business men (from the Dusseldorf Industry Club) (even a few

Junkers supported his Pan-German nationalist ideas), and the SA fighting Communists on the streets as well; the Nazis won 230 seats in the 1932 July election (around 37.4 per cent) and became the largest party in the Reichstag. One could argue that Hitler simply manipulated economic and social situations in Germany to his favour; he was able to play on the fears of the German people during the depression and through this brought the votes up making him an eligible enough candidate for Chancellor (the support for Hitler was made more aware of when he ran for President against Hindenburg and lost by only a few million votes). According to Feuchtwanger, Hitler simply had a 'combination of demagogic gifts and political instinct...'

Another popular argument is that Hitler's political instinct had little to do with his appointment as Chancellor; the failure of the Weimar Republic especially after the Depression made democracy a less appealing option and resulted in the German Public voting in extremist parties such as the Nazis and the Communists (although the Left (the SPD and DVP) were divided amongst themselves). The Weimar Republic faced a lot of opposition from both the Left (such as The Spartacists) and the Right (Kapp Putsch) and was also disregarded by elites such as the Junkers who wanted Authoritarian rule back. However, one of the most important reasons for the downfall of The Weimar Republic was how it handled the occupation of the Ruhr by France in 1923. Calling a general strike in retaliation to the Ruhr invasion resulted in hyperinflation and an economic crisis that undermined and embarrassed the government. The German Public lost its trust in the Weimar Republic after

that. During the period when the depression started to affect Germany and the Americans asked for a repayment on their loans (the ones needed to pay reparations), Heinrich Brüning becomes chancellor in 1930 through the use of Article 48 (he was unable to gain a majority), ending Democracy in the process.

He makes things worse for Germany during his 2 year reign by introducing deflation as an attempt to make it look like Germany was unable to pay the reparations; the economic situation in Germany worsened and he became known as the Hunger Chancellor. It is during that period that Nazi seats increased from 12 to 107. Kershaw believed ' The future (for Weimar) looked promising. And without the onset of the world economic crisis from 1929 it (Weimar) might have remained so'. Perhaps if the Great Depression had not set in; the Weimar Republic would have recovered from its initial struggles and a democratic Germany may have been possible. However, a more short-term and direct answer to the question of why Hindenburg chose to appoint Hitler as chancellor has only a little to do with his charisma (Hindenburg despised Hitler, condescendingly referring to Hitler as that " Bohemian corporal") and although the failures of the Weimar Republic (the inability to get a majority in the Reichstag was frustrating) did come into play; Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor mostly because of a shared miscalculation among the elites.

Von Papen (a right wing politician who was also the 1932 chancellor) and many non-Nazis thought having Hitler as chancellor would be advantageous. " Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far in the corner that he'll

squeak," Papen boasted to a political colleague. Conservative members of the former aristocratic ruling class (such as the Junkers) desired an end to the Weimar republic and a return to an authoritarian government that would restore Germany to its former glory and bring back their old privileges. They wanted to go back to the days of the Kaiser. For them, putting Hitler in power was simply the first step towards achieving their goal. They hoped he would destroy the Republic and knew it was likely. Then once the republic was abolished, they could choose a ruler for Germany, hopefully a descendant of the Kaiser. Bankers and Industrialists supported this as well, believing Hitler would keep Communism at bay as well as put a stop to the Trade Union Movements.

The drastically reduced German army wanted a return as well; to the old days where they had been larger and more respectable and Hitler's hatred for the Treaty of Versailles showed (which they shared) showed that he would be willing to do that as well. Von Papen; chancellor at that time (he was ruling under emergency decree) offered the post of Vice-Chancellor to Hitler who refused and demanded to be made Chancellor. Hindenburg pressured by those around him; took a risk and then appointed Hitler as chancellor with only 2 Nazis in his cabinet. The elites thought they could control him; put him in a temporary position of power until they got their way; they were wrong. American Historian E. Anderson believes that the group of elites mentioned previously ' utilized the senility of President von Hindenburg to accomplish its purpose... the group expected to control the Nazis and to exploit the Nazi Power for its own purposes; but the National

Socialists proved too clever and too ruthless for it.' Salmon also claims that 'Nazism came to power as a result of a miscalculation by conservative politicians and the military...' Hitler never won his way to power; he had simply been handed it because the elites thought he could be controlled. Why then did Hindenburg appoint Hitler as Chancellor in 1933?

Every reason and argument mentioned come into play and they all influenced his decision to a certain extent. The pressure put on by the elites on Hindenburg to appoint Hitler was borne out of their desire for autocratic rule, a return to the days of Kaiser and this desire was not only shared by the elite but by a significant proportion of the German people as well. Perhaps autocratic rule was too engrained in German tradition and history to be eradicated by a democratic government; Hitler could have simply been a manifestation of Germany's need for an autocracy. Yet Kershaw argues that 'There was nothing inevitable about Hitler's triumph in January 1933'. There is no denying that the Nazis were failing to gain seats in the 1920s and it was only after the depression that things changed positively for Hitler (as well as other extremist parties) and this was the situation in other European countries (as a reaction to the Depression) such as Italy (Mussolini), Spain (Franco). Nazism did not grow inevitably from Germany's past nor was it an example of Germany following its special path (Sonderweg); 'the totalitarian state, composed of one single party, is a European and not solely a German phenomenon' (Ritter).

Nazi propaganda and Hitler's charisma and political instinct did play a part in gaining Nazi support but there is no denying that in the 1920s 'the Nazi

Party had been a fringe irritant in German politics' (Kershaw) and Hitler's message and charisma was having very little impact on the German people and their votes. Hindenburg never gave in to Hitler's constant demands to be Chancellor and was obviously not impressed by his political instinct as well; Hitler was never elected into power; he was given it. The failure of the Weimar Republic, especially after The Great Depression could be seen as a major factor; Salmon states that ' If Weimar had some chances of survival before (the Depression), it had very little chance afterwards'. It was during that period that German people who had not even heard Hitler or the Nazi message voted for him and Germany became the largest parliamentary power.

Yet, despite this, Nazi seats fell down to 196 in November 1932 and Hitler briefly considered suicide. It appeared that the Nazis had reached their peak and despite all their effort, Hitler would not make it as Chancellor. Who knows? Perhaps the Nazis would have continued to sink (it was getting more difficult to fund) and Hitler would have become a name barely recognised in German History. Unfortunately; this was not the case. Nicholls argues that Hitler's ' appointment was quite unnecessary... Their (The Nazi) movement was waning; a further period of frustration would have finished them off'. There is no denying that if Hindenburg had simply continued to refuse elite demands; Hitler's appointment would probably have never happened. Why did Hindenburg appoint Hitler as Chancellor in 1933? There are a number of reasons but the most significant would be the fatal underestimation of his character; Hitler and the Nazis had simply been misjudged.