

# The comparison of rising to power: napoleon and hitler



## Abstract

The paper compares and contrasts the rise to power between Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. It goes into depth of how each of their respective lives led up to the point at which they assume power, comparing each of them along the way. It discusses how Hitler was a reject for most of his life until he joined the German military and how Napoleon came from a high-born family. The last section of the paper converses over the similarities and differences of the two leader's rises. The two different leaders resembled each others' more often than not, especially in ways such as their militaristic commonalities, nationalism, and their ambitious personalities. They were different, however, in their relationship with their citizens, Hitler had a better relationship with his than that of Napoleon.

*Keywords: Nationalism, fascism, ideology*

How did the two most powerful leaders in Europe during the modern period, Napoleon and Hitler, come to power? Through the recent years the discussion behind the civility and the reasonability that brought about these two all-powerful leaders to their maxims of power has been circling around in media outlets such as the news and press. The question is how similar are the two power hungry rulers in their mount to dominance. Knowing the similarities of how Napoleon and Hitler rose through the ranks of their respective governments can allow the future generations of societies to prevent another dictator from assuming control of a major super power, possibly disturbing peace in the world. Although the rise to power for Napoleon was in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century and Hitler's reign was

in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two are still comparable because they both have their core principles centered around nationalism, take advantage of a low point in their country's history in different ways, and they also both had strong affluent and conservative military based backgrounds.

Napoleon was born on August 15, 1769, in Ajaccio, a town on the Mediterranean island, Corsica. Napoleon was one of eight children to survive birth, his mother was Letizia Romolino Buonaparte, and his father, Carlo Buonaparte. His parents were members of Corsican nobility, however Napoleon's family lacked significant wealth. Just a year before Napoleon was born, France obtained Corsica from the city-state of Genoa, Italy. It was this, French capture that caused Napoleon to adopt a French way of spelling his last name. (From Buonaparte to Bonaparte.) During his youth, young Napoleon attended school in France's mainland, here, he learned to speak French and then moved on to a military academy all by 1785, or when he was just sixteen (National Gallery of Victoria, n. d.).

After graduating from the military academy, Napoleon joined the French army, becoming a second lieutenant in the artillery regiment. The French Revolution started after this, in 1789. After just three years the revolutionaries overthrew the government and made a proclamation that France would now be a Republic. Through the beginning years of the revolution, Napoleon was on leave from the French Army, instead at his home in Corsica. During this time, Bonaparte associated himself with the Jacobins, a political group that was pro-democracy. He associated himself with the Jacobins at first because of their like-mindedness. After a fight with

the Corsican governor, Napoleon's family chose to move to leave their long-time home in Corsican in exchange for France's mainland ( *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2002 ).

Once back on the mainland, Napoleon returned to his old military position. Bonaparte became close associates with the Jacobin Augustin Robespierre, one of the most pivotal pushing factors leading up to the Reign of Terror. Although the intent behind the actions that happened during this time period were meant to weed out all of the enemies of the revolution, there were just as many if not more loyal members of the Revolution that were decapitated because of the Reign of Terror. Following that singular year of fear, Napoleon was promoted to brigadier general in France's army. He was then forced into house arrest because of his affiliation with Robespierre. Bonaparte then helped defend the newly formed French Republic from a royalist insurrection which gained him a lot of support from the French citizens and revolutionists. Additionally, this set him apart from the assumptions that he shared the same plans as Robespierre. After this small battle, Napoleon was also promoted to Major General (Napoleon, n. d.).

As Major General, Napoleon was given the opportunity to lead an army against the British in Egypt and the Ottomans in Syria. With his campaign ending mostly a failure by early 1799, Napoleon leaves most of his troops back in Egypt while he leaves them in order to head back to the French mainland. Upon arrival, Napoleon returned and joined " The Coup of 18 Brumaire", which eventually overthrew the French Directory. Napoleon slowly gained power within the newly setup government and after defeating county upon country, Napoleon finally was able to centralize the

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government, forming the Napoleonic Code as a set of laws, and declaring himself the Emperor of France (VMFA, nd).

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, in Branau am, a hamlet in Austria near the German Boarder. Adolf spent the majority of his time in the capital of Upper Austria, Linz. After struggling and then dropping out of Secondary School, he applied for Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts but got rejected. This was a major turning point in Hitler's life.

After his mother died a few years later, Hitler moved out to Vienna, where he made a living selling paintings of monuments and scenery. While Hitler was isolated, he got inspiration to begin to form the premise of his Nazi ideology. Hitler said when his mind was just starting to change, " To study history means to search for and discover the forces that are the causes of those results which appear before our eyes as historical events," (Langer, 1999, p. 127). While Hitler was in In the year 1913 Hitler moved to Germany. He served in World War One where he earned two medals based off of his bravery, one of the being the prestigious Iron Cross First Class. He wore this for the remainder of his life. World War One was another key factor of his decision making and his Nazi memorandum. Hitler was injured twice during the war, and the second time, near the end of the war, he was sent to the hospital. By the time when Hitler was fully recovered and able to go back to war, Germany had lost the war. This caused Hitler to feel betrayed by his fellow countrymen because he thought that there were unpatriotic traitors at Germany. This was fueled even further because of his strong sense of nationalism.

Hitler joined a group of like-minded individuals called The German Workers' Party. Their main goal was to unite the Germanic working class. This same group of people became known as the National Socialist German Workers, or the Nazis. Before the end of 1921, Hitler led the Nazi Party on a widespread revolt against the Weimar Republic and how the Versailles Treaty was too harsh and harmful towards the Germans. The Nazis at this point were mostly discharged members of the Germanic military and other ultra-nationalistic members of society. After the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler was tried for treason, but instead gets five years in prison. Of these five years, Hitler spent nine months of it in the comfort of Landsberg Castle ( *The Holocaust : The Rise of the Nazis*, n. d.). It is his time at the castle when he gets his basis for *Mein Kempf* , or, " *My Struggle*". *Mein Kempf* was the premise of the Nazi ideology. An example of the ideology that Hitler used comes to light when he said, " When one half of a nation is sunk in misery and worn out by hard distress... that nation presents such an unattractive picture that nobody can feel proud to belong to it. It is only when a nation is sound in all its members, physically and morally, that the joy of belonging to it can properly be intensified to the supreme feeling which we call national pride," (Hitler, 1924, p. 42). This quote comes from Hitler's book, *Mein Kempf* , it paved the road for how Hitler plans to assume command of the country.

Hitler's book quickly gained him a lot of new followers and instantly became a German best-seller. Amongst some of the thoughts within it, the book touched greatly on anti-Semitic views and preaching for strong nationalistic ideologies. Along with the help from the popularity from his book, the people and the, at the time, war hero Paul von Hindenburg named him the

chancellor of Germany. From here on, Hitler has the absolute power within Germany and goes on to start the battles and global monopolies that he is known best for today (Hitler into Power, n. d.).

Similarly, Hitler and Napoleon both grew up in highly valued families that come from noble or government-based backgrounds. This means that they grew up with the ability to have a proper education with highly respectable last names. Additionally, both Hitler and Napoleon thrived in a militaristic society and environment. They also were ingenious war planners and strategists, commanding some of the strongest militaries at their respective times of rule. Bonaparte and Adolf also were also great manipulators who were able to achieve what they wanted from people with relative ease. On a political spectrum, these leaders had a great ordeal of importance placed on the ideas of nationalistic principles. Their circle of influence within each of their countries was also very high, in both Germany and France, Hitler and Napoleon were seen as if gods amongst men who are helping them out of their dark times.

Separately, Napoleon and Hitler's rise to power are different from each other primarily in their public relations. In Hitler's case, he used anti-Semitic views to as a scape goat to push forwards his own agenda and plans, and since he was loved by all of his citizens because he brought about great economic prosperity, the majority of his citizens joined his points of view. In Napoleon's case, however, he wasn't able to place as much blame on external sources due to him not being loved as much as Hitler was. Additionally, Hitler was on a slightly higher level of nationalistic pride and made better use of

propaganda thus allowing him to get more from his citizens in terms of work  
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and trust. Lastly, all of the people in Germany loved Hitler entirely while Napoleon's citizens did not back him the entire time.

The differences between Hitler and Napoleon's come to power were minute, showing in reality how similar they are. Napoleon and Hitler are both remembered in history as two leaders whom focused primarily on their conquest who both wanted to see their countries succeed and become the best on the world. In contrast, Napoleon coming to power during a time of political turmoil while Hitler made political turmoil in order to receive power.

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