How did the Nazis change their tactics between 1924 and 1929?

THE FAILURE OF the Munich Putsch convinced Hitler that the only sure way of getting power was by legal means.

SOURCE 1 Hitler speaking in the mid-1920s

"Instead of working to achieve power by armed coup, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the opposition deputies. If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own constitution. Sooner or later we shall have a majority, and after that – Germany."

The Nazi Party was banned in the immediate aftermath of the putsch. However, while Hitler was still in prison the Nazis – under another name – entered the Reichstag elections for the first time. In the afterglow of the trial, they won 32 seats in the May election. However, just seven months later there was another election. The Nazis did disastrously, their seats reduced to just fourteen.

Reorganising the party

Clearly electoral success would require a different kind of Nazi Party. Two weeks after his release from prison in December, the ban on the party was lifted and it was officially re-launched at a rally (in the Munich beer hall!) on 27 February 1925. Hitler began to reorganise the party to make it more effective in elections.

Winning over the working classes

Through the late 1920s the Nazis worked steadily. They ran many public meetings and tried harder to win the support of the working classes. They discovered that it was their anti-Jewish message which had most appeal among the working classes and they increased their anti-Jewish propaganda.

Mein Kampf

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was published in 1925. His national fame was now such that it became a best-seller.

1. Why might each of the points in Source 2 appeal to people in Weimar Germany?
2. Critics said that *Mein Kampf* contained nothing new but just recapped all the old Nazi ideas. Do the extracts in Source 2 support this view? You may need to refer back to pages 33–35.

SOURCE 2 Extracts from *Mein Kampf*

"There must be no majority decisions. The decisions will be made by one man, only he alone may possess the authority and right to command.

Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures. All who are not of good race in the world are chaff.

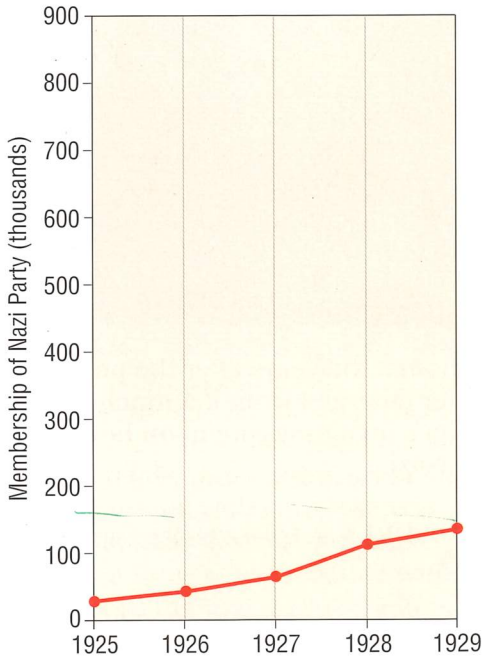
The danger to which Russia has succumbed is always present for Germany. In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews to achieve world domination.

History proves that the German people owes its existence solely to its determination to fight in the East and to obtain land by military conquest."

Increased membership

Gradually, year by year, the Nazis increased their membership.

SOURCE 3 Nazi Party membership, 1925–29



Despite this rise in membership, the Nazis were actually losing ground in the only place it now really mattered – in the Reichstag. After four years of campaigning and reorganisation, in the 1928 Reichstag elections the Nazis were reduced to just twelve deputies. Their hated rivals the Social Democrats had 153 seats. Even the Communists had four times as many seats as the Nazis.

Winning over the middle classes

In 1928 the Nazis decided on another change of policy. They were increasingly convinced that they were getting nowhere in their appeals to the working classes. But they were doing well among the middle classes and among farmers, and this is where most of their new members were coming from. They began to focus on the parts of their message which would appeal to this section of society.

SOURCE 4 From a resolution passed at a Nazi meeting for farmers, January 1928

"We have recognised that the distress of agriculture is inseparably bound up with the political misery of the German people. Let us do away with this Marxist–capitalist extortion system that has made Germany, our homeland, powerless, without honour, defenceless, and has turned free German farmers into poor, misused slaves of the world stock exchange."

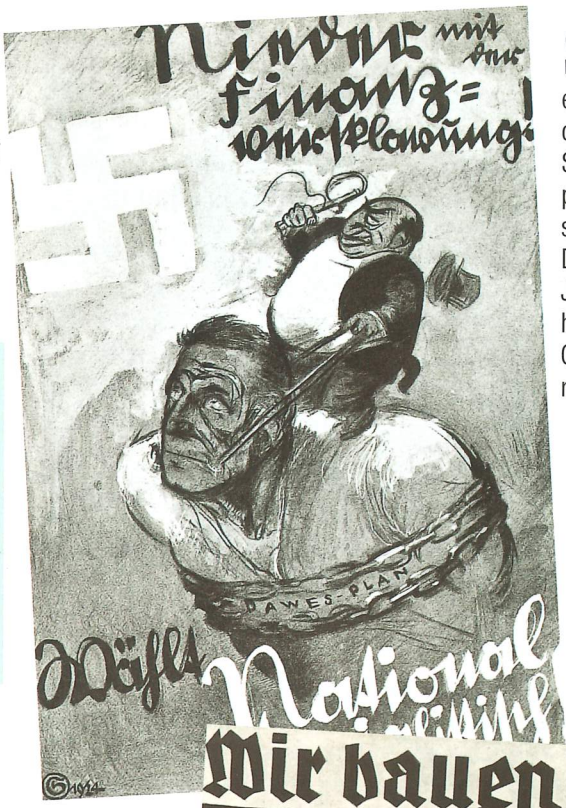
Public meetings

Whereas political parties today have television as their main way of communicating with the public, parties at that time depended mainly on public meetings. The Nazis were the only party in Germany to run evening classes for their members to train them in public-speaking skills. Nazi activists in villages and towns throughout Germany would put on meetings with visiting speakers. If a subject proved popular then they would repeat it. In this way the Nazis developed a very sensitive system of propaganda. They learnt the skill of focusing on the issues that people thought were important. If this also meant changing their policies to fit, then they seemed prepared to do so.

As you can see from Source 3, Nazi membership almost doubled between 1927 and 1928. Would this growth have continued? Maybe. But in 1929 other events over which the Nazis had no control brought about a change in their fortunes which launched them on the path to power.

■ TASK

One historian has said of Hitler in the summer of 1929 that he was 'no more than the leader of a small splinter party, scarcely known outside Bavaria and very likely doomed to remain forever on the fringe of political life'. Does the information on pages 44–45 support this viewpoint? Explain your answer carefully.

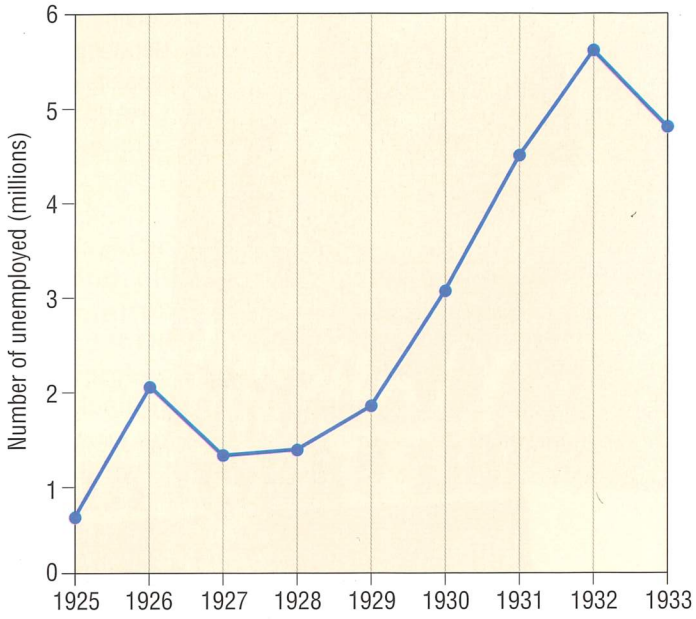


SOURCE 5 1924 election poster criticising Stresemann's policies – suggesting the Dawes Plan and Jewish bankers holding Germany to ransom

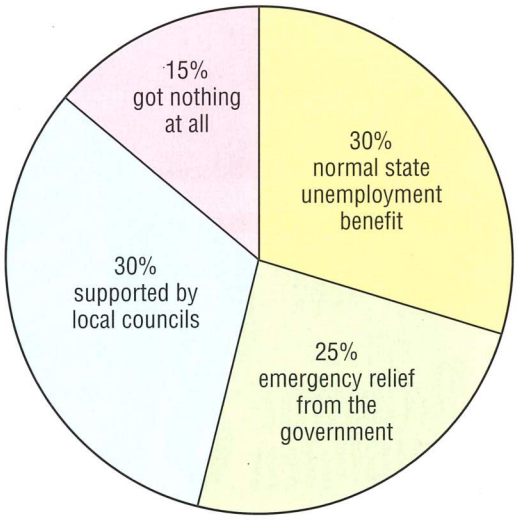
SOURCE 6 1928 election poster. The Nazis present their 'building blocks' for the reconstruction of Germany – work, freedom, bread – as opposed to the unemployment, social spending cuts, corruption and lying of the other parties

How did the Depression help the Nazis?

IN OCTOBER 1929 the WALL STREET CRASH was the beginning of a worldwide slide into the Great Depression. The effects were felt everywhere but Germany was hit particularly badly because American banks recalled the loans which were the lifeblood of German industry. Businesses had to close. As world trade declined, German exports slumped. Millions of people lost their jobs.



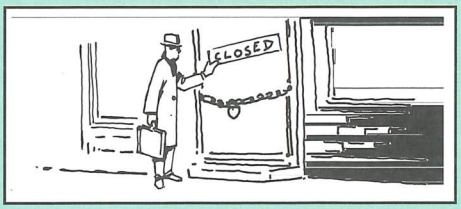
SOURCE 1 Unemployment in Germany 1925–33



SOURCE 2 How the unemployed were supported in 1932. Those on emergency relief from the government received a payment lower than normal unemployment benefit, while the support from local councils was a lower payment still

What was life like in the Depression?

The Depression affected different people in different ways. For those who had lost their jobs there was poverty, hunger and homelessness. Of course not all Germans suffered equally, but even those who were protected from the worst of the Depression felt its impact in other ways.



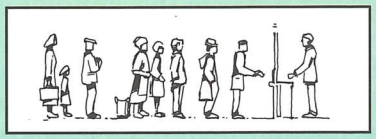
Businessmen
Businessmen saw their businesses close. If they did manage to survive they saw their income fall – because in the Depression people had less money to spend, even on essentials like food and clothes.To make matters worse the government actually raised taxes to pay for looking after the increasing number of poor people. However, business owners were not hit as badly as either their workers, or farmers.

WHO SUFFERED?

Young people
In 1933 over half of all Germans between the ages of 16 and 30 were unemployed. Sixty per cent of new university graduates could not get a job.

Farmers
Farmers had not done well in the 1920s. Prices had been falling since 1925. In the 1930s farmers slipped further into debt.

Factory workers
40% of all factory workers were unemployed by 1932. At the same time the government cut unemployment benefit to save money. For the unemployed this was a time of extreme poverty.



SOURCE 3 Who suffered in the Depression?

SOURCE 4 The writer Heinrich Hauser describes what he saw as he toured Germany in 1932

"An almost unbroken chain of homeless men extends the whole length of the great Hamburg–Berlin highway. It is the same scene for the entire two hundred miles, and all the highways in Germany over which I travelled this year.

They walked separately or in small groups with their eyes on the ground. And they had the queer, stumbling gait of barefoot people, for their shoes were slung over their shoulders. Some of them were guild members – carpenters with broad felt hats, milkmen with striped red shirts, and bricklayers with tall black hats – but they were in a minority. Far more numerous were those to whom one could assign no special profession or craft – unskilled young people for the most part who had been unable to find a place for themselves in any city or town in Germany, and who had never had a job and never expected to have one.

There was something else that had never been seen before – whole families who had piled all their goods into baby carriages and wheelbarrows that they were pushing along as they plodded forward in dumb despair. It was a whole nation on the march.

I saw them – and this was the strongest impression that the year 1932 left with me – I saw them, gathered into groups of fifty or a hundred men, attacking fields of potatoes. I saw them digging up the potatoes and throwing them into sacks while the farmer who owned the field watched them in despair and the local policeman looked on gloomily from the distance. I saw them staggering towards the lights of the city as night fell, with their sacks on their backs. What did it remind me of? Of the war, of the worst period of starvation in 1917 and 1918, but even then people paid for the potatoes."

1. Why do you think the homeless men in Source 4 carried their shoes rather than wore them?
2. What would be the best way for the government to help the people in Source 4?

SOURCE 5 A camp for the homeless in a Berlin park. There were so many homeless that large camps of tents were set up. The tents were numbered and erected in neat rows which even had names as if they were streets. The camps had children's playgrounds and communal kitchens

SOURCE 6 A soup kitchen providing food for unemployed Germans. The government kept food prices high to protect the farmers from the worst of the Depression. The result was that many unemployed people could not afford to eat

SOURCE 7 Heinrich Hauser (see Source 4) describes the Berlin municipal lodging house where many young unemployed men had to stay

"Long lines of men were leaning against the wooden walls, waiting in silence and staring. Heavy steam rose from the men's clothes. Some of them sat down on the floor, pulled off their shoes, and unwound the rags that bound their feet. More people were constantly pouring in the door, and we stood closely packed together. The municipal lodging house means waiting, waiting, standing around. We arrange ourselves in long lines, each leading up to an official. The man wants to know: When and where were you born, and where have you come from? Name of your parents? Ever been in a municipal lodging house before? Where have you spent the last three nights? Where did you work last? Have you begged? My impression is the helplessness of the men. Eight out of every ten men are young fellows and about a third of these are mere boys.

I have been given a night's sleep and food in the lodging house. The bare walls of the room that we have entered are lined with iron bedsteads. There are no windows but a sloping roof with skylights that reminds me of a factory. They do not make it easy for you to get supper and a bed in a municipal lodging house."

SOURCE 8 A woman textile worker describes her weekend in 1930. She worked six days a week, for a very low wage

"I would be happy if I could properly provide for my household and children, but of the 25 marks a week one and a half marks goes for transport, six marks for childcare and what it otherwise costs to be out of the house all day.

Saturdays and every night are spent washing. If I'm finished with the housework on Saturdays around 9.30, I'm usually too tired to give the child a bath so I have to start up again Sunday morning. Then there are things to mend, and everything else that didn't get done during the week. Those are the famous weekend joys of a working woman. I often wonder what I live for, and why everything is so unequal."

SOURCE 9 Farmers ploughing by hand in East Prussia, 1933 – probably because they could not afford a horse

SOURCE 10 A shop forced to close because of the Depression and sell all its goods 'for any reasonable price', 1931

3. Why do you think the woman in Source 8 did the work she did if she was so dissatisfied with it?
4. Who would you rather have been of all the people in Sources 3–10? Explain your choice.

■ ACTIVITY

Imagine two of the people in Sources 3–10 meet each other. Either role-play or write out a conversation between them in which they talk about what life is like in the Depression.

How did the Depression weaken the Weimar government?

1. Unpopular economic policies

For half a century or more Germans had judged their country by its economic success. So if the economy was failing then the country must be going down the drain! The Weimar government seemed to have no idea what to do about the problems of rising unemployment and growing poverty.

The government did of course try to get Germany out of depression, but with little success. To be fair, no other country affected by the Depression did much better, but the Weimar government faced particular problems. For example, one way out of depression is to print money and increase government expenditure – but all Weimar leaders were aware that these were the policies which had led to disastrous inflation in 1923. What if the same happened again? The government was more scared of what would happen if there was another period of inflation than it was of unemployment. So instead the Chancellor raised taxes, cut wages and reduced unemployment benefit – hardly the policies to win support from the German people.

2. Presidential rule

These policies also caused the collapse of the government because the Social Democrats withdrew from the coalition. In order for his government to survive the Chancellor fell back on Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution (see page 21) which gave the President special powers in an emergency. Germany was now ruled by presidential decree. But who was the President? An 84-year-old war hero, apparently controlled by business and army leaders, and who seemed to be well past his prime.

3. The rise of extremism

To many Germans it seemed that the Weimar government was making a hopeless mess of handling the situation. Some people who had never bothered to vote in elections before – because they were not interested in politics – now became more involved. Politics did matter. Something had to be done!

From right and left they could hear the claims of extremist parties who said they could solve all these problems. The Communists said that the Depression showed that the capitalist system was doomed and that only communism had the answer. The Nazis blamed the Weimar Republic, the Treaty of Versailles, the Marxists and the Jews and promised to get rid of 'the enemy within' who was destroying Germany.

As extremism increased, so too did political violence. Nazi and Communist supporters fought regular battles. Five hundred were killed or seriously wounded in a seven-week frenzy of political fighting during the elections of 1932. Town halls were bombed by farmers.

SOURCE 11 Police in Berlin, 1932, on the way to deal with a demonstration

How did these problems help the Nazis?

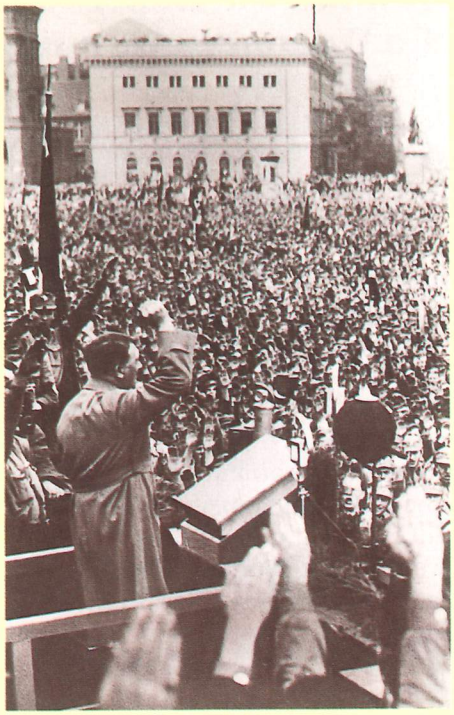
The Depression was a gift to Hitler and the Nazis. For every problem the Nazis had an explanation or a promise:

- The Weimar government is weak: you need strong leadership. Hitler is your man.
- Unemployment? The Nazis will get people back to work on road-building and public works.
- Worried about the Communists? Look at the Nazis' SA – we are the only ones who really know how to deal with the Communists.

Most importantly, Hitler, standing before a crowd delivering his powerful and moving speeches, seemed to represent strong, decisive leadership in the great German tradition going back to the Kaiser and beyond. While the Weimar Republic appeared simply to be muddling through indecisively, Hitler's strong personality and powerful ideas seemed to be just what Germany needed.

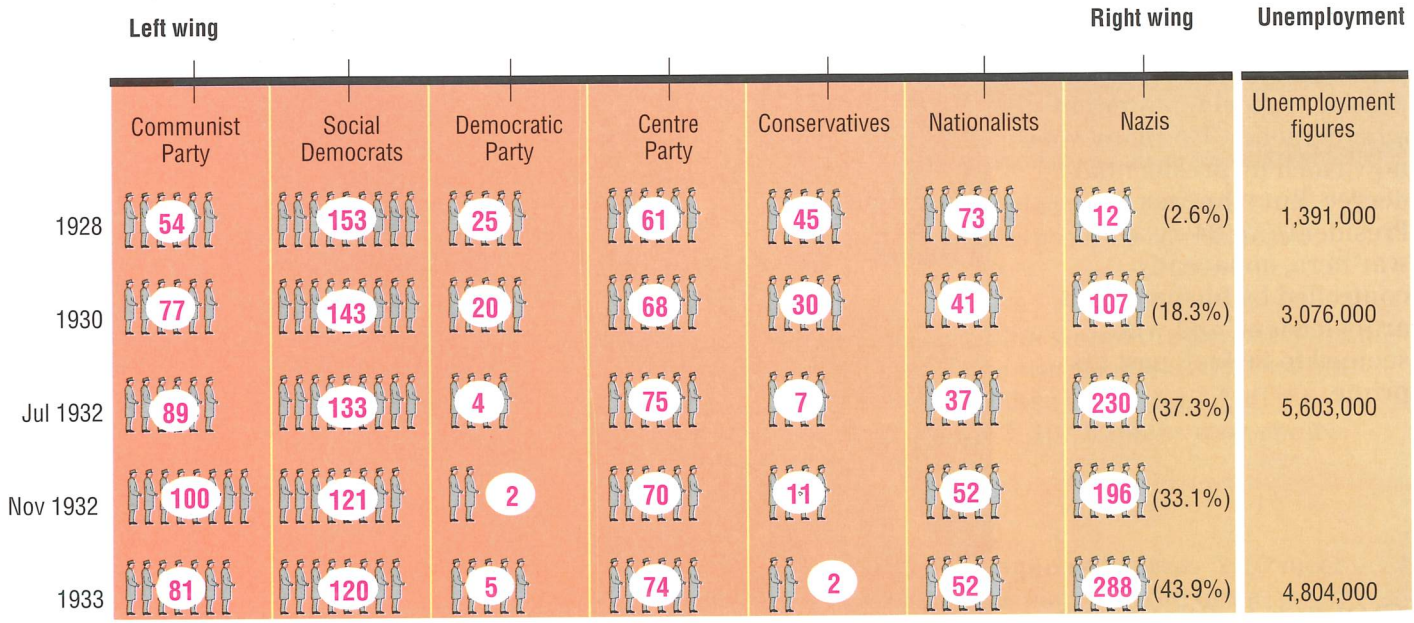
As you can see from Source 12, in the Reichstag elections in 1930 the Nazis made their first great breakthrough, jumping from twelve to 107 seats. They were suddenly the second largest party and were well ahead of the Communists. In the July 1932 elections they advanced to 230 seats and were the biggest party. The Nazi Party was now *the* major force in German politics.

SOURCE 13 Hitler addressing an open-air meeting during the 1932 presidential election campaign



Summary: how did the Nazis do it?

The impact of the Depression can only partly explain the success of the Nazis. All parties claimed they had solutions. Why was it the Nazis and not the other parties who managed to convince Germans they could solve the country's problems?



SOURCE 12 Reichstag election results, 1928–33, and unemployment figures 1925–33

Organisation
They were very well organised. Many Nazis had been soldiers in the First World War. They brought to party work the same obedience, organisation and teamwork skills which they had needed in the trenches. The local workers were well trained and motivated. They had skilled leaders at almost every level.

Propaganda
Their national leaders were masters of propaganda, and they carefully trained their local groups in propaganda skills. They used every trick in the book to get their message home. They knew that their anti-Communist stance was very popular and their propaganda further whipped up fear and hatred of the Communists. They stirred up violence at election meetings so that the SA could crush it and be seen 'dealing with the Communist threat'. Hitler pointed to the Nazis' ten-year track record in leading the fight against Communism.

Support of the industrialists
One of their aims – which was partly successful – was to earn the support of the powerful industrialists. Traditionally they had voted for the Conservative Party, which lost much of its support after 1930. In 1931 Hitler made a deal with the other main right-wing party, the Nationalists, by which the two parties agreed to co-operate. The Nazi Party also received some financial backing from big business.

Use of technology
The Nazis could now redouble their propaganda. Radio was used for the first time. In the 1932 presidential election, while Hindenburg gave just one election speech, Goebbels chartered planes to fly Hitler all over Germany in order to speak to four or five massive rallies per day. Radio broadcasts, millions of election posters, rallies, parades and marches carried the Nazi message into every town and home in Germany.

Promises to voters
And every sector of German society seemed to hear something it wanted to hear.

Workers were promised jobs (Hitler could point to how the Nazis' SA had taken in the unemployed and fed and housed them). Employers were promised restored profits; farmers higher prices; shopkeepers protection against competition. There was something for everybody.

Flexibility
In fact, one reason for the Nazis' success was that they were flexible. If they found an idea was losing them support they would change it. In one election speech a leading Nazi spoke powerfully for the nationalisation of industry (which had always been one of the Nazis' beliefs). When they found out how alarmed the industrialists were they quickly dropped the idea. In their campaigns it was never mentioned again. In their all-out push for electoral success they realised that it doesn't really matter what you promise as long as people trust you. If all else failed the Nazis simply went for vague promises: they would 'make Germany great again'. In the end, despite the extreme beliefs expressed in the Nazis' 25 Points – of which they made no secret (see page 34) – Germans were actually very unsure as to what the Nazis really stood for.

Hitler the superman
Only one thing really stayed consistent throughout this barrage of electioneering: the unblinking focus on Hitler, the strong leader whom Germany needed and wanted. Posters and rallies built him up into a superman. His physical appearance was adapted (on posters at least). Hitler himself developed his speech-making skills still further. He wore spectacles to read but refused to be seen wearing them in public and so his speeches were typed in large – 12mm high – print. It no longer seemed to matter *what* he said, just *how* he said it. Hitler was the Nazis' trump card. The campaigns focused around his personality and his skills. The opposition had no one to match him.

Weaknesses of opposition
Other parties were very weak and they consistently underestimated the Nazis. The Social Democrats feared they would attempt a putsch, but they thought that the Nazis' electioneering was so absurd that ordinary Germans would see through it. And their own support was constant so they were not eager to change. They quarrelled among themselves rather than uniting to face the Nazis' challenge.

TASK

1. The text describes many factors which helped the Nazis. Explain *how* each one helped them.
2. Which of these factors were also present in the 1920s?
3. Why were the Nazis less successful in the 1920s?

Nazi messages and Nazi methods

■ SOURCE INVESTIGATION

What was the Nazis' message... and how did they get it across?

SOURCE 1 'Our last hope: Hitler': a 1932 election poster

1. Look at Sources 1–4. For each source explain whom you think it was designed to appeal to.
2. Which of Sources 1–4 best shows the following Nazis messages?

a) The Nazis will make Germany great again.
b) Hitler is a great leader.
c) The Nazis will deal with the Communists. Explain your choice.

3. What other messages are given by these sources?
4. Which do you think is the most effective piece of propaganda?

SOURCE 2 A 1932 election poster. The text at the top reads: 'Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future'

SOURCE 3 A Nazi election poster (we have translated the text into English)

SOURCE 4 Nazi election poster from 1928. The text reads: 'Work, freedom and bread! Vote for the National Socialists!'

SOURCE 5 A Hamburg schoolteacher recalls a Nazi meeting in 1932

"It was nearly 3 p.m. 'The FÜHRER is coming!' A ripple went through the crowd. Around the speakers' platform one could see hands raised in the Hitler salute. There stood Hitler in a simple black coat and he looked over the crowd, waiting – a forest of swastika pennants swished up, the jubilation of this moment was given vent in a roaring salute.

[Hitler's main theme was] out of parties shall grow a nation. 'Thirteen years ago I was a simple unknown soldier. I went my way. I never turned back. Nor shall I turn back now.'

When the speech was over there was roaring enthusiasm and applause. Then he went. How many look up to him with touching faith, as their helper, their saviour, their deliverer from unbearable distress."

SOURCE 6 From a report by the British Ambassador to Berlin in 1932

"According to official statistics there were between 1 June and 20 July in Prussia alone, excluding Berlin, 322 serious clashes, involving 72 deaths and 497 injured. The most disgusting outrages were in East Prussia, now the stronghold of the Nazi Party. Prominent Socialists and Communists were surprised at night and murdered in their own beds or shot down at the doors of their houses. The windows of shops owned by Jews were smashed and the contents looted. There were attacks with high explosives on the offices of democratically owned newspapers. The assailants used firearms, hand grenades and acid."

SOURCE 7 From a description of Hitler written by a member of the British Foreign Office in the 1930s as information for the government

"As a speaker, Hitler exercises astonishing sway over a German audience, presumably because public speaking is an unknown art in Germany. His speeches are practically repetitions of a few simple main ideas, in the course of which platitudes [everyday ideas] are uttered with such extraordinary emphasis that an unsophisticated audience mistakes them for newly minted political theories. He has sized up the German audience with astonishing accuracy. This and an undeniable political instinct have brought him to the top of the tree."

5. Read Source 6. Explain how these tactics helped the Nazis to achieve success in elections.
6. How far do Sources 5 and 7 agree in their assessment of Hitler as a public speaker?
7. Explain why Goebbels was keen for Hitler to speak at as many meetings as possible.
8. Which of Sources 1–7 is the most helpful in explaining the Nazis' success in the 1932 elections?