

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 22

How far did the Nazi Party create a police state?

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What is a police state?

When **Hitler** became **Chancellor** of Germany on the **30th January 1933**, his control of the government wasn't strong. He realised that his control of the German police was also weak. Therefore, **Hitler** created his own police and security forces. They were under the direct control and authority of **Hitler** and their job was to protect the Nazi Party. **Hitler** was creating a **police state**.



A **police state** is when the Nazi government used the police, often the secret police, to control what the German people did or what they said. People who did or said anything against Germany or the Nazi Party were punished. This was a method used by **Hitler** to keep control.



How did he do this?

After the power of the **SA** was significantly reduced as a result of the **Night of the Long Knives** on the **30th June 1934**, **Hitler** used three main organisations to control the German people. The most important of these organisations was the **SS**, led by **Heinrich Himmler**. The **SS** were originally created to act as **Hitler's** personal bodyguards but their power increased after the **Night of the Long Knives**, they became responsible for dealing with and removing all opposition within Germany.

By 1939 there was approximately 150,000 people in prison, not for committing criminal acts, like stealing or murder. Instead they were imprisoned because they did things which the Nazis didn't like, for example being vocal about their negative or critical opinions of **Hitler**.



In order to cope with the growing number of prisoners, the Nazis created a new type of prison, a **concentration camp**. Prisoners of a concentration camps included political prisoners like the **Communists**, anyone who was considered 'work shy' like the homeless within Germany and minority groups such as Jews, effectively anyone who opposed the Nazis. The first Nazi **concentration camp** was opened in **Dachau** in 1933. The camps were often located in isolated areas away from the cities and the prisoners in these camps completed hard labour tasks such as breaking stones or working in construction.



The **SD** were under the authority of the **SS**. The **SD** was also created by **Himmler** but leadership of this organisation was passed to **Reinhard Heydrich**. The **SD** were the intelligence agency, their job was to collect intelligence, or information, about who was a threat or even a potential threat to Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Another extremely powerful organisation in helping **Hitler** to create a **police state** was a group called the **Gestapo**. The **Gestapo** were the Nazis' secret police force. They were created in 1933 by a leading Nazi called **Hermann Goering** and in 1936 it came under the authority of **Himmler** and the **SS**, with **Heydrich** as its leader.



The **Gestapo** were feared amongst the German people. They didn't march around in the feared black uniforms of the **SS**, they wore plain clothes and that's what made them truly terrifying as they could be anyone. The aim of the **Gestapo** was to identify anyone who criticised the Nazis, so you would need to be very careful what you said and who you said it to! The **Gestapo** were known for spying on people, tapping their phones and using informants. Informants were German civilians who provided information to the **Gestapo**. The **Gestapo** would typically arrest someone in the early hours of the morning and put them in prison without a trial.



The Legal System

Even though the Nazis were able to make their own laws, **Hitler** wanted to ensure that all laws were interpreted in a Nazi way. Before 1933 the Nazis had accused German courts being too soft on crime and favouring criminals rather than their victims. The NSDAP's 25-point plan even talked of scrapping the entire court system and replacing them with new Nazi courts. Germany's **judges, lawyers and legal experts** caved in to many Nazi demands and expectations. Some **judges were removed from their positions** and those that remained had to become members of the **National Socialist League for the Maintenance of Law**. In other words, all judges had to favour the Nazi Party in any decision. From 1936, judges had to wear the Nazi symbol of the **swastika** on their robes.



Hitler also controlled the law courts. He **abolished trial by jury**, there would be no group of people to decide if someone was innocent or guilty, only a judge would make this decision. As a result, they often gave in to **Nazi demands for tougher sentences for certain crimes**. In one example, a Nazi report was furious about petty (small) crimes which then influenced a German judge to sentence a middle-aged woman to death for stealing some curtains, clothes and three tins of coffee!

In 1934, a new **People's Court** was created to try cases of so-called '**political crimes**'. Political crimes ranged from minor offences like criticising **Hitler** or the government, or protesting about work conditions, through to treason. Trials were held in secret and judges were hand-picked. **The judges were loyal Nazis**. Judges knew that the Minister of Justice would check to see if they had been lenient (too soft) and that sometimes **Hitler** would change sentences if he felt that they had been.



How did Hitler try to control religion in Germany?

There was one part of German life which **Hitler** wanted to control which would not be so easy to control as others may have been, and that area was religion! A large proportion of the German population were **Christians** and were either part of the **Catholic Church** or the **Protestant Church**. Both of these churches are **Christian** and believe in **God** but they have several differences. For example, the **Catholic Church** believes that someone called the **Pope** should speak on behalf of God and is the head of the **Catholic Church**. Where as **Protestantism** does not follow a **Pope** or anyone similar.



1/3 of German Christians were **Catholic**, and the main issue **Hitler** had was that for those Germans their loyalty would be more towards the **Pope** than towards **Hitler**. He was also worried because **Catholics** had their own schools and youth groups. These taught different values and beliefs to those that the Nazis wanted to be taught to the young people of Germany. Surprisingly, **Hitler** made an agreement with the **Catholic Church** in **July of 1933!** This agreement is called a **concordat** and it was made between **Hitler** and the **Pope**. Under this agreement **Hitler** agreed to allow the **Catholics** within Germany the freedom to worship and that he would not interfere with the **Catholic** schools. In response, the **Catholic Church** agreed that their priests would not get involved and interfere with German politics and that German bishops would **swear loyalty to the Nazis**.



Hitler didn't stick to this agreement! Within months of making the **concordat** with the **Pope**, **Catholic** priests were arrested and many ended up in **concentration camps**. The **Catholic** schools were made to remove **Christian** symbols like the cross and these schools were eventually abolished. Catholic youth groups were also banned.



Two **Protestant** churches were created in Germany during the 1930s, one of them in support of the Nazis and one which opposed the Nazis. The **Protestant** churches which supported the Nazis combined in 1936 to form a single **Protestant Church** called the **Reich Church**. The **Reich Church** was led by **Ludwig Muller** and **Protestant** pastors who supported the Nazis and **Hitler's** views were allowed to continue with their church services. Some members of the church allowed the Nazi **swastika** to be displayed in the Church and they would also give the Nazi salute.



However, not every member of the **Protestant Church** were willing to work with the Nazis. The **Confessional Church** was created by **Martin Niemöller** in 1934 and openly opposed the Nazis. **Niemöller** and others within the church were arrested and sent to **concentration camps** for speaking out against the Nazis.



Glossary

Christianity - A religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and within Christianity there were different churches such as the Catholic Church and Protestant Church.

Concentration camp - A new type of prison created by the Nazis and ran by the SS.

Concordat - The agreement made between Hitler and the Pope.

Gestapo - The secret police.

Police state - When the Nazi government used the police, often the secret police, to control what the German people did or what they said.

Pope - The head of the Catholic Church.

SD - Created by Himmler as an intelligence agency.

SS - Originally created to act as Hitler's personal bodyguards but they became responsible for removing all opposition within Germany.



Comprehension Questions

1. How did Hitler use the SS to create a police state?
2. How did Hitler use courts within the legal system to help him strengthen his power and control over the people?
3. Why was the Catholic Church a threat to Hitler?
4. How did Hitler try to control the Catholic Church at first?
5. **Challenge question:** How far do you agree that the use of the Gestapo was the most important method used by Hitler to create a police state?

You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer

It could be argued that the Gestapo was the most important method used by Hitler to create a police state. This is because...

However, there are other reasons to explain why Hitler was able to create a police state. For example...

Overall, I mostly agree/disagree that...

