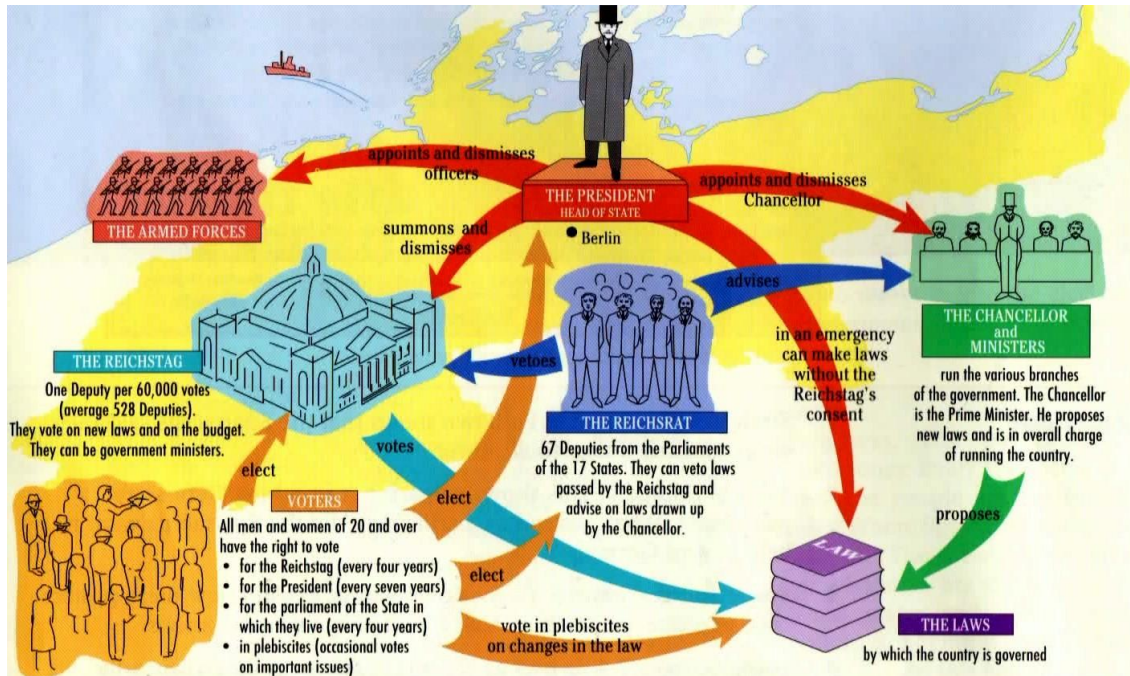


## Was the Weimar Republic doomed?

### Article 48 /Weimar Constitution

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/germany/hitlerpowerrev1.shtml>



Was Hitler's success because of Weimar's failure? Was the Weimar constitution to blame or was Weimar doomed from the start?

### Arguments

Throughout this section (Germany - Weimar), we have been assessing **how successful** the Weimar Republic was. It was beset by problems in the early years, but the stability and **prosperity enjoyed by Germany during the period 1924-1929**, suggests that it was successful to a degree.

However, throughout this time, Hitler and the Nazi party came to prominence and eventually **gained control** in 1933.

It is arguable that the problems which beset the Weimar Republic from the start finally 'got it in the end':

- The **vilification** of the government as the **November Criminals** continued even into the 1930s, when Hitler referred to the government as the November Criminals in his election speeches.
- The **weakness of the Reichstag** governments because of proportional representation continued right to the very end, and lay behind the Hindenburg/Papen deal with Hitler in January 1933.
- Hitler used Article 48 to **destroy the Republic** after January 1933. (1)

Yet:

- The Republic **lasted 13 years** - the world in 1933 was very different to 1919, so there was no simplistic cause-and-effect.
- The Republic was **very successful** during the period **1923-1929**. When the pro-democracy parties organised themselves properly, the Republic could be very strong.
- The Republic would have survived if Hindenburg and Papen hadn't made Hitler chancellor; the **Nazis had not done as well** in the November 1932 elections as they had in July 1932, and some historians believe that their appeal was beginning to wane.

The historian AJP Taylor said that there was nothing wrong with the Weimar Republic per se: he blamed the stupid men who lacked the will to maintain democracy the politicians of the Centre and Social Democratic parties, and particularly Hindenburg and Papen for Hitler's rise to power.

## Revision tip and answer preparation

### Revision tip

- 'The Weimar Republic had flaws that made its failure inevitable.'
- 'Hitler's accession as chancellor was the result of weak politicians, not a weak Republic.'

Look back over the facts and ideas you have studied in this unit, and see if any of them lend support for either of these ideas.

### Answer preparation

As part of your revision, think about the **arguments and facts** you would use to explain:

1. **Why** the Weimar Republic was doomed from the start.
2. **Whether** it was inevitable - or simply bad luck - that Hitler came to power in 1933.

---

(1) **Article 48** of the constitution of the Weimar Republic of Germany (1919–1933) allowed the President, under certain circumstances, to take emergency measures without the prior consent of the *Reichstag*. This power was understood to include the promulgation of "emergency decrees (*Notverordnungen*)". Article 48 did require the President to inform the Reichstag immediately of the issuance of the emergency decree, and gave the Reichstag the power to nullify the emergency decree by simple majority action. The Reichsrat, or upper house, was not involved in this process at all. If the Reichstag nullified the decree, the President could in effect counter-retaliate under **Article 25 and dissolve the Reichstag, and call for new elections within 60 days**. **On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany**. Lacking a majority in the *Reichstag*, Hitler formed a coalition with the Nationalists. Not long afterwards, he called elections for March 5. Six days before the election, on February 27, the

**Reichstag Fire** damaged the house of Parliament in Berlin. Claiming that the fire was the first step in a Communist revolution, the Nazis used the fire as a pretext to get President von Hindenburg to sign the Reichstag Fire Decree, officially the **Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat** (Presidential Decree for the Protection of People and State). Under the decree, issued by von Hindenburg on the basis of Article 48, the government was given authority to curtail constitutional rights including habeas corpus, free expression of opinion, freedom of the press, rights of assembly, and the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications. Constitutional restrictions on searches and confiscation of property were likewise suspended. **The Reichstag Fire Decree was one of the first steps the Nazis took toward the establishment of a single-party dictatorship in Germany.** With several key government posts in the hands of Nazis and with the constitutional protections on civil liberties suspended by the decree, the Nazis were able to use police power to suppress, intimidate and arrest their opposition, in particular the Communists. Hitler's subversion of the Constitution under Article 48 thus had the mark of legality. The March 5 elections gave the Nazi-DNVP coalition a narrow majority in the *Reichstag*. Nonetheless, the Nazis were able to maneuver on March 23, 1933 the passage of the **Enabling Act** by the required two-thirds parliamentary majority, effectively abrogating the authority of the Reichstag and placing its authority in the hands of the Cabinet (in effect, the Chancellor). **Over the years, Hitler used Article 48 to give his dictatorship the stamp of legality. Thousands of his decrees--such as those that abolished all other political parties apart from the Nazis and enlarged Hitler's powers--were based explicitly on the Reichstag Fire Decree, and thus on Article 48. Thus, for the next 12 years Hitler ruled under what amounted to martial law.**



Diario del partido nacionalsocialista alemán: "Ahora actuaremos sin consideraciones"

