

Annotated candidate answer from the 2003 diet: Advanced Higher (Germany)

This exemplar has been chosen as the candidate responses show excellent technique as well as mastery of the field. It may usefully serve as a model for candidate essay and source responses.

Part 1

Question 4

“The Weimar Republic was founded on defeat and finished in disaster. Hitler’s ascent was made possible through the degeneration of democracy, economic distress and the popularity of the party.”

Feuchtwanger here suggests that the Nazi takeover was the result of interacting socio-economic factors, of which Hitler’s own popularity was but one. The common historiographical view has attributed the Republic’s end to Hitler’s charisma above all else. However, revisionists such as Miller and Bookbinder explain the rise of the Nazis in terms of a top-level “power auction”, in which the “people” were certainly not involved. This analysis will examine how the Nazis came to power, and identify to what extent the person of Hitler was a key influence — was he “the people’s choice” as propaganda suggested?

Without a shadow of doubt, Hitler was vital to the cohesion of the Nazi Party. During his stay at Landsberg prison, Shirer tells us, “the NSDAP virtually imploded – he was the mortar between the bricks”. Hitler, upon his release, immediately set about re-branding the Party as respectable and electable. GK Waddington — “The ballast of unrealistic expectations [presumably revolution?] had been shed”. Parikos Panayi concurs: “He realised democracy had to be fought through democratic channels — through the ballot box”. This point is crucial — Hitler had to show himself to be a man of the people. Thus in 1925, upon release, he re-founded the Party as a ‘Führer Party’ in which he had autonomy. 1919s 25-point plan remained the only concrete statute, but was, according to Kershaw, “open to interpretation as it pleased Hitler”. SA violence was relaxed (this had seriously curbed middle-class support in the past) but they were still employed to intimidate when necessary. In the 1933 elections that saw 14 million endorse the Nazis, 40,000 brownshirts were disseminated – so amidst his paraphernalia of respectability, there was an element of coercion that casts doubt on his “people’s choice” veneer.

The first Nazi majority was gained in Coburg, which is largely agricultural. This is interesting, in that it is indicative of a general trend of Hitler — support in agricultural areas. In *Völkischer Beobachter*, 1929, Goebbels rapturously waxed lyrical about how allocation of propaganda materials to different sectors produced good results. It would therefore be revealing to spend some time on sectional interests in this analysis — to what extent was he the choice of different **kinds** of people? Nazi propaganda frequently proclaimed the support of farmers. Hitler’s own humble (though not agrarian!) origins were thought to have gained votes in the countryside. ‘Blood and Soil’ propaganda declared farmers to be pure Aryan, and there were promises of guaranteed sale prices to inject new life into the ailing farmers sector. 1928 had seen a very poor harvest, and Nazi support consequently increased by two thirds in the agrarian sector. Hitler gained double the average support farmers usually gave to any one candidate.

Workers are a notoriously difficult area to look at. The broad consensus of early Weimar historiography is typified by Shirer: “the workers were generally Communist in sympathy”. This is, to an extent, true. The KPD were the main beneficiaries of labour force votes. More recently, however, historians have adopted an outlook summarised by Hite and Hinton: “A more detailed appraisal is needed”. The question changes from ‘did workers support Hitler?’ to ‘what types did?’ While the Nazis received a fifth of the average single-party labour support, white-collar or highly-skilled workers almost invariably saw Hitler as a bulwark against Communism, and voted accordingly. Thus, the combined support of farmers and the middle-classes (whose only alternative “choice” was the flaccid DVP) brought Hitler’s Reichstag total from 12 seats in 1929 to 107 in 1930,

which continued to rise until the Party once described as ‘an insignificant fringe group’ were the largest in Germany. The reasons can be summarised thus: the Party iconography (swastika, Romanesque hail after Feb 1926) was more dynamic; autarky (economic self-sufficiency) was an irresistible lure to middle-classes threatened by fiscal emergency after the Crash; propaganda was incisive and targeted distinct sectors including women; Hitler was the only saviour from communism. All of these led to the people “choosing” the Nazis or, more specifically, the charismatic leader.

However, a strong case exists against these historical assumptions. It has already been mentioned, SA intimidation removed “choice” through terror. Hitler’s radio speech of 5 March presented him as an honest, modest, Godfearing man and is tellingly obsequious to Hindenburg. This is a veneer, however. Hitler was, as Bookbinder bitinglly said, “bankrolled into power”. His anti-Communist policy attracted the attention of right-wingers and industrialists who had a vested interest in tipping the scales in favour of Nazism. Hitler’s collaboration with media tycoon* and DNVP leader Hugenberg gave him unlimited media resources for disseminating propaganda, in return for denunciation of the Young Plan. Also, Hitler became the protégé of the Dusseldorf Industry Club, who it is believed pumped billions of RM into the Party and funded anti-Communist rallies. His participation in the Harzburg League allowed him to open new SA soup-kitchens, and thus enable pre-election paramilitary violence. Hitler’s election successes were therefore not just the result of popular support for the concepts of Volksgemeinschaft and Gleichschaltung — as Hildebrand recently wrote, “Hitler’s backing by Industry and the right-wing keyholders of power helped him to generate the illusion that there was no viable alternative to Nazism”.

Stuart Miller coined the term “Power Auction” to explain the reality of Hitler’s rise to power. The “Nazi Revolution” trumpeted by propaganda did not conform to the stereotype of the coup d’etat — rather it was a private top-level plot without reference to nuances of the “people’s choice”. Hindenburg had created a political climate in which Chancellors were appointed or sacked on whim — Müller and Brüning had fallen in this ignominious fashion. The ‘auction’ began when Franz von Papen behaved complacently, using multiple elections as a tool for the marginalisation of small Parties. Schleicher terrified the decrepit Hindenburg with tall tales of Polish invasion and uprisings in Germany, and replaced Papen. He was unable to manufacture a coalition due to disdain from both wings, so the embittered Papen offered the popular Hitler as a possible cat’s-paw. His appointment by Hindenburg was **NOT** the result of any “people’s choice” — Papen hoped to use the NSDAP majority to strengthen his position, while Hitler was a puppet in the top spot. Oskar Hindenburg: “We’ve hired him for our act” — clearly not democratic; Papen: “We’ll push him so far into a corner he’ll squeak”! They were wrong, of course, and the death of Hindenburg allowed Hitler to (unconstitutionally!) amalgamate Chancellor and Presidential roles. Therefore although Hitler’s rise may have had popular unofficial support, the means by which his power was sealed were most assuredly not a result of “the people’s choice”!

* UFA inc.

Assessor’s comments

An excellent evaluation of the contributing factors – these are never far from the heart of the argument. The opening paragraph is a model worth following. So also is its use of historians’ views, integrating historiography into the flow of the essay. Its fluency makes the essay easy to read and to assess

This answer was awarded 25 marks.

Part 2

Question 2

Source B is a diary, and therefore an extremely private document. It is written by a Jew, and therefore will certainly not present the regime in a biased, flattering light. It bemoans the way in which the pretence of international co-operation is used as a tool for the advancement of Germany rather than a true expression of brotherhood. Its purpose seems to be to lay bare the true nature of Nazi foreign policy expressed through the Olympics. Source C is also an extremely private document — the infamous minutes taken (without consent) during Hitler’s foreign policy meeting. This document is held up by historians as proof that Hitler wanted to adopt an aggressive foreign policy geared towards a future, inexorable war for (i) the resolution of self-determination grievances created at Versailles and (ii) conquest.

Sources C and B show different sides to foreign policy, but combine to provide a cogent view of how it was conducted. For example, the occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 typifies the assertive ideology of Source C; while Hitler’s subsequent claim that “I only seek parity, and the resolution of Germany’s grievances” is consistent with the devious, mock-co-operative methodology discussed in Source B. When the Olympics began, anti-Jewish violence was indeed relaxed, which denotes a sensitivity to international opinion also seen after the murder of Engelbert Dolfuss and occupation of Austria – a post facto plebiscite returned 99% support for the new Anschluss. Thus the image of national rebirth without sabre-rattling was important in early foreign policy.

However, Source C shows that the Nazi state’s eagerness to legitimize its foreign policy was a ruse that would, after full economic revival, be jettisoned. Source C presents the driving force of foreign policy in a strictly racial way; foreign policy will provide Lebensraum. There were other considerations, however. Mason controversially claimed that foreign policy was driven by the fact that the ‘over-heating’ economy required new outlets. Overy’s view is far more convincing — Germany’s lack of certain vital resources (rubber, corn, oil) necessitated expansion by conquest. Goerring hoped to get corn from Russia, while reclaiming the Sudetenland and conquering Czechoslovakia would allow a springboard to oil fields in the Ukraine. Therefore Source B sees foreign policy as prestige-orientated and capable of overriding other considerations, while C points to uncompromising conquest for racial motives: but neither takes account of the pressing economic needs created by the Wehrwirtschaft.

Assessor’s comments

This response treats origin, purpose, content and context for both sources in the evaluation. There is very good use of comparison to extrapolate underlying differences of perspective. Historiography is used well to enrich the answer. Only in a minor error on the Anschluss does the candidate’s touch desert him.

This answer was awarded 11 marks.

Question 3

Source D is a recently – written secondary source by an academic — there is no reason to suspect bias, and reliability is ensured by a range of available sources. The document suggests that the view held by a generation of historians, that the state was a monolith, was false, and that the regime was disorganised and randomly administered.

The interpretation seems eminently supportable — Hitler disliked presence at the Chancellery, the administrative hub, and left implementation of policy to Hans Lammers. Upon assumption of power, a two-tier bureaucracy was put in place, as the source comments. To elaborate: Todt and Rubenacht suffered from ambiguous jurisdiction, since the new Nazi order did not replace the previous bureaucracy, it just sat on top. There was a minister for youth (Ley) but also one for education from the Republic years. Who had hegemony was unclear.

Hildebrand has suggested that the arbitrary, un-coordinated state structure was “a deliberate tactic to encourage competition”. Trevor-Roper, perhaps the most eloquent Third Reich historian, said that Hitler “surrounded himself with cringing toadies”, who were all competing to fill the ‘policy vacuum’ mentioned in the source, and impress the Fuhrer. Thus, the power structure, in which all were confused and determined to dominate, became what Kershaw powerfully dubbed “The Darwinist Jungle of the Third Reich”. This phenomenon of survival of the fittest is seen in the way in which the vigilant, ambitious Bormann supplanted Party Chairman Hess.

Hitler, as the source says, wanted flexibility above all else. Recently Andrew Roberts, in ‘Secrets of Leadership’, showed how the ‘mission command’ military principle, which delegates creative power to officers from generals, was applied also to politics. Without the impediment of the Reichstag, Hitler created a monolithic power structure of Gaue, each of which had an autonomous Gauleiter. Hitler was fond of calling them ‘true kings’, since they had delegated powers to implement policies in their Gaue that might even go against central policy. However, this was limited by the need for Gauleiter to consider their future careers. It is commonly believed that Bormann coasted into office, due to his habit of staunch compliance as a Gauleiter.

Hitler’s personal decisions on ‘policy’ were usually arbitrary and random — Broszat — “the Fuhrer’s will was expressed inconsistently”. For example, the policy of euthanasia is believed to have arisen from “one man’s pleading letter to have his disabled son terminated” (from Hite and Hinton). Similarly, the pogroms and Kristallnacht were the result of an idea by Goebbels which Hitler sanctioned with a mere nod.

Therefore the Source is correct that the traditional view is flawed — as Miller said: “Power in the Third Reich was elemental, based on whom — not official”.

Assessor’s comments

A thorough evaluation covers origin, purpose, content and context. There is excellent development of this last – a comprehensive contextualisation, supported by historians’ views as appropriate.

This answer was awarded 12 marks.