SOURCE 7.17 J. Noakes, 'The Rise of the Nazis', *History Today*, January 1983, p. 11

The Nazis did best in the rural areas and small towns of the Protestant parts of Germany, particularly in the north and east. They won much of their support from the most rooted and traditional section of the German population – peasant farmers, self-employed artisans, craftsmen and small retailers ... In urban areas the party did best in those towns and cities which were administrative or commercial centres with large civil servant and white collar populations, rather than in industrial centres; and they tended to win most support in upper-middle-class districts. Nazi support also tended to be strongest among the younger generation. This was particularly true of the membership, which was also overwhelmingly male.

SOURCE 7.18 J. Falter, 'How likely were workers to vote for the NSDAP?', in *The Rise of Nationalism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany*, ed. C. Fischer, 1996, pp. 34 and 40

According to our estimates, probably one in three workers of voting age backed the NSDAP ... From July 1932 onwards more workers would have voted NSDAP than voted KPD or SPD ... On a regular basis more than a quarter of National Socialist voters were workers ...

In terms of its electoral support the NSDAP was clearly Protestant dominated, but otherwise in social terms it was a distinctly heterogeneous [mixed] party ... There is unmistakable over-representation of voters from the middle classes, a fact certainly disputed by no one as yet. On the other hand, it no longer appears admissible, given so high a proportion of voters from the working class, to speak of a middle class party. The National Socialists' electoral successes were nourished by so many different sources, that the NSDAP might really best be characterised as an integrative [all-embracing] protest movement ... Its composition was so socially balanced ... that ... it possessed the character of a people's party or national party more than any other large Weimar party.

Historical debate: who voted Nazi?

ACTIVITY

The issue of who voted for the Nazis has been the subject of great historical controversy. To some extent this is because behind it lies the extremely sensitive question, 'Who was to blame for Hitler?' This activity will help you to identify the main trends in historians' explanations.

1 Copy the table below. Mark a tick if the historian identifies a group as prone to vote Nazi.

Group	1 Noakes (Source 7.17)	2 Peterson (Source 7.19)	3 Fischer (Source 7.20)	4 Falter (Source 7.18)	5 Geary (Source 7.21)
Working class					
Petty bourgeoisie/ middle class, e.g. shopkeepers, white-collar workers					
Wealthy, i.e. upper middle class					
Protestants					
Wide range, i.e. a people's movement					

2 What degree of historical consensus about Nazi support emerges from this exercise?

3 These are only extracts from the analyses of these historians so care has to be taken when assessing their views. However, the paragraph from Peterson (Source 7.19) is complete. Is there any surprising omission from his discussion of Nazi supporters? How might this be explained?

4 'The traditional stress on the petty-bourgeois base of Nazi support need not be discarded, but instead incorporated into a broader picture.' How far do these extracts substantiate this opinion?

SOURCE 7.19 B. Peterson, 'Regional Elites and the Rise of National Socialism' in *Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany*, 1989, p. 172

Most [historians] now generally agree that the social class most inclined to join and vote for the National Socialists was the petty bourgeoisie, including artisans, shopkeepers, and peasants. Substantial support, however, has been shown to have come from higher social strata. Recent studies have demonstrated that residents of affluent neighbourhoods, vacationers, cruise ship passengers, civil servants and RENTIERS – all arguably elite – supported the National Socialist German Workers Party. On the other hand, big business and Junkers – the core groups of the ruling class in Weimar Germany – were generally disinclined to join or vote for the Nazis, although some of them gave various other kinds of direct and indirect support.

SOURCE 7.20 Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis*, 1995, pp. 63 and 99

[The Nazis] intended to MOBILISE all 'ethnic' Germans, tried to do so and enjoyed a degree of success in crossing class, regional, confessional [religious], gender and age barriers which was unprecedented in German political history ...

An impressive body of evidence ... supports the overall picture of National Socialism as a predominantly Protestant, middle-class rassemblement [movement], and this line of interpretation has provided the starting point and the conclusion for most of the general histories of Nazism ... The latest EMPIRICAL work on the National Socialist constituency [voters] has now created problems for this long-standing consensus which have yet to be fully addressed. It appears that some 40 per cent of voters and party members were working class and some 60 per cent of SA members were working class, leading to the typification of Nazism as a popular or people's movement instead of a class movement.

SOURCE 7.21   R. Geary, *Hitler and Nazism*, 1993, p. 27

The NSDAP was most successful where it did not have to cope with strong pre-existing IDEOLOGICAL and organisational loyalties. Where these did exist, as in Social Democratic and Communist strongholds, it did far less well. The same applied to Germany's Catholic community, strongly represented over decades by the Centre Party (or the BVP in Bavaria). Loyalty to the party was reinforced by a plethora [great range] of Catholic leisure organisations which penetrated daily life and also by the pulpit, from which the NSDAP was sometimes denounced as godless. On the other hand, Nazi success in Protestant rural and middle class Germany was facilitated by the fact that political loyalties there were either weak or non-existent.

Until the 1980s the predominant view was that the key group was the petty bourgeoisie (*Mittelstand*) who provided the Nazis with mass support. They shared responsibility with the elite (who intrigued to get Hitler appointed) for the catastrophe of the Nazis coming to power. Left-wing historians could thus blame the Right and portray the working class as largely without blame. By the 1990s two developments challenged this view. Firstly, the centrality of the whole concept of class has been questioned. The phenomenon of many workers voting for right-wing governments in Britain and the USA led to more sophisticated analysis of political support and voting behaviour. Other factors, such as religion and the local community, have been identified as additional important influences on voting. The end of the Cold War and the decline of Marxism as a major force in Western universities have also encouraged a more empirical approach.
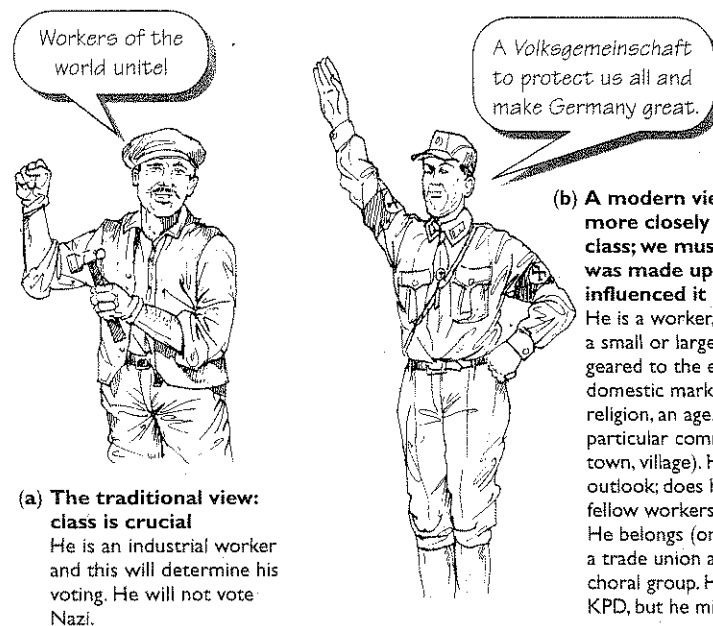
Secondly, more sources have been examined, with new techniques. The use of computers and refined statistical methodology have allowed more data to be viewed in different ways. There has been a growth in local studies, so the German people have been looked at in small groups and as individuals, not as classes. This has inevitably led to more complex views emerging. The collapse of the East German communist regime has further opened up many records. As a result, recent historians such as Falter, Conan Fischer and Brustein have all produced convincing arguments that German workers were far more attracted to the Nazis than many have argued in the past.

This does not mean, however, that the long-standing stress on the importance of support from the petty bourgeoisie can be rejected. The evidence does powerfully suggest that this class voted disproportionately for the Nazis, but far less than used to be thought. Religion and local community influences seem to have been a greater determinant of voting behaviour than class.

SOURCE 7.22   J. Falter, 1996, p. 10

The range of living and working conditions concealed behind the collective term 'worker' was huge. Thus the East Prussian or Pomeranian farm labourer who was paid largely in kind [goods] and received an hourly cash payment of 10 pfennig or less belonged to this group as much as the factory-employed craftsman or the highly specialised skilled worker who might earn ten times as much in the industrialised conurbations. Similarly, the foreman who had worked in the same Württemberg family for thirty years was as much a 'worker' according to the census as the young labourer in an Upper Silesian ironworks, the homeworker from the Erzgebirge or the daily help in a villa in Berlin-Zehlendorf. One might be in everyday contact with 'his' trade union and the workers' parties, while the other might have scarcely heard of either and align his voting intentions according to the political preferences of the estate manager or the proprietor of the small workshop with whom he went to school and who, possibly, belonged to the same hunting association or sporting club. In view of this it appears all the less likely that the working class as a whole would manifest even a degree of homogeneity in its voting behaviour.

■ 7D   The working class and Nazism

Workers of the world unite!

A Volksgemeinschaft to protect us all and make Germany great.

(a) The traditional view: class is crucial
He is an industrial worker and this will determine his voting. He will not vote Nazi.

(b) A modern view: we must look more closely at the working class; we must examine how it was made up and what influenced it
He is a worker, but does he work in a small or large factory? Is his work geared to the export or the domestic market? He also has a religion, an age, a family. He lives in a particular community (city, small town, village). He has a particular outlook; does he identify with fellow workers or is he ambitious? He belongs (or does not belong) to a trade union and other bodies, e.g. choral group. He may vote SPD or KPD, but he might vote NSDAP!

126

WHY DID THE NAZIS BECOME THE LARGEST PARTY IN WEIMAR GERMANY?

Historians' assessments of Nazi support
Mood, manipulation or money: why did Germans vote Nazi?

Some historians have laid great stress on the emotional appeal of the Nazis, via a charismatic leader, symbols and rallies, to the many people who felt alienated in Germany at the time. The petty bourgeoisie was particularly attracted by this. It felt threatened by big business and by the powerful working class. These atomised (divided up, isolated) individuals in a new, mass society were looking for security and a sense of direction. The Nazis tapped this sense of unease and offered a bright future. The high turnover of Nazi Party membership has also been taken to indicate how many joined for emotional reasons, which could not be sustained on deeper reflection.

This stress on irrationalism (not based on reason) as the crucial factor in the Nazi appeal can also be used to support more recent interpretations that put stress on the broad base of Nazi support, that is a true *Volkspartei*. The prospect of firm action to take Germany out of the economic and psychological depression made Nazism attractive to millions of worried Germans, regardless of class. The Nazis were particularly successful with those Germans who had weak, unsupportive communities.

Many historians also stress the importance of propaganda organised to appeal to the emotions, especially mass meetings and rallies. Here there was no political discussion. What mattered was being there, surrounded by thousands of others, exhilarated by the carefully choreographed (designed) display. 'How could 20,000 be wrong?' 'Stop thinking, just believe!' As Goebbels said in 1934: 'Propaganda was our sharpest weapon in conquering the state, and remains our sharpest weapon in maintaining and building up the state.'

By stressing the power of Nazi propaganda it was possible to some extent to make excuses for Germans. They were manipulated: it could happen to anyone.

However, the recent work of Noakes and others has introduced a corrective to what they see as an excessive stress on propaganda. They argue that the Nazis had major electoral successes in some areas where there was little propaganda, and vice versa. Therefore, propaganda was more successful in reinforcing existing sympathies and feelings than in creating them.

An alternative view has recently come from other historians – notably Brustein – who have challenged the stress on emotions as an explanation for Nazi success, and have instead argued that Germans voted Nazi for rational economic reasons. Between 1930 and 1933 the Nazis put forward a series of economic policies, offering a third way between Marxist state planning and LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism. They said the economy should serve the needs of the state, not individuals. They advocated public investment in industry to boost the economy; financial controls to protect those in debt; economic AUTARKY to put the interests of Germans above those of foreigners and the creation of a continental economic zone dominated by Germany. They would support farmers through controls on prices, imports and debt, and help some resettle on unused land in the east. This package of policies, developed from 1928 to exploit the rising tide of protest in some farming areas, was reinforced by the SA and others taking action to defend farmers' interests, for example by disrupting auctions of bankrupt farms.

Brustein also sees economic factors as the reason for working-class support for the Nazis. Blue-collar workers in depressed industries were particularly attracted to their interventionist economic policies. Aspiring workers, those who had benefited from the social reforms of Weimar and were looking for further advance beyond their working-class origins, might be attracted by a Nazi future.

One commonly held view that is no longer propounded by historians is that virulent (poisonous/bitter) anti-semitism was a major contributor to Hitler's mass support. It was indeed a powerful attraction for many of the original Nazis and for some who joined the party, but not especially for voters. Other parties, such as the DNVP, were also anti-semitic. Hitler was deeply anti-semitic but played down Nazi anti-semitism as the prospects for power increased, instead stressing anti-communism which was much more attractive to the elite upon whom his chances might depend. Even the American Jewish historian

Goldhagen, who caused a storm in 1996 with his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (see page 350) where he argued that Germany alone developed a strong desire to eliminate Jews, accepts that anti-semitism was not crucial in the Nazis' electoral success.

SOURCE 7.33 In a survey of Nazi Party members, the following reasons were given as the main factor for joining the Nazis

Reasons for joining the Nazi Party	% of those surveyed
Anti-Marxism	65
National community	32
Supernationalism	22
Hitler cult	18
Anti-semitism	14

SOURCE 7.34 A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, 1992, p. 249

[Nazism was] a movement that was deliberately designed to highlight by every manipulative device – symbols, language, ritual, hierarchy, parades, rallies ... the supremacy of the dynamic, irrational factors in politics: struggle, will, force, the sinking of individual identity in the collective emotions of the group, sacrifice, discipline.

SOURCE 7.35 W. Brustein, *The Logic of Evil. Social Origins of the Nazi Party 1925–33*, 1996, p. 184

The Nazi Party did not gain its phenomenal mass constituency because of its emphasis on xenophobia but rather because the party designed a series of innovative programs that appealed to material interests of a broad constituency overwhelmed by the Depression. Xenophobia alone could not have brought the Nazis to power.

I must conclude that evil may have ordinary and rational origins. This applied to pre-1933 Germans as much as to all other peoples.

Why do you think Brustein called his book *The Logic of Evil?*

ACTIVITY

Study Sources 7.34 and 7.35.

1 Explain the differences between Bullock's and Brustein's views.
2 'Complementary rather than competing.' Using the sources and your knowledge, explain how far you agree with this comment on Brustein's and Bullock's opinions on the reasons for the Nazis' support.
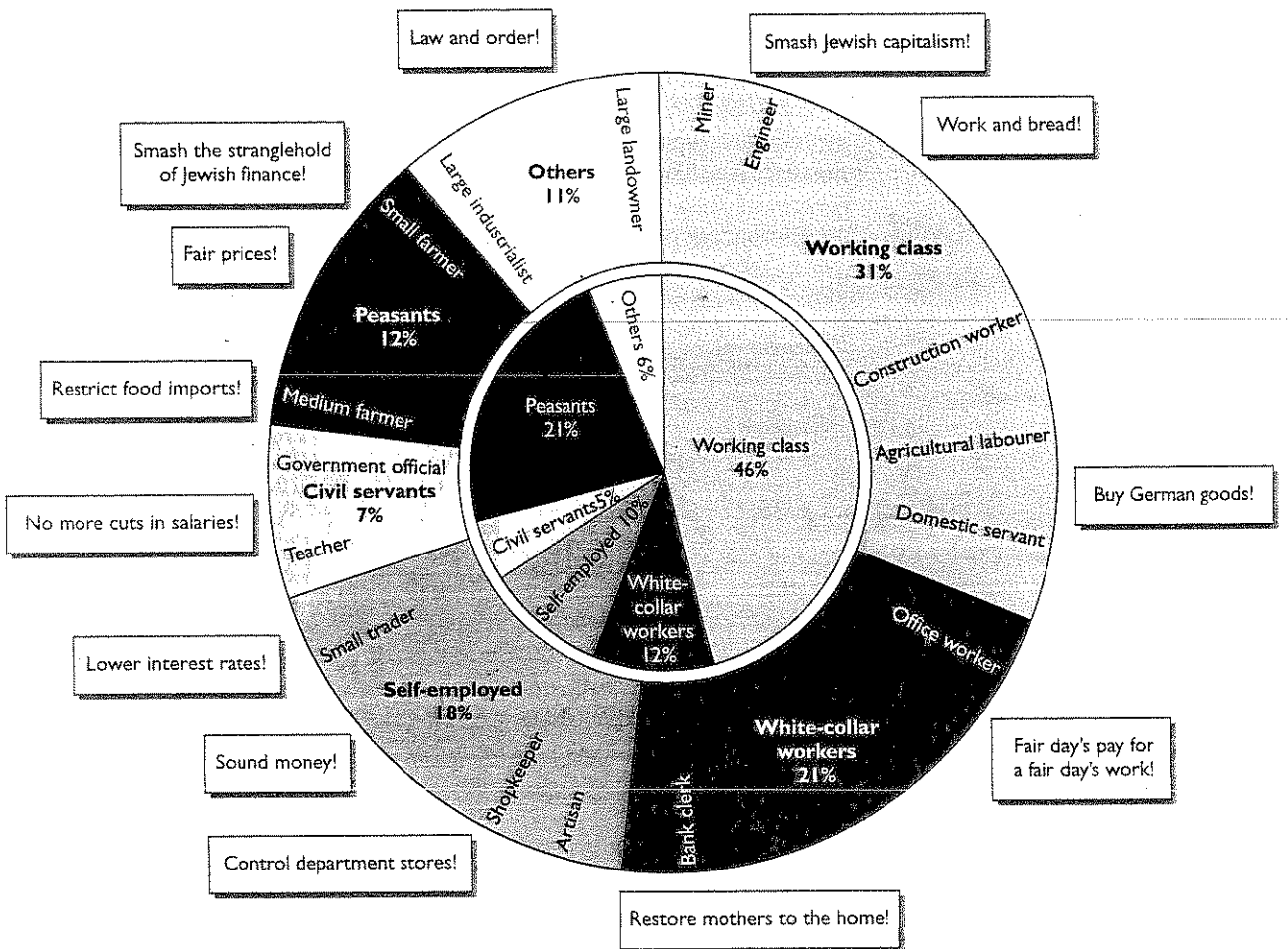
128

WHY DID THE NAZIS BECOME THE LARGEST PARTY IN WEIMAR GERMANY?

F Review: Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

Chart 7E tries to summarise what you have learnt about the extent to which different social groups supported the Nazis, and what the Nazis offered. Then, to conclude, we look at two contemporary sources that shed light on the nature of support for the Nazis.

■ 7E   Who supported the Nazis and why?

Make Germany great!

Away with reparations!

Help us build a Volksgemeinschaft!

Restore traditional values!

Smash communism!

Away with feeble Weimar democracy!

Smash the chains of Versailles!

Rebuild the economy!

Law and order!

Smash Jewish capitalism!

Smash the stranglehold of Jewish finance!

Work and bread!

Fair prices!

Restrict food imports!

No more cuts in salaries!

Lower interest rates!

Buy German goods!

Sound money!

Fair day's pay for a fair day's work!

Control department stores!

Restore mothers to the home!

Key

Inner circle: German population in 1933 by social group (%)

Outer circle: members of Nazi Party in 1932 by same social groups

General slogans

Slogans targeted at particular social groups

REVIEW ACTIVITY

1 a) Which reasons for the growth of support for the Nazis are shown in Source 7.36?

  b) Which reasons are not reflected?

2 a) What can you learn from Source 7.37 about the reasons for the rise of the Nazis?

  b) What can be deduced from this poem about Brecht's political position?

3 A key reason for the Nazis' electoral success was that they offered both big ideas that could appeal to any German and also particular policies aimed at specific groups. How does Chart 7E support this view?

4 Do you think the actions and skills of Hitler and the Nazi Movement were more important in winning support than factors outside their control such as the economic depression?

SOURCE 7.36 'Why I became a Nazi.' An extract from an autobiography of a Nazi member submitted in 1934 to a prize competition organised by Professor Abel at Columbia University, New York, USA. The writer was a farmer and fought in the First World War against the Russians

Then came November 9 [1918]. Slowly and more strongly there grew up in me a hatred of this band of traitors and their followers. Soon the consequence of this betrayal of the nation became more and more evident.

[We lost West Prussia and Danzig; were hit by inflation; Jews became rich.] My inward aversion [hostility] to these men of a foreign race which had crucified the saviour and which now was betraying our people increased until one day it grew into hatred. The Jew was at fault for all the misery.

Then came November 9, 1923. Great and brilliant, the name of Adolf Hitler, which we heard not for the first time in these agitated days, appeared before us. We were all marching in step; we all had the same desire to wipe out the existing system which had come into power by betrayal of the people and country. We wanted something that was to grow out of the common experience of the war and the front, that would know no estates [social groups] and classes but only the German people. The word, Hitler, became for me a symbol of our future.

These first members are still our best. They grasped National Socialism not with their minds but with their emotions. They had not learned National Socialism from books. Their blood, their natural instinct drove them to the movement. Like myself, they sought the road to the people and, like myself, found it by ridding themselves of class consciousness and seeing only the fellow-countryman in every German.

In July the leader came to Tilsit. I saw him for the first time. About 40,000 people from near and far had gathered to greet him. I wore the brown shirt for the first time. Those hours are never to be forgotten. The Leader spoke. For the first time I heard his voice. His words went straight to the heart. From now on my life and efforts were dedicated to the Leader. I wanted to be a true follower. The Leader spoke of the threatened ruin of the nation and of the resurrection under the Third Reich. What matter personal interest, and social status? How insignificant had all parties become to my eyes. How despicable [vile] was Communism.

Another thing the Leader gave us was faith in the German people. If we won, Germany was saved; if we were defeated, a gate would open up and Moscow's Red hordes would swarm in and plunge Europe into night and misery.

SOURCE 7.37 'Song of the SA Man' by Bertolt Brecht (translated by John Willett)

My hunger made me fall asleep
With a belly ache.
Then I heard voices crying
Hey, Germany awake!

Then I saw crowds of men marching:
To the Third Reich, I heard them say.
I thought as I'd nothing to live for
I might as well march their way.

And as I marched, there marched beside me
The fattest of the crew
And when I shouted 'We want bread and work'
The fat man shouted too.

The chief of staff wore boots
My feet meanwhile were wet
But both of us were marching
Whole heartedly in step.

I thought that the left road led forward
He told me that I was wrong.
I went the way that he ordered
And blindly tagged along.

And those who were weak from hunger
Kept marching, pale and taut
Together with the well-fed
To some Third Reich of a sort.

They told me which enemy to shoot at
So I took their gun and aimed
And, when I had shot, saw my brother
Was the enemy they had named.

Now I know: over there stands my brother
It's hunger that makes us one
While I march with the enemy
My brother's and my own.

So now my brother is dying
By my own hand he fell
Yet I know that if he's defeated
I shall be lost as well.

REVIEW ACTIVITY

This activity brings together your work in Chapter 3 and in this chapter on the rise of the Nazis and voting behaviour in general in the Weimar Republic.

1 Study the data on Weimar elections on page 63. Compose a linear graph showing the election results for all the parties 1919–33. You might like to do this using a computer.
2 Identify and explain the trend in support for the Nazis.
3 Which parties lost support as the Nazis gained it? Does this automatically mean that the Nazis took votes from these parties?
4 What happened to support after 1928 for
   a) the SPD
   b) the KPD
   c) both left-wing parties together?
5 What happened to support for the Z/BVP throughout the Weimar period?
6 Explain what this exercise shows about why the Nazis became the largest party.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 7: Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

1 After the failure of the Munich Putsch of 1923, Hitler reorganised the Nazi Party on the *Führerprinzip*.
2 The Nazis were well organised in the regions, and established associations covering most groups in German society.
3 The Nazis used skilful propaganda techniques, and exploited Hitler's ability as a speaker.
4 In 1928, the Nazis were still on the fringe of politics.
5 In 1930, as a result of the impact of the slump, the Nazis became the second-largest party.
6 Success built up a momentum, and in July 1932 the Nazis won 37 per cent of the vote.
7 However, in August 1932 Hitler failed to be made Chancellor, and in November 1932 the Nazis' share of the vote dropped to 33 per cent.
8 The Nazis gained particular support from the petty bourgeoisie, but were a true people's party, gaining support from all groups. For some their appeal was emotional; others were attracted for reasons of material self-interest.
9 The Nazis made least impact amongst groups that had a strong sense of community, such as Catholics and Socialists.
10 The Nazis offered a solution to Germany's problems, were well organised, and rallied around an inspiring leader.