

ACTIVITY

Does the evidence on pages 62–3 suggest that the Weimar Republic was more stable and secure in 1929 than in 1924?

A

'A republic without republicans.' How far did the German people support the Republic?

Governments, parties and elections – the pattern of events

Pages 62–70 give you a range of information about the political developments during the Weimar Republic. You can use the Activities on these pages to work out whether the Weimar Republic had become politically more stable by 1929 or whether major weaknesses remained.

SOURCE 3.1 Weimar governments 1919–33

Elections	Date of appointment of new government	Chancellor (party)	Parties in government							% of deputies in Reichstag in parties supporting the government
			S P D*	D D P	Z	D V P	B V P	D N V P	N S D A P	
Jan 1919	Feb 1919	Scheidemann (SPD)	•	•	•					78
	June 1919	Bauer (SPD)	•		•					60
	Mar 1920	Müller (SPD)	•	•	•					78
June 1920	June 1920	Fehrenbach (Z)		•	•	•				37
	May 1921	Wirth (Z)	•	•	•					45
	Nov 1922	Cuno†		•	•	•	•			41
	Aug 1923	Stresemann (DVP)	•	•	•	•				59
	Nov 1923	Marx (Z)		•	•	•				37
May 1924	June 1924	Marx (Z)		•	•	•				29
Dec 1924	Jan 1925	Luther†		•	•	•	•	•		56
	Jan 1926	Luther†		•	•	•	•			35
	May 1926	Marx (Z)		•	•	•	•			35
	Jan 1927	Marx (Z)			•	•	•	•		49
May 1928	June 1928	Müller (SPD)	•	•	•	•	•			61
Sept 1930	Mar 1930	Brüning (Z)	Presidential government including DDP, Z, BVP, DVP							35–28
July 1932 Nov 1932	June 1932	Papen (Z)	Presidential government, including DNVP							6–10
	Dec 1932	Schleicher†	Presidential government, including DNVP							9
Mar 1933	Jan 1933	Hitler (NSDAP)						•	•	43 53 after March

* On many issues the government was dependent on the support of the SPD, even when it was officially in opposition.

† Not a member of a party.

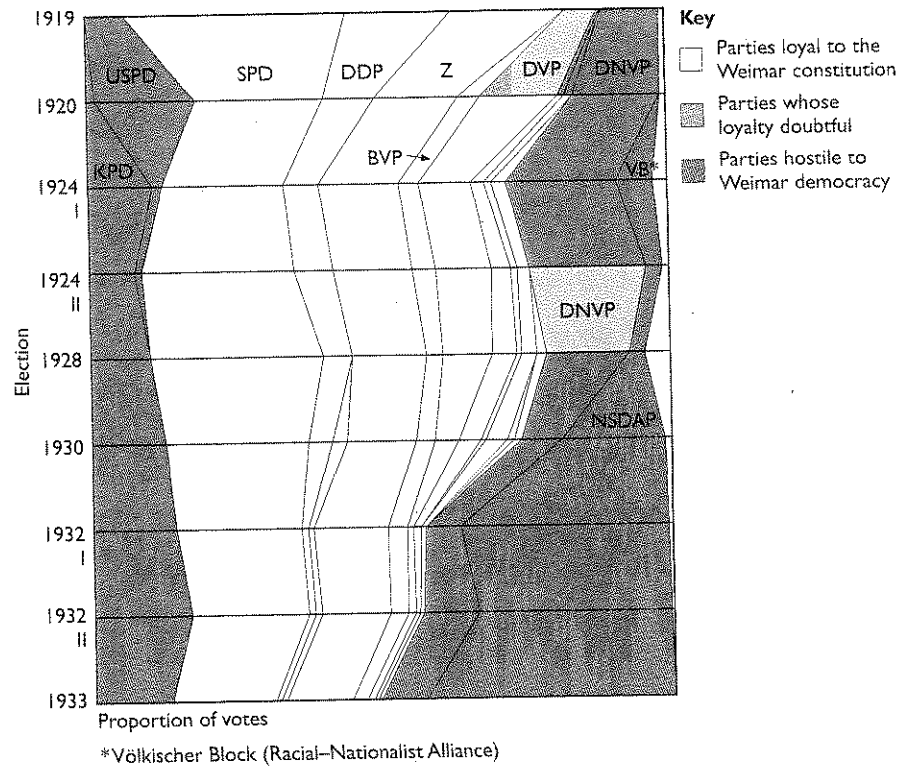
ACTIVITY

- Study Source 3.1. What does it reveal about:
 - the number of governments during the Weimar Republic
 - their approximate time in office?
- Look at the final column of Source 3.1. How many minority governments were there? How must they have survived?
- How many government changes were there which were not the result of elections? How healthy was this for democracy?

ACTIVITY

Study Source 3.2. Did the vote for parties supporting the Republic increase, fall or stay the same between 1924 and 1929?

SOURCE 3.2 Support for democracy



SOURCE 3.3 Reichstag elections, 1919-33

Parties	% of vote won by each party									
	Jan 1919	Jun 1920	May 1924	Dec 1924	May 1928	Sept 1930	July 1932	Nov 1932	Mar 1933	
KPD	—	2.1	12.6	9.0	10.6	13.1	14.5	16.9	12.3	
USPD	7.6	17.9	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.0	—	—	—	
SPD	37.9	21.7	20.5	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4	18.3	
DDP*	18.6	8.3	5.7	6.3	4.9	3.8	1.0	1.0	0.9	
Z	15.9	13.6	13.4	13.6	12.1	11.8	12.5	11.9	11.2	
BVP	3.8	4.2	3.2	3.8	3.1	3.0	3.7	3.4	2.7	
DVP	4.4	13.9	9.2	10.1	8.7	4.7	1.2	1.9	1.1	
DNVP	10.3	15.1	19.5	20.5	14.2	7.0	6.2	8.9	8.0	
NSDAP	—	—	6.5	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.4	33.1	43.9	
Others†	1.6	3.3	8.6	7.0	13.9	13.8	2.0	2.6	1.6	
Turnout (%)	83	79	77	79	76	82	84	81	89	
Number of deputies	421	459	472	493	491	577	608	584	647	
Total vote (millions)	30.4	28.2	29.3	30.3	30.8	35.0	36.9	35.5	39.6	

* From 1930 known as the German States Party.

† Others consisted of a number of special interest parties formed to protect a narrow segment of the population, such as the Völkischer Block (Racial-Nationalist Alliance). Such parties were encouraged by the system of proportional representation.

■ 3A Political parties in Weimar Germany

DID POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN 1924 AND 1929 MAKE THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC MORE STABLE?

Parties generally committed to Weimar democracy	Parties with a more fluctuating attitude to Weimar democracy	Parties hostile to Weimar democracy
<p>SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands). Founded in 1875, this party was the main creator of the Weimar Republic, and for much of the period gained the greatest electoral support, largely from the working class. Yet for long periods it did not participate in the coalition governments, although it did help maintain the government in office. There was tension between advocates of keeping the SPD a Marxist, class-based party of the proletariat, aiming for genuine socialism, and those modernisers who wanted a more broadly based, reformist party. The SPD continually worried about losing votes to the KPD but was also wary of frightening potential democratic allies amongst middle-class moderates.</p> <p>The SPD was strong not just in the federal Reichstag, but in many states. From 1918 to 1932 it led coalition governments (with the Z) in the key state of Prussia, using its position in power there to appoint officials supportive of democracy.</p>	<p>DVP (Deutsche Volkspartei). A moderate conservative party, under Stresemann's leadership it became committed to the Weimar system and moderate social reform, whilst retaining a more right-wing stance. Its main support came from the Protestant middle class and industrialists who favoured free trade. Despite Stresemann's diplomatic achievements, his party never became a major force in Weimar politics. After his death, the DVP moved to the right, and helped bring down Müller's SPD government in 1930.</p>	<p>KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands). This was a revolutionary Marxist party committed to a soviet-style system. Formed from the Spartacists and radicals from the USPD, the KPD attempted a series of revolts between 1919 and 1923. It failed to overthrow the Republic, so then it concentrated on building up mass support. From 1924 the KPD became a disciplined bureaucratic party under Ernst Thaelmann. It gained between 9 and 17 per cent of the vote, overwhelmingly from the working class. The KPD had 360,000 members by 1932.</p> <p>The KPD became increasingly dominated by the USSR, which through the Third COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL (or Comintern) sought to influence the tactics of communist parties throughout Europe. Stalin encouraged it to be hostile to the SPD, so left-wing forces in Germany were divided.</p>
<p>Z (Zentrum) – Centre Party. This party, created in 1870, existed primarily to protect the interests of the Catholic Church. It regularly attracted the support of about two-fifths of voting Catholics. It had a broad appeal across the classes, and so it had left and right wings. From 1928, under Kass and Brüning, it moved to the right. Catholics who supported the Z considered protecting Catholicism the most important issue and tended to vote for the Centre Party regardless of changing economic circumstances. Bavaria had its own Catholic Party, the Bavarian People's Party (BVP).</p>	<p>DNVP (Deutschnationale Volkspartei). This was the main conservative party. Initially hostile to the Republic, the DNVP became more pragmatic, and joined the government in 1925 and in 1927–8. It remained split between reactionaries and moderates. The majority came to realise the benefits of co-operation in government to protect the interests of the industrialists and large landowners that the party represented. Initially it also attracted support from smaller farmers and artisans. After major election losses in 1928 when it was part of the government, it moved to the right under its new leader Alfred Hugenberg, an industrialist and media tycoon.</p>	<p>NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei). In 1924 the Nazis were part of a racialist grouping, but from 1928 onwards they campaigned on their own. Like the KPD, the NSDAP tried to use legal electoral methods to gain power, having failed to overthrow the regime by force. The NSDAP received reasonable support in some regional elections, especially in farming areas in 1928, but overall there was little mass support before 1930.</p>
<p>DDP (Deutsche Demokratische Partei). This liberal, middle-class party might have been the main base for a secure parliamentary system, if liberalism had had deeper roots in Germany. Its members played a major role in drawing up the constitution, but it failed to attract the majority of the more conservative-minded middle classes. Pruss and Rathenau were leading members.</p>		

FOCUS ROUTE

- Study Chart 3A. Copy and complete this table. (You will be able to add more information by the end of Chapter 4.)
- Copy out the names of the following parties, arranging them in order from left wing to right wing:
 - NSDAP • DDP • DVP
 - KPD • DNVP • Z
 - SPD • BVP

Party	German name	Prominent figures	Political position	Main supporters
Nazis				
Nationalists				
People's Party				
Centre Party				
Democratic Party				
Social Democrats				
Communists				

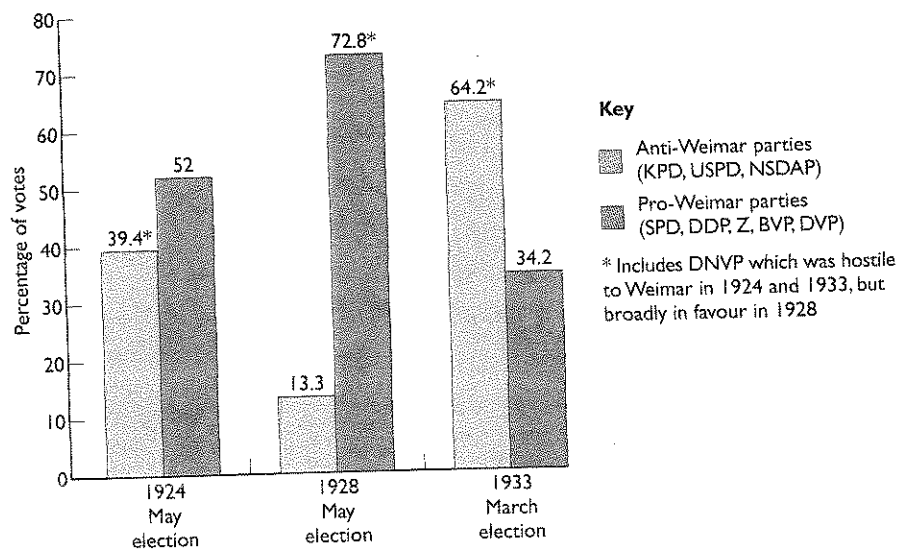
As you read pages 67–9, note down in the 'politics' section of your own copy of the table on page 60 evidence that supports the two opposing views (which you were introduced to on page 58). Include election results, the voting system, developments in the Reichstag, governments, the presidency and the attitudes of ordinary Germans and the elite. Remember, things that *don't* happen can be important too.

Did the German voters, parties and politicians strengthen the Weimar Republic?

After 1923 politics became more peaceful. There were no attempted coups, from right or left, between 1924 and 1929 and no major political figures were assassinated. However, political violence did not completely disappear. Although extremist parties did not gain mass support, they still made an impact on the streets. There were frequent fights between the Nazis, with their SA, and the KPD, with its paramilitary Red Fighting League. Over 50 people were killed and many more were injured.

Elections also gave some encouraging signs to supporters of the Republic. As the economic situation stabilised in 1924, so Germans switched back to voting for the main democratic parties. These made gains in the 1928 election, as you can see in Source 3.12. However, behind this broadly positive pattern, the liberal DDP, which could have formed the basis for representing middle-class interests within the parliamentary system, lost ground. Peukert (in *The Weimar Republic*, p. 210) argues that 'The electoral decline of the liberals was the decisive event of Weimar politics because it undermined the pro-republican centre from within.' Furthermore, the Centre Party moved to the right in the late 1920s, and some of its leaders, like Brüning, began to favour establishing a more authoritarian system.

SOURCE 3.12 Votes (in %) in Reichstag elections in 1924, 1928 and 1933



The likelihood of an increased sense of stability was reduced by the fact that there were six Weimar governments between 1924 and 1929, each one a short-lived coalition. Most did not have a secure majority in the Reichstag. These coalitions were the product of the proportional representation electoral system. Ideally, the politicians from different parties should have co-operated in government but many found this difficult. They often stuck to their political principles rather than accept the compromises necessary for effective government. As a result, no Chancellor was able to hold a government together for more than two years. Even when politicians tried to work together, the need for constant bargaining to stay in power discredited parliamentary government

in the eyes of many Germans who came to see politics as a matter of manoeuvring by politicians rather than a process that they themselves controlled. The so-called 'political stability' of 1924-8 only appeared stable in comparison to the turmoil of 1918-23.

Another cause of public dissatisfaction with politicians was the voting system. Voters, in 35 vast electoral regions, voted for a party list rather than individual politicians. It was therefore the party machine that decided who actually became a Reichstag deputy, on the basis of the number of votes the party list had won. The voters therefore had not chosen their own deputy and thus there was not a close tie between voters in an area and the deputy.

The political parties can also be blamed for public disenchantment. The moderate parties were inconsistent in their attitudes to governments. The only way for governments to gain approval for policies in the Reichstag, given the presence of the radical opposition groups on the Left and Right, was by building a majority around the middle ground. However, on any issue the moderate Left (SPD) and moderate Right (DVP) might join forces with the radicals to defeat government policy. Furthermore, within the Reichstag, parties were also often divided amongst themselves. On one occasion in November 1928, SPD government ministers voted with their party against their own government which was proposing the funding of a new battleship. Such manoeuvres, critics argued, showed that parliamentary government was a charade.

The prospects for stable government were further reduced during this period by the growth of narrow sectional interest parties which gained a total of 78 deputies at their peak in 1930. (They then dramatically lost support to the Nazis who, as a form of 'super-interest group', took over their role.) Such sectional groups were encouraged by the proportional representation system because only 60,000 votes were needed to get representation in the Reichstag. Their advocacy of narrow interests, such as compensation for the losers from hyperinflation (the Reich Party for People's Rights and Revaluation), reduced the chances of the broader compromises required for effective democratic government.

In addition, a series of apparently minor issues showed the deep divisions within Germany. One example was the fierce controversy over the new national flag of black, red and gold, originally adopted by the 1848 revolutionaries but opposed by conservatives who used the old imperial flag of black, white and red. The Weimar regime might have won broader support if it had developed symbols that appealed to popular emotions, but it had no heroes and very few commemorative days. It only created a less than inspiring 'Constitution Day' in 1928. No myths of heroic leadership were fostered; and the negative one of the 'stab in the back' retained its hold. Weimar lacked a CHARISMATIC leader to deepen people's support. It was served by able politicians, like Rathenau and Stresemann, but no leader built up a dynamic of support for the regime. As a result, as the historian Bookbinder has argued in *Weimar Germany* (p. 150), 'Pride was in short supply during the Weimar years', echoing the views of Edgar Jung (secretary to Papen, leader of the Centre Party), who said in 1927: 'If there were to be an opinion survey, not of those who support today's Republic, but of those who love it, the result would be devastating.' A growing number of Germans began to look for charismatic, inspiring leadership and were attracted to what has been called the 'totalitarian temptation'.

Further evidence about the stability of the Weimar regime comes from the first election to the presidency in 1925. The presidency was crucial in the Weimar Republic's development, given its power to appoint and dismiss chancellors and to issue decrees under Article 48. The committed democrat Ebert had been chosen as President by the Assembly in 1919 and his period of office was renewed in 1922 for three years. Ebert was expected to win the election due to be held in 1925 but, when he died, the question of who should become President became a major issue.

The electoral system said that if no candidate gained over 50 per cent in the first round, a second round, in which new candidates could stand, had to be held. The candidate then winning most votes would become President. After an indecisive first round where most parties put forward their own candidate, the

parties regrouped. The influential SPD Prussian leader Braun withdrew in favour of the drab Wilhelm Marx, leader of the Centre Party, in the hope of consolidating support for a reforming republic. The Right, in an attempt to broaden its support, rallied behind a new candidate, Paul von Hindenburg. (He had asked the ex-Kaiser's son for permission to become President!) The Communists refused to withdraw to help a united Left against the Right. The voting figures suggest this may have been vital in determining the result.

The election of the ultra-conservative Hindenburg can be seen as both a positive and an ominous sign for Weimar democracy. Hindenburg did nothing unconstitutional and abided by his oath to uphold the constitution. The presence of the conservative former field marshal, as opposed to a socialist ex-saddler, as head of the Republic, may have attracted some conservatives to the Republic. On the other hand, it was ominous to have someone who was uncommitted to democracy with such great powers. Hindenburg increasingly became the focus of powerful groups who wanted a more authoritarian system.

SOURCE 3.13 Presidential election, March–April 1925

First round 29 March			Second round 26 April		
Votes (millions)	Candidate (party)	Votes (%)	Votes (millions)	Candidate (party)	Votes (%)
10.8	Jarres (DVP)	39	14.7	Hindenburg (DNVP)	48
7.8	Braun (SDP)	28	13.8	Marx (Z)	45
4.0	Marx (Z)	14	1.9	Thaelmann (KPD)	6
1.9	Thaelmann (KPD)	7			
1.6	Hellpach (DDP)	6			
1.0	Held (BVP)	4			
0.2	Ludendorff (Volk)	1			

Note: 2.5m extra people voted in the second round; total vote was 69% of electorate.

The elite and the parliamentary system

We have seen how many in the elite had initially supported the Republic only through fear of a worse alternative. For its consolidation a more positive commitment would be important, but this did not develop even during the calmer days of the mid-1920s.

Many industrialists resented what they saw as the growing burdens of the welfare state and, as in the 1928 Ruhr lockout, tried to reassert greater control of wages. The landed aristocracy resented its loss of influence. The army was dominated by generals who at best wanted to keep the army as 'a state within a state', supposedly above politics, or who desired a more authoritarian system. Many of the employees of the state, such as judges and civil servants, retained a distaste for democracy. Few among opinion formers, such as church leaders, teachers and newspaper editors, tried to win support for democracy. Thus the people in key German institutions failed the Weimar Republic during the 'golden years'. The historian Bookbinder (*Weimar Germany*, p. 159) has summarised the situation as follows: 'With the schools not being geared to create critically thinking citizens and with newspapers not doing what they might to clarify issues, citizenship development did not progress very quickly. This was especially unfortunate during the peaceful period of the Republic. It was under these conditions, when people were not continually beset by crisis and when the shrill voices of the extremists created less resonance, that real progress towards the creation of Republicans could have been made ... With little inspiration from political leaders and little encouragement for democracy from the pulpit or the teacher's desk, the political education of many Germans made little progress.'