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Nazi Germany

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Nazi Germany and the **Third Reich** are common names for [Germany](#) during the period from 1933 to 1945, when its government was controlled by [Adolf Hitler](#) and his [National Socialist German Workers' Party](#), commonly known as the Nazi Party. Under Hitler's rule, Germany was transformed into a [totalitarian state](#) where nearly all aspects of life were controlled by the state. Nazi Germany ceased to exist after the [Allied Forces](#) defeated the [Wehrmacht](#) in May 1945, thus ending [World War II in Europe](#).

After Hitler was appointed [Chancellor of Germany](#) by the President of the [Weimar Republic](#) [Paul von Hindenburg](#) on 30 January 1933, the Nazi Party began to eliminate all political opposition and consolidate their power. Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, and Hitler became dictator of Germany when the powers and offices of the Chancellery and Presidency were merged. A national referendum held 19 August 1934 confirmed Hitler as sole [Führer](#) (leader) of Germany. All power was centralised in Hitler's hands, and his word was above all laws. The government was not a coordinated, cooperating body, but rather a collection of factions struggling to amass power and gain Hitler's favour. In the midst of the [Great Depression](#), the Nazis restored economic stability and ended mass unemployment using heavy military spending and a [mixed economy](#). Extensive public works were undertaken, including the construction of [Autobahns](#) (high speed highways). The return to economic stability boosted the regime's popularity.

Racism, especially [antisemitism](#), was a central feature of the regime. The [Germanic peoples](#)—also referred to as the [Nordic race](#)—were considered to be the purest representation of [Aryanism](#), and therefore the [master race](#). Jews and others deemed undesirable were persecuted or murdered, and opposition to Hitler's rule was ruthlessly suppressed. Members of the liberal, socialist, and communist opposition were killed, imprisoned, or forced into exile. The Christian churches were also oppressed, with many leaders imprisoned. Education focused on [racial biology](#), population policy, and fitness for military service. Career and educational opportunities for women were curtailed. Recreation and tourism were organised via the [Strength Through Joy](#) program, and the [1936 Summer Olympics](#) showcased the Third Reich on the international stage. [Propaganda](#) minister [Joseph Goebbels](#) made effective use of film, mass rallies, and Hitler's hypnotising oratory to control public opinion. The government controlled artistic expression, promoting specific art forms and discouraging or banning others.

Germany made increasingly aggressive territorial demands, threatening war if they were not met. [Austria](#) and [Czechoslovakia](#) were seized in 1938 and 1939. Hitler [made a pact](#) with [Joseph Stalin](#) and [invaded Poland](#) in September 1939, launching World War II in Europe. In alliance with Italy and other [Axis powers](#), Germany conquered most of Europe by 1940 and threatened Great Britain. [Reichskommissariats](#) took brutal control of conquered areas, and a [German administration](#) was established in Poland. Jews and others deemed undesirable were imprisoned in [concentration camps](#). The implementation of the regime's racial policies culminated in the mass murder of Jews and other minorities in the [Holocaust](#). Following the German invasion of the [Soviet Union](#) in 1941, the tide turned against the Third Reich, and major military defeats were suffered in 1943. Large-scale bombing of German cities, rail lines, and oil plants escalated in 1944. Germany was overrun in 1945 by the Soviets from the east and the [other Allies](#) from the west. Hitler's refusal to admit defeat led to massive destruction of German infrastructure and unnecessary loss of life in the closing months of the war. The victorious Allies initiated a policy of [denazification](#) and put the surviving Nazi leadership on trial for war crimes at the [Nuremberg Trials](#).

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Greater German Reich <i>Großdeutsches Reich</i>	
	
1933–1945	
	
Flag Emblem	
Anthem	
"Das Lied der Deutschen"	
Sorry, your browser either has JavaScript disabled or does not have any supported player.	
You can download the clip or download a player to play the clip in your browser.	
"Horst-Wessel-Lied"	
Sorry, your browser either has JavaScript disabled or does not have any supported player.	
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<p>Europe at the height of German expansion, 1941–1942</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater Germany^[a] Areas under German and/or Axis occupation German allies,^[a] co-belligerents, and puppet states^[a] Soviet Union (Allied-held) Western Allied-held Neutral countries 	
Capital	Berlin
Languages	German
Government	Nazi single-party state Totalitarian dictatorship
President / Führer	
–1933–1934	Paul von Hindenburg
–1934–1945	Adolf Hitler ^[b]
–1945	Karl Dönitz
Chancellor	
–1933–1945	Adolf Hitler
–1945	Joseph Goebbels
–1945 (as leading minister)	Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk
Legislature	Reichstag Reichsrat
Historical era	Interwar period/World War II

Gaeilge
Gaelg
Galego
한국어
Հայերեն
Hrvatski
Ido
Ilokano
Bahasa Indonesia
Interlingua
Ирон
Íslenska
Italiano
עברית
Basa Jawa
Къарачай-малкъар
ქართული
Қазақша
Kiswahili
Kurdî
Лезги
Latina
Latviešu
Lietuvių
Magyar
Македонски
മലയാളം
मराठी
مصرى
مازرونى
Bahasa Melayu
Mirandés
Монгол
Nederlands
Nedersaksies
नेपाल भाषा
日本語
Norsk bokmål
Norsk nynorsk
Novial
Occitan
O‘zbekcha
Pälzisch
پنجابی
Polski
Português
Română
Русиньскый
Русский
Seeltersk
Shqip
Simple English
Slovenčina
Slovenščina
کوردی
Српски / srpski
Srpskohrvatski / српскохрватски
Basa Sunda
Suomi
Svenska
Tagalog
தமிழ்
ṯǫ̟
Türkçe
Українська
اردو
Tiếng Việt
Võro
文言
Winaray
שיח
Yorùbá

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Name

The official name of the state was the *Deutsches Reich* (German Reich) from 1933 to 1943, and the *Großdeutsches Reich* (Greater German Reich) from 1943 to 1945. The name *Deutsches Reich* is usually translated into English as "German Empire" or "**German Reich**".^[2]

Common English terms are "Nazi Germany" and "Third Reich." The latter, adopted by the Nazis, was first used in a 1923 novel by **Arthur Moeller van den Bruck**. The book counted the medieval **Holy Roman Empire** (962–1806) as the first Reich and the **German Empire** (1871–1918) as the second.^[3] Modern Germans refer to the period as *Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (National Socialist period) or *Nationalsozialistische Gewaltherrschaft* (National Socialist tyranny).

History

*See also: **History of Germany***

Background

*Further information: **Adolf Hitler's rise to power***

The German economy suffered severe setbacks after the end of World War I, partly because of **reparations payments** required under the 1919 **Treaty of Versailles**. The government printed money to make the payments and to repay the country's war debt; the resulting **hyperinflation** led to inflated prices for consumer goods, economic chaos, and food riots.^[4] When the government failed to make the reparations payments in January 1923, French troops **occupied German industrial areas** along the **Ruhr**. Widespread civil unrest was the result.^[5]

The **National Socialist German Workers' Party** (NSDAP;^[4] Nazi Party) was the renamed successor of the **German Workers' Party** founded in 1919, one of several **far-right** political parties active in Germany at the time.^[6] The party platform included removal of the Weimar Republic, rejection of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, radical **antisemitism**, and anti-**Bolshevism**.^[7] They promised a strong central government, increased ***Lebensraum*** (living space) for Germanic peoples, formation of a national community based on race, and racial cleansing via the active suppression of Jews, who would be stripped of their citizenship and civil rights.^[8] The Nazis proposed national and cultural renewal based upon the ***Völkisch*** movement.^[9]

When the stock market in the United States **crashed on 24 October 1929**, the impact in Germany was dire. Millions were thrown out of work, and several major banks collapsed. Hitler and the NSDAP prepared to take advantage of the emergency to gain support for their party. They promised to strengthen the economy and provide jobs.^[10] Many voters decided the NSDAP was capable of restoring order, quelling civil unrest, and improving Germany's international reputation. After the **federal election of 1932**, the Nazis were the largest party in the **Reichstag**, holding 230 seats with 37.4 per cent of the popular vote.^[11]

Nazi seizure of power

Although the Nazis won the greatest share of the popular vote in the two Reichstag general elections of 1932, they did not have a majority, so Hitler led a short-lived coalition government formed by the NSDAP and the **German National People's Party**.^[12] Under pressure from politicians, industrialists, and the business community, President **Paul von Hindenburg** appointed Hitler as **Chancellor of Germany** on 30 January 1933. This event is known as the ***Machtergreifung*** (seizure of power).^[13] In the following months, the NSDAP used a process termed ***Gleichschaltung*** (coordination) to rapidly bring all aspects of life under control of the party.^[14] All civilian organisations, including agricultural groups, volunteer organisations, and sports clubs, had their leadership replaced with Nazi sympathisers or party members. By June 1933, virtually the only organisations not in the control of the NSDAP were the army and the churches.^[15]

- Machtergreifung	30 January 1933
- Gleichschaltung	27 February 1933
- Anschluss	12 March 1938
- World War II	1 September 1939
- Death of Adolf Hitler	30 April 1945
- Surrender of Germany	8 May 1945

Area	
 - 1939 ^[c]	633,786 km² (244,706 sq mi)
Population	
 - 1939 est. ^[1]	69,314,000
 Density	109.4 /km² (283.3 /sq mi)
Currency	Reichsmark (℞ℳ)



Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, January 1933

On the night of 27 February 1933, the **Reichstag building was set afire**; **Marinus van der Lubbe**, a Dutch communist, was found guilty of starting the blaze. Hitler proclaimed that the arson marked the start of a communist uprising. Violent suppression of communists by the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) was undertaken all over the country, and four thousand **Communist Party of Germany** members were arrested. The **Reichstag Fire Decree**, imposed on 28 February 1933, rescinded most German civil liberties, including rights of assembly and freedom of the press. The decree also allowed the police to detain people indefinitely without charges or a court order. The legislation was accompanied by a propaganda blitz that led to public support for the measure.^[16]

In March 1933, the **Enabling Act**, an amendment to the **Weimar Constitution**, passed in the Reichstag by a vote of 444 to 94.^[17] This amendment allowed Hitler and his cabinet to pass laws—even laws that violated the constitution—without the consent of the president or the Reichstag.^[18] As the bill required a two-thirds majority to pass, the Nazis used the provisions of the Reichstag Fire Decree to keep several Social Democratic deputies from attending; the Communists had already been banned.^{[19][20]} On 10 May the government seized the assets of the Social Democrats; they were banned in June.^[21] The remaining political parties were dissolved, and on 14 July 1933, Germany became a de facto **single-party state** when the founding of new parties was made illegal.^[22] Further elections in **November 1933**, **1936**, and **1938** were

entirely Nazi-controlled and saw only the Nazis and a small number of independents elected.^[23] The regional state parliaments and the *Reichsrat* (federal upper house) were abolished in January 1934.^[24]

The Nazi regime abolished the symbols of the Weimar Republic, including the black, red, and gold tricolor flag, and adopted reworked imperial symbolism. The previous imperial black, white, and red tricolor was restored as one of Germany's two official flags; the second was the **swastika flag** of the NSDAP, which became the sole national flag in 1935. The NSDAP anthem "**Horst-Wessel-Lied**" ("Horst Wessel Song") became a second national anthem.^[25]

In this period, Germany was still in a dire economic situation; millions were unemployed and the **balance of trade** deficit was daunting.^[26] Hitler knew that reviving the economy was vital. In 1934, using deficit spending, public works projects were undertaken. A total of 1.7 million Germans were put to work on the projects in 1934 alone.^[26] Average wages both per hour and per week began to rise.^[27]

On 2 August 1934, President von Hindenburg died. The previous day, the cabinet had enacted the "Law Concerning the Highest State Office of the Reich", which stated that upon Hindenburg's death, the office of president would be abolished and its powers merged with those of the chancellor.^[28] Hitler thus became head of state as well as head of government. He was formally named as *Führer und Reichskanzler* (leader and chancellor). Germany was now a totalitarian state with Hitler at its head.^[29] As head of state, Hitler became Supreme Commander of the armed forces. The new law altered the traditional loyalty oath of servicemen so that they **affirmed loyalty to Hitler personally** rather than the office of supreme commander or the state.^[30] On 19 August, the merger of the presidency with the chancellorship was approved by 90 per cent of the electorate in a **plebiscite**.^[31]

Most German people were relieved that the conflicts and street fighting of the Weimar era had ended. They were deluged with propaganda orchestrated by **Joseph Goebbels**, who promised peace and plenty for all in a united, Marxist-free country without the constraints of the Versailles Treaty.^[32] The first **Nazi concentration camp**, initially for political prisoners, was opened at **Dachau** in 1933.^[33] Hundreds of camps of varying size and function were created by the end of the war.^[34]

Militaristic foreign policy

See also: [Remilitarization of the Rhineland](#) and [German involvement in the Spanish Civil War](#)

As early as February 1933, Hitler announced that rearmament must be undertaken, albeit clandestinely at first, as to do so was in violation of the Versailles Treaty. A year later he told his military leaders that 1942 was the target date for going to war in the east.^[35] He pulled Germany out of the **League of Nations** in 1933, claiming its disarmament clauses were unfair, as they applied only to Germany.^[36] The **Saarland**, which had been placed under League of Nations supervision for 15 years at the end of World War I, voted in January 1935 to become part of Germany.^[37] In March 1935 Hitler announced that the *Reichswehr* would be increased to 550,000 men and that he was creating an air force.^[38] Britain agreed that the Germans would be allowed to build a naval fleet with the signing of the **Anglo-German Naval Agreement** on 18 June 1935.^[39]

When the Italian **invasion of Ethiopia** led to only mild protests by the British and French governments, on 7 March 1936 Hitler ordered the *Reichswehr* to march 3,000 troops into the demilitarised zone in the **Rhineland** in violation of the Versailles Treaty; an additional 30,000 troops were on standby. As the territory was part of Germany, the British and French governments did not feel that attempting to enforce the treaty was worth the risk of war.^[40] In the single-party election held on 29 March, the NSDAP received 98.9 per cent support.^[40] In 1936 Hitler signed an **Anti-Comintern Pact** with Japan and a non-aggression agreement with the **Fascist Italy** of **Benito Mussolini**, who was soon referring to a "Rome-Berlin Axis".^[41]

Hitler sent air and armored units to assist General **Francisco Franco** and his Nationalist forces in the **Spanish Civil War**, which broke out in July 1936. The Soviet Union sent a smaller force to assist the **Republican government**. Franco's Nationalists were victorious in 1939 and became an informal ally of Nazi Germany.^[42]

Austria and Czechoslovakia

Main articles: [Anschluss](#) and [German occupation of Czechoslovakia](#)

Further information: [Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia](#)

In February 1938, Hitler emphasised to Austrian Chancellor **Kurt Schuschnigg** the need for Germany to secure its frontiers. Schuschnigg scheduled a plebiscite regarding Austrian independence for 13 March, but Hitler demanded that it be cancelled. On 11 March, Hitler sent an ultimatum to Schuschnigg demanding that he hand over all power to the Austrian NSDAP or face an invasion. The *Wehrmacht* entered Austria the next day, to be greeted with enthusiasm by the populace.^[43]

The **Republic of Czechoslovakia** was home to a substantial minority of Germans, who lived mostly in the **Sudetenland**. Under pressure from separatist groups within the **Sudeten German Party**, the Czech government offered economic concessions to the region.^[44] Hitler decided to incorporate not just the Sudetenland but the whole of Czechoslovakia into the Reich.^[45] The Nazis undertook a propaganda campaign to try to drum up support for an invasion.^[46] Top leaders of the armed forces were not in favour of the plan, as Germany was not yet ready for war.^[47] The crisis led to war preparations by the British, the Czechs, and France (Czechoslovakia's ally). Attempting to avoid war,



Ethnic Germans in **Saaz** Czechoslovakia, greet German soldiers with the **Nazi salute**, 1938

British Prime Minister [Neville Chamberlain](#) arranged a series of meetings, the result of which was the [Munich Agreement](#), signed on 29 September 1938. The Czechoslovak government was forced to accept the Sudetenland's annexation into Germany. Chamberlain was greeted with cheers when he landed in London bringing, he said, "peace for our time."^[48] The agreement lasted six months before Hitler seized the rest of Czech territory in March 1939.^[49] A puppet state was created in [Slovakia](#).^[50] Austrian and Czech foreign exchange reserves were soon seized by the Nazis, as were stockpiles of raw materials such as metals and completed goods such as weaponry and aircraft, which were shipped back to Germany. The [Reichswerke Hermann Göring](#) industrial conglomerate took control of steel and coal production facilities in both countries.^[51]

Poland

In March 1939, Hitler demanded the return of the [Free City of Danzig](#) and the [Polish Corridor](#), a strip of land that separated [Prussia](#) from the rest of Germany. The British announced they would come to the aid of Poland if it was attacked. Hitler, believing the British would not actually take action, ordered an invasion plan should be readied for a target date of September 1939.^[52] On 23 May he described to his generals his overall plan of not only seizing the Polish Corridor but greatly expanding German territory eastward at the expense of Poland. He expected this time they would be met by force.^[53]

The Germans reaffirmed their alliance with Italy and signed non-aggression pacts with Denmark, Estonia, and Latvia. Trade links were formalised with Romania, Norway, and Sweden.^[54] Hitler's foreign minister, [Joachim von Ribbentrop](#), arranged in negotiations with the [Soviet Union](#) a non-aggression pact, the [Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact](#), which was signed in August 1939.^[55] The treaty also contained secret protocols dividing Poland and the Baltic states into German and Soviet spheres of influence.^{[56][57]}

World War II

Foreign policy

Further information: [Diplomatic history of World War II#Germany](#)

Germany's foreign policy during the war involved the creation of allied governments under direct or indirect control from Berlin. A main goal was obtaining soldiers from the senior allies, such as Italy and Hungary, and millions of workers and ample food supplies from subservient allies such as [Vichy France](#).^[58] By the fall of 1942, there were 24 divisions from Romania on the Eastern Front, 10 from Italy, and 10 from Hungary.^[59] When a country was no longer dependable, Germany assumed full control, as it did with France in 1942, Italy in 1943, and Hungary in 1944. Although Japan was an official powerful ally, the relationship was distant and there was little coordination or cooperation. For example, Germany refused to share their formula for synthetic oil from coal until late in the war.^[60]

Outbreak of war

[Germany invaded Poland](#) on 1 September 1939. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later. World War II was under way.^[61] Poland fell quickly, as the Soviets attacked from the east on 17 September.^[62] [Reinhard Heydrich](#), then head of the [Gestapo](#), ordered on 21 September that Jews should be rounded up and concentrated into cities with good rail links. Initially the intention was to deport the Jews to points further east, or possibly to [Madagascar](#).^[63] Using lists prepared ahead of time, some 65,000 Polish intelligentsia, noblemen, clergy, and teachers were killed by the end of 1939 in an attempt to destroy Poland's identity as a nation.^{[64][65]} The Soviets continued to attack, advancing into Finland in the [Winter War](#), and German forces were involved in action at sea. But little other activity occurred until May, so the period became known as the "[Phoney War](#)".^[66]

From the start of the war, a [British blockade](#) on shipments to Germany had an impact on the Reich economy. The Germans were particularly dependent on foreign supplies of oil, coal, and grain.^[67] To safeguard Swedish iron ore shipments to Germany, Hitler ordered an [attack on Norway](#), which took place on 9 April 1940. Much of the country was occupied by German troops by the end of April. Also on 9 April, the Germans [invaded and occupied Denmark](#).^{[68][69]}

Conquest of Europe

Against the judgement of many of his senior military officers, Hitler ordered an [attack on France](#) and the [Low Countries](#), which began in May 1940.^[70] They quickly conquered [Luxembourg](#), the [Netherlands](#), and [Belgium](#), and France surrendered on 22 June.^[71] In spite of the provisions of the [Hague Convention](#), industrial firms in the Netherlands, France, and Belgium were put to work producing war materiel for the occupying German military. Officials viewed this option as being preferable to their citizens being deported to the Reich as forced labour.^[72]

The Nazis seized from the French thousands of locomotives and rolling stock, stockpiles of weapons, and raw materials such as copper, tin, oil, and nickel.^[73] Financial demands were levied on the governments of the occupied countries as well; payments for occupation costs were received from France, Belgium, and Norway.^[74] Barriers to trade led to hoarding, black markets, and uncertainty about the future.^[75] Food supplies were precarious; production dropped in most areas of Europe, but not as much as during World War I.^[76] Greece experienced famine in the first year of occupation and the Netherlands in the last year of the war.^[76]

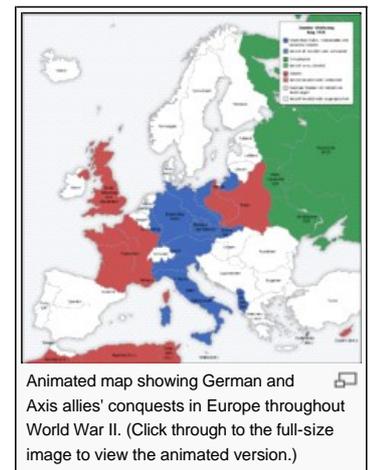
Hitler made peace overtures to the new British leader, [Winston Churchill](#), and upon their rejection he ordered a series of aerial attacks on [Royal Air Force](#) airbases and radar stations. However, the German Luftwaffe failed to defeat the Royal Air Force in what became known as the [Battle of Britain](#).^[77] By the end of October, Hitler realised the necessary air superiority for his planned [invasion of Britain](#) could not be achieved, and he ordered [nightly air raids](#) on British cities, including London, [Plymouth](#), and [Coventry](#).^[78]

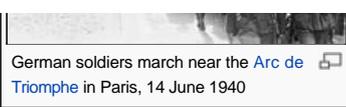
In February 1941, the German [Afrika Korps](#) arrived in Libya to aid the Italians in the [North African Campaign](#) and attempt to contain [Commonwealth](#) forces stationed in Egypt.^[79] On 6 April, Germany launched the [invasion of Yugoslavia](#) and the [battle of Greece](#).^[80] German efforts to secure oil included negotiating a supply from their new ally, [Romania](#), who signed the [Tripartite Pact](#) in November 1940.^{[81][82]}



On 22 June 1941, contravening the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, 5.5 million Axis troops attacked the Soviet Union. In addition to Hitler's stated purpose of acquiring *Lebensraum*, this large-scale offensive (codenamed [Operation Barbarossa](#)) was intended to destroy the Soviet Union and seize its natural resources for subsequent aggression against the Western powers.^[83] The reaction among the German people was one of surprise and trepidation. Many were concerned about how much longer the war would drag on or suspected that Germany could not win a war fought on two fronts.^[84]

The invasion conquered a huge area, including the [Baltic republics](#), [Belarus](#), and West [Ukraine](#). After





German soldiers march near the [Arc de Triomphe](#) in Paris, 14 June 1940

the successful [Battle of Smolensk](#), Hitler ordered [Army Group Centre](#) to halt its advance to Moscow and temporarily divert its Panzer groups to aid in the encirclement of [Leningrad](#) and [Kiev](#).^[85] This pause provided the [Red Army](#) with an opportunity to mobilise fresh reserves. The Moscow offensive, which resumed in October 1941, [ended disastrously in December](#).^[85] On 7 December 1941, Japan [attacked Pearl Harbor](#), Hawaii. Four days later, Germany declared war on the United States.^[86]

Food was in short supply in the conquered areas of the Soviet Union and Poland, with rations inadequate to meet nutritional needs. The retreating armies had burned the crops, and much of the remainder was sent back to the Reich.^[87] In Germany itself, food rations had to be cut in 1942. In his role as [Plenipotentiary](#) of the [Four Year Plan](#), [Hermann Göring](#) demanded increased shipments of grain from France and fish from Norway. The 1942 harvest was a good one, and food supplies remained adequate in Western Europe.^[88]

[Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce](#) was an organisation set up to loot artwork and cultural material from Jewish collections, libraries, and museums throughout Europe. Some 26,000 railroad cars full of art treasures, furniture, and other looted items were sent back to Germany from France alone.^[89] In addition, soldiers looted or purchased goods such as produce and clothing—items which were becoming harder to obtain in Germany—for shipment back home.^[90]

Turning point and collapse

Germany, and Europe as a whole, was almost totally dependent on foreign oil imports.^[91] In an attempt to resolve the persistent shortage, Germany launched *Fall Blau* ([Case Blue](#)), an offensive against the Caucasian oilfields, in June 1942.^[92] The Soviets launched a counter-offensive on 19 November and encircled the German armies, who were trapped in [Stalingrad](#) on 23 November.^[93] Göring assured Hitler that the [6th Army](#) could be supplied by air, but this turned out not to be possible.^[94] Hitler's refusal to allow a retreat led to the deaths of 200,000 German and Romanian soldiers; of those who surrendered on 31 January 1943, only 6,000 survivors returned to Germany after the war.^[95] Soviet forces continued to push the invaders westward after the failed the German offensive at the [Battle of Kursk](#), and by the end of 1943 the Germans had lost most of their territorial gains in the east.^[96]



[Battle of Stalingrad](#), August 1942

In Egypt, Field Marshal [Erwin Rommel](#)'s *Afrika Korps* were defeated by British forces under Field Marshal [Bernard Montgomery](#) in October 1942.^[97] Allied forces landed in Sicily in July 1943 and in Italy in September.^[98] Meanwhile, American and British bomber fleets, based in Britain, began [operations against Germany](#). In an effort to destroy German morale, many sorties were intentionally given civilian targets.^[99] Soon German aircraft production could not keep pace with losses, and without air cover, the Allied bombing campaign became even more devastating. By targeting oil refineries and factories, they crippled the German war effort by late 1944.^[100]

On 6 June 1944, American, British, and Canadian forces established a western front with the [D-Day](#) landings in [Normandy](#).^[101] On 20 July 1944, Hitler narrowly survived [a bomb attack](#).^[102] He ordered savage reprisals, resulting in 7,000 arrests and the execution of more than 4,900 people.^[103] The failed [Ardennes Offensive](#) (16 December 1944 – 25 January 1945) was the last major German campaign of the war. Soviet forces entered Germany on 27 January.^[104] Hitler's refusal to admit defeat and his repeated insistence that the war be fought to the last man led to unnecessary death and destruction in the closing months of the war.^[105] Through his Justice Minister, [Otto Georg Thierack](#), he ordered that anyone who was not prepared to fight should be summarily court-martialed. Thousands of people were put to death.^[106] In many areas, people looked for ways to surrender to the approaching Allies, in spite of exhortations of local leaders to continue the struggle. Hitler also ordered the intentional destruction of transport, bridges, industries, and other infrastructure—a [scorched earth](#) decree—but Armaments Minister [Albert Speer](#) was able to keep this order from being fully carried out.^[105]



[US Air Force](#) film of the destruction in central Berlin in July 1945

During the [Battle of Berlin](#) (16 April 1945 – 2 May 1945), Hitler and his staff lived in the underground [Führerbunker](#), while the Red Army approached.^[107] On 30 April, when Soviet troops were one or two blocks away from the [Reich Chancellery](#), Hitler and [Eva Braun](#) [committed suicide](#) in the [Führerbunker](#).^[108] On 2 May General [Helmuth Weidling](#) unconditionally surrendered Berlin to Soviet General [Vasily Chuikov](#).^[109] Hitler was succeeded by Grand Admiral [Karl Dönitz](#) as Reich President and Goebbels as Reich Chancellor.^[110] Goebbels and his wife [Magda](#) committed suicide the next day, after murdering their [six children](#).^[111] On 4–8 May 1945 most of the remaining German armed forces surrendered unconditionally. The [German Instrument of Surrender](#) was signed 7 May, marking the [end of World War II in Europe](#).^[112]

Main article: [Mass suicides in 1945 Nazi Germany](#)

Suicide rates in Germany increased as the war drew to a close, particularly in areas where the Red Army was advancing. More than a thousand people (out of a population of around 16,000) [committed suicide in Demmin](#) on and around 1 May 1945 as the 65th Army of [2nd Belorussian Front](#) first broke into a distillery and then rampaged through the town, committing mass rapes, arbitrarily executing civilians, and setting fire to buildings.^[113] High numbers of suicides took place in many other locations, including [Neubrandenburg](#) (600 dead),^[113] [Ślupsk](#) (1,000 dead),^[113] and Berlin, where at least 7,057 people committed suicide in 1945.^[114]

German casualties

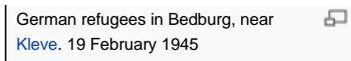
Further information: [World War II casualties](#) and [German casualties in World War II](#)

Estimates of the total German war dead range from 5.5 to 6.9 million persons.^[115] A study by German historian [Rüdiger Overmans](#) puts the number of German military dead and missing at 5.3 million, including 900,000 men conscripted from outside of Germany's 1937 borders, in Austria, and in east-central Europe.^[116] Civilian deaths due to Allied strategic bombing within the 1942 borders were 437,000. An additional 20,000 died in the land campaign.^{[117][118]} Some 22,000 citizens died during the Battle of Berlin.^[119] Other civilian deaths include 300,000 Germans (including Jews) who were victims of Nazi political, racial, and religious persecution,^[120] and 200,000 who were murdered in the Nazi euthanasia program.^[121] Political courts called *Sondergerichte* sentenced some 12,000 members of the [German resistance](#) to death, and civil courts sentenced an additional 40,000 Germans.^[122] [Mass rapes of German women](#) also took place.^[123]

At the end of the war, Europe had more than 40 million [refugees](#),^[124] its economy had collapsed, and 70 per cent of its industrial infrastructure was destroyed.^[125] Between twelve and fourteen million



ethnic Germans **fled or were expelled** from east-central Europe to Germany.^[126] During the **Cold War**, the **West German** government estimated a death toll of 2.2 million civilians due to the flight and expulsion of Germans and through **forced labour in the Soviet Union**.^[127] This figure remained unchallenged until the 1990s, when some historians put the death toll at 500,000–600,000 confirmed deaths.^{[128][129][130]} In 2006 the German government reaffirmed its position that 2.0–2.5 million deaths occurred.^[e]



Geography

Territorial changes

Main article: [Territorial evolution of Germany](#)

As a result of their defeat in World War I and the resulting Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost **Alsace-Lorraine**, **Northern Schleswig**, and **Memel**. The Saarland temporarily became a protectorate of France, under the condition that its residents would later decide by referendum which country to join. Poland became a separate nation and was given access to the sea by the creation of the Polish Corridor, which separated Prussia from the rest of Germany. Danzig was made a free city.^[131]

Germany regained control of the Saarland via a referendum held in 1935 and annexed Austria in the Anschluss of 1938.^[132] The Munich Agreement of 1938 gave Germany control of the Sudetenland, and they seized the remainder of Czechoslovakia six months later.^[48] Under threat of invasion by sea, Lithuania surrendered the Memel district to the Nazis in March 1939.^[133]

Between 1939 and 1941 the Third Reich invaded Poland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Soviet Union.^[71] **Trieste**, **South Tyrol**, and **Istria** were ceded to Germany by Mussolini in 1943.^[134] Two puppet districts were set up in the area, the **Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral** and the **Operational Zone of the Alpine Foothills**.^[135]



Territorial expansion of Germany from 1933 to 1943. Red: 1933; pink: 1939; orange: 1943

Occupied territories

Some of the conquered territories were immediately incorporated into Germany as part of Hitler's long-term goal of creating a **Greater Germanic Reich**. Several areas, such as Alsace-Lorraine, were placed under the authority of an adjacent *Gau* (regional district). Beyond the territories incorporated into Germany were the *Reichskommissariate* (Reich Commissariats), quasi-colonial regimes established in a number of occupied countries. Areas placed under German administration included the **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**, *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (encompassing the Baltic states and Belarus), and *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*. Conquered areas of Belgium and France were placed under control of the **Military Administration in Belgium and Northern France**.^[137] Part of Poland was immediately incorporated into the Reich, and the **General Government** was established in occupied central Poland.^[138] Hitler intended to eventually incorporate many of these areas into the Reich.^[139]

The governments of Denmark, Norway (*Reichskommissariat Norwegen*), and the Netherlands (*Reichskommissariat Niederlande*) were placed under civilian administrations staffed largely by natives.^{[137][f]}



Under the cover of **anti-partisan operations**, the Germans murdered civilians in 5,295 different localities in occupied **Soviet Belarus**.^[136]

Post-war changes

With the issuance of the **Berlin Declaration** on 5 June 1945 and later creation of the **Allied Control Council**, the four Allied powers temporarily assumed governance of Germany.^[140] At the **Potsdam Conference** in August 1945, the Allies arranged for the **Allied occupation** and **denazification** of the country. Germany was split into four zones, each occupied by one of the Allied powers, who drew reparations from their zone. Since most of the industrial areas were in the western zones, the Soviet Union was transferred additional reparations.^[141] The Allied Control Council disestablished Prussia on 20 May 1947.^[142] Aid to Germany began arriving from the United States under the **Marshall Plan** in 1948.^[143] The occupation lasted until 1949, when the countries of **East Germany** and **West Germany** were created. Germany finalised her border with Poland by signing the **Treaty of Warsaw (1970)**.^[144] Germany remained divided until 1990, when the Allies renounced all claims to German territory with the **Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany**, under which Germany also renounced claims to territories lost during World War II.^[145]

Politics

Ideology

Further information: [Nazism](#)

The NSDAP was a far-right political party which came into its own during the social and financial upheavals that occurred with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.^[146] While in prison after the failed **Beer Hall Putsch** of 1923, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, which laid out his plan for transforming German society into one based on race.^[147] The ideology of Nazism brought together elements of antisemitism, **racial hygiene**, and **eugenics**, and combined them with **pan-Germanism** and territorial expansionism with the goal of obtaining more *Lebensraum* for the Germanic people.^[148] The regime attempted to obtain this new territory by attacking Poland and the Soviet Union, intending to deport or kill the Jews and **Slavs** living there, who were viewed as being inferior to the Aryan **master race** and part of a **Jewish Bolshevik** conspiracy.^{[149][150]} Others deemed **unworthy of life** by the Nazis included the mentally and physically disabled, Romani people, **homosexuals**, **Jehovah's Witnesses**, and social misfits.^{[151][152]}

Influenced by the *Völkisch* movement, the regime was against cultural **modernism** and supported the development of an extensive military at the expense of intellectualism.^{[9][153]} Creativity and art were stifled, except where they could serve as propaganda media.^[154] The party used symbols such as the **Blood Flag** and rituals such as the **Nazi party rallies** to foster unity and bolster the regime's popularity.^[155]



Heinrich Himmler, Hitler, and Viktor Lutze perform the **Nazi salute** at the **Nuremberg Rally**.

Government

See also: [Organization of the Third Reich](#)

A law promulgated 30 January 1934 abolished the existing *Länder* ([constituent states](#)) of Germany and replaced them with new [administrative divisions of Nazi Germany](#), the *Gaue*, headed by NSDAP leaders (*Gauleiters*), who effectively became the governor of their region.^[156] The change was never fully implemented, as the *Länder* were still used as administrative divisions for some government departments such as education. This led to a bureaucratic tangle of overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities typical of the administrative style of the Nazi regime.^[157]



Jewish civil servants lost their jobs in 1933, except for those who had seen military service in World War I. Members of the NSDAP or party supporters were appointed in their place.^[158] As part of the process of *Gleichschaltung*, the Reich Local Government Law of 1935 abolished local elections. From that point forward, mayors were appointed by the Ministry of the Interior.^[159] Hitler ruled Germany autocratically by asserting the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle), which called for absolute obedience of all subordinates. He viewed the government structure as a pyramid, with himself—the infallible leader—at the apex. Rank in the party was not determined by elections; positions were filled through appointment by those of higher rank.^[160] The party used propaganda to develop a [cult of personality](#) around Hitler.^[161] Historians such as Kershaw emphasize the psychological impact of Hitler's skill as an orator.^[162] Kressel writes, "Overwhelmingly ... Germans speak with mystification of Hitler's 'hypnotic' appeal".^[163]

Top officials reported to Hitler and followed his policies, but they had considerable autonomy.^[164] Officials were expected to "work towards the Führer" – to take the initiative in promoting policies and actions in line with his wishes and the goals of the NSDAP, without Hitler having to be involved in the day-to-day running of the country.^[165] The government was not a coordinated, cooperating body, but rather a disorganised collection of factions led by members of the party elite who struggled to amass power and gain the Führer's favour.^[166] Hitler's leadership style was to give contradictory orders to his subordinates and to place them in positions where their duties and responsibilities overlapped.^[167] In this way he fostered distrust, competition, and infighting among his subordinates in order to consolidate and maximise his own power.^[168]

Law

Further information: [Law of Germany](#)

On 20 August 1934, civil servants were required to swear an oath of unconditional obedience to Hitler; a similar oath had been required of members of the military several weeks prior. This law became the basis of the *Führerprinzip*, the concept that Hitler's word overrode all existing laws.^[169] Any acts that were sanctioned by Hitler—even murder—thus became legal.^[170] All legislation proposed by cabinet ministers had to be approved by the office of [Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess](#), who also had a veto over top civil service appointments.^[171]

Most of the judicial system and legal codes of the Weimar Republic remained in use during and after the Third Reich to deal with non-political crimes.^[172] The courts issued and carried out far more death sentences than before the Nazis took power.^[172] People who were convicted of three or more offences—even petty ones—could be deemed habitual offenders and jailed indefinitely.^[173] People such as prostitutes and pickpockets were judged to be inherently criminal and a threat to the racial community. Thousands were arrested and confined indefinitely without trial.^[174]

Although the regular courts handled political cases and even issued death sentences for these cases, a new type of court, the *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court), was established in 1934 to deal with politically important matters.^[175] This court handed out over 5,000 death sentences until its dissolution in 1945.^[176] The death penalty could be issued for offences such as being a communist, printing seditious leaflets, or even making jokes about Hitler or other top party officials.^[177] The Gestapo was in charge of investigative policing to enforce National Socialist ideology. They located and confined political offenders, Jews, and others deemed undesirable.^[178] Political offenders who were released from prison were often immediately re-arrested by the Gestapo and confined in a concentration camp.^[179]

In September 1935 the [Nuremberg Laws](#) were enacted. These laws prohibited marriages between Jews and people of Germanic extraction, extramarital relations between Jews and Germans, and the employment of Jewish women under the age of 45 as domestic servants in German households.^[180] The Reich Citizenship Law stated that only those of Germanic or related blood were defined as citizens. Thus Jews and other minority groups were stripped of their German citizenship. The wording of the law also potentially allowed the Nazis to deny citizenship to anyone who was not supportive enough of the regime.^[181] A supplementary decree issued in November defined as Jewish anyone with three Jewish grandparents, or two grandparents if the Jewish faith was followed.^[182]

Military and paramilitary

Further information: [German Army \(1935–1945\)](#)

Wehrmacht

The unified armed forces of Germany from 1935 to 1945 were called the *Wehrmacht*. This included the *Heer* (army), *Kriegsmarine* (navy), and the *Luftwaffe* (air force). From 2 August 1934, members of the armed forces were required to pledge an oath of unconditional obedience to Hitler personally. In contrast to the previous oath, which required allegiance to the constitution of the country and its lawful establishments, this new oath required members of the military to obey Hitler even if they were being ordered to do something illegal.^[183] Hitler decreed that the army would have to tolerate and even offer logistical support to the *Einsatzgruppen*—the mobile death squads responsible for millions of deaths in Eastern Europe—when it was tactically possible to do so.^[184] Members of the *Wehrmacht* also participated directly in [the Holocaust](#) by shooting civilians or undertaking genocide under the guise of anti-partisan operations.^[185]

In spite of efforts to prepare the country militarily, the economy could not sustain a lengthy war of attrition such as had occurred in World War I. A strategy was developed based on the tactic of *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war), which involved using quick coordinated assaults that avoided enemy strong points. Attacks began with artillery bombardment, followed by bombing and strafing runs. Next the tanks would attack and finally the infantry would move in to secure any ground that had been taken.^[186] Victories continued through mid-1940, but the failure to defeat Britain was the first major turning point in the war. The decision to attack the Soviet Union and the decisive defeat at Stalingrad led to the retreat of the German armies and the eventual loss of the war.^[187] The total number of soldiers who served in the *Wehrmacht* from 1935 to 1945 was around 18.2 million, of whom 5.3 million died.^[116]

The SA and SS



The *Sturmabteilung* (SA; Storm Detachment; Brownshirts), founded in 1921, was the first paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party. Their initial assignment was to protect Nazi leaders at rallies and assemblies.^[188] They also took part in street battles against the forces of rival political parties and violent actions against Jews and others.^[189] By 1934, under *Ernst Röhm's* leadership, the SA had grown to over half a million members—4.5 million including reserves—at a time when the regular army was still limited to 100,000 men by the Versailles Treaty.^[190]

Röhm hoped to assume command of the army and absorb it into the ranks of the SA.^[191] Hindenburg and Defence Minister *Werner von Blomberg* threatened to impose martial law if the alarming activities of the SA were not curtailed.^[192] Hitler also suspected that Röhm was plotting to depose him, so he ordered the deaths of Röhm and other political enemies. Up to 200 people were killed from 30 June to 2 July 1934 in an event that became known as the *Night of the Long Knives*.^[193] After this purge the SA was no longer a major force.^[194]

Initially a force of a dozen men under the auspices of the SA, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) grew to become one of the largest and most powerful groups in Nazi Germany.^[195] Led by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler from 1929, the SS had over a quarter million members by 1938 and continued to grow.^[196] Himmler envisioned the SS as being an elite group of guards, Hitler's last line of defence.^[197] The *Waffen-SS*, the military branch of the SS, became a de facto fourth branch of the Wehrmacht.^[198]

In 1931 Himmler organised an SS intelligence service which became known as the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD; Security Service) under his deputy, SS-*Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich.^[199] This organisation was tasked with locating and arresting communists and other political opponents. Himmler hoped it would eventually totally replace the existing police system.^{[200][201]} Himmler also established the beginnings of a parallel economy under the auspices of the SS Economy and Administration Head Office. This holding company owned housing corporations, factories, and publishing houses.^{[202][203]}

From 1935 forward the SS was heavily involved in the persecution of Jews, who were rounded up into ghettos and concentration camps.^[204] With the outbreak of World War II, SS units called *Einsatzgruppen* followed the army into Poland and the Soviet Union, where from 1941 and 1945 they killed more than two million people, including 1.3 million Jews.^{[205][206]} The *SS-Totenkopfverbände* (death's head units) were in charge of the concentration camps and *extermination camps*, where millions more were killed.^{[207][208]}



Economy

Main article: Economy of Nazi Germany

Reich economics

The most pressing economic matter the Nazis initially faced was the 30 per cent national unemployment rate.^[209] Economist Dr. *Hjalmar Schacht*, President of the *Reichsbank* and Minister of Economics, created in May 1933 a scheme for deficit financing. Capital projects were paid for with the issuance of promissory notes called *Mefo bills*. When the notes were presented for payment, the Reichsbank printed money to do so. While the national debt soared, Hitler and his economic team expected that the upcoming territorial expansion would provide the means of repaying the debt.^[210] Schacht's administration achieved a rapid decline in the unemployment rate, the largest of any country during the Great Depression.^[209]

On 17 October 1933, aviation pioneer *Hugo Junkers*, owner of the *Junkers Aircraft Works*, was arrested. Within a few days his company was expropriated by the regime. In concert with other aircraft manufacturers and under the direction of Aviation Minister Göring, production was immediately ramped up industry-wide. From a workforce of 3,200 people producing 100 units per year in 1932, the industry grew to employ a quarter of a million workers manufacturing over 10,000 technically advanced aircraft per year less than ten years later.^[211]

An elaborate bureaucracy was created to regulate German imports of raw materials and finished goods with the intention of eliminating foreign competition in the German marketplace and improving the nation's *balance of payments*. The Nazis encouraged the development of synthetic replacements for materials such as oil and textiles.^[212] As the market was experiencing a glut and prices for petroleum were low, in 1933 the Nazi government made a profit-sharing agreement with *IG Farben*, guaranteeing them a 5 per cent return on capital invested in their synthetic oil plant at *Leuna*. Any profits in excess of that amount would be turned over to the Reich. By 1936, Farben regretted making the deal, as the excess profits by then being generated had to be given to the government.^[213]

Major public works projects financed with deficit spending included the construction of a network of *Autobahns* and providing funding for programmes initiated by the previous government for housing and agricultural improvements.^[214] To stimulate the construction industry, credit was offered to private businesses and subsidies were made available for home purchases and repairs.^[215] On the condition that the wife would leave the workforce, a loan of up to 1,000 Reichsmarks could be accessed by young couples of Aryan descent who intended to marry. The amount that had to be repaid was reduced by 25 per cent for each child born.^[216] The caveat that the woman had to remain unemployed was dropped by 1937 due to a shortage of skilled labourers.^[217]



Hitler envisioned widespread car ownership as part of the new Germany. He arranged for designer *Ferdinand Porsche* to draw up plans for the *KdF-wagen* (*Strength Through Joy* car), intended to be an automobile that every German citizen could afford. A prototype was displayed at the *International Motor Show* in Berlin on 17 February 1939. With the outbreak of World War II, the factory was converted to produce military vehicles. No production models were sold until after the war, when the vehicle was renamed the *Volkswagen* (people's car).^[218]

Six million people were unemployed when the Nazis took power in 1933, and by 1937 there were fewer than a million.^[219] This was in part due to the removal of women from the workforce.^[220] Real wages dropped by 25 per cent between 1933 and 1938.^[209] Trade unions were abolished in May 1933 with the seizure of the funds and arrest of the leadership of the Social Democratic trade unions.

A new organisation, the *German Labour Front*, was created and placed under NSDAP functionary

Robert Ley.^[221] The average German worked 43 hours a week in 1933, and by 1939 this increased to 47 hours a week.^[222]

By early 1934 the focus shifted away from funding work creation schemes and toward rearmament. By 1935, military expenditures accounted for 73 per cent of the government's purchases of goods and services.^[223] On 18 October 1936 Hitler named Göring as Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan, intended to speed up the rearmament programme.^[224] In addition to calling for the rapid construction of steel mills, synthetic rubber

plants, and other factories, Göring instituted [wage and price controls](#) and restricted the issuance of [stock dividends](#).^[209] Large expenditures were made on rearmament, in spite of growing deficits.^[225] With the introduction of compulsory military service in 1935, the *Reichswehr*, which had been limited to 100,000 by the terms of the Versailles Treaty, expanded to 750,000 on active service at the start of World War II, with a million more in the reserve.^[226] By January 1939, unemployment was down to 301,800, and it dropped to only 77,500 by September.^[227]

Wartime economy and forced labor

The Nazi war economy was a [mixed economy](#) that combined a free market with central planning; historian [Richard Overy](#) described it as being somewhere in between the command economy of the Soviet Union and the capitalist system of the United States.^[228]

In 1942, after the death of Armaments Minister [Fritz Todt](#), Hitler appointed Albert Speer as his replacement.^[229] Speer improved production via streamlined organisation, the use of single-purpose machines operated by unskilled workers, [rationalisation](#) of production methods, and better coordination between the many different firms that made tens of thousands of components. Factories were relocated away from rail yards, which were bombing targets.^{[230][231]} By 1944, the war was consuming 75 per cent of Germany's [gross domestic product](#), compared to 60 per cent in the Soviet Union and 55 per cent in Britain.^[232]

The wartime economy relied heavily upon the large-scale employment of [forced labourers](#). Germany imported and enslaved some 12 million people from 20 European countries to work in factories and on farms; approximately 75 per cent were Eastern European.^[233] Many were casualties of Allied bombing, as they received poor air raid protection. Poor living conditions led to high rates of sickness, injury, and death, as well as sabotage and criminal activity.^[234]

Women played an increasingly large role. By 1944 over a half million served as auxiliaries in the German armed forces, especially in anti-aircraft units of the *Luftwaffe*; a half million worked in civil aerial defense; and 400,000 were volunteer nurses. They also replaced men in the wartime economy, especially on farms and in small family-owned shops.^[235]

Very heavy [strategic bombing](#) by the Allies targeted refineries producing synthetic oil and gasoline as well as the German transportation system, especially rail yards and canals.^[236] The armaments industry began to break down by September 1944. By November fuel coal was no longer reaching its destinations, and the production of new armaments was no longer possible.^[237] Overy argues that the bombing strained the German war economy and forced it to divert up to one-fourth of its manpower and industry into anti-aircraft resources, which very likely shortened the war.^[238]



Woman with *OST-Arbeiter* badge at the IG Farben plant in *Auschwitz* concentration camp

Racial policy

Main article: [Racial policy of Nazi Germany](#)

Persecution of Jews

Further information: [Nazism and race](#)

Racism and antisemitism were basic tenets of the NSDAP and the Nazi regime.^[239] Discrimination against Jews began immediately after the seizure of power; following a month-long series of attacks by members of the SA on Jewish businesses, synagogues, and members of the legal profession, on 1 April 1933 Hitler declared a national boycott of Jewish businesses.^[240] The [Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service](#), passed on 7 April, excluded most Jews from the legal profession and civil service. Similar legislation soon deprived Jewish members of other professions of their right to practise. On 11 April a decree was promulgated that stated anyone who had even one Jewish parent or grandparent was considered non-Aryan. As part of the drive to remove Jewish influence from cultural life, members of the National Socialist Student League removed from libraries any books considered un-German, and a nation-wide [book burning](#) was held on 10 May.^[241]

Violence and economic pressure were used by the regime to encourage Jews to voluntarily leave the country.^[242] Jewish businesses were denied access to markets, forbidden to advertise in newspapers, and deprived of access to government contracts. Citizens were harassed and subjected to violent attacks.^[243] Many towns posted signs forbidding entry to Jews.^[244]



Damage caused during *Kristallnacht*. 9 November 1938

In November 1938, a young Jewish man requested an interview with the German ambassador in Paris. He met with a legation secretary, whom he shot and killed to protest his family's treatment in Germany. This incident provided the pretext for a [pogrom](#) the NSDAP incited against the Jews on 9 November 1938. Members of the SA damaged or destroyed synagogues and Jewish property throughout Germany. At least 91 German Jews were killed during this pogrom, later called *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass.^{[245][246]} Further restrictions were imposed on Jews in the coming months – they were forbidden to own businesses or work in retail shops, drive cars, go to the cinema, visit the library, or own weapons. Jewish pupils were removed from schools. The Jewish community was fined one billion marks to pay for the damage caused by *Kristallnacht* and told that any money received via insurance claims would be confiscated.^[247] By 1939 around 250,000 of Germany's 437,000 Jews emigrated to the United States, Argentina, Great Britain, Palestine, and other countries.^{[248][249]} Many chose to stay in continental Europe. Emigrants to Palestine were

allowed to transfer property there under the terms of the [Haavara Agreement](#), but those moving to other countries had to leave virtually all their property behind, and it was seized by the government.^[249]

The Holocaust

Main article: [The Holocaust](#)

Germany's war in the East was based on Hitler's long-standing view that Jews were the great enemy of the German people and that *Lebensraum* was needed for Germany's expansion. He focused on Eastern Europe, aiming to defeat Poland and the Soviet Union and remove or kill the resident Jews and Slavs.^{[149][150]} At the outset of World War II, the German authority in the General Government in occupied Poland ordered that all Jews face compulsory labour and that those who were physically incapable of work were to be confined to [ghettos](#).^[250] In 1941 Hitler decided to destroy the Polish nation completely. He planned that within 10 to 20 years the section of Poland under German occupation would be cleared of ethnic Poles and resettled by German colonists.^[251] About 3.8 to 4 million Poles would remain as slaves,^[252] part of a slave labour force of 14 million the Nazis intended to create using citizens of conquered nations in the East.^{[150][253]}

The [Generalplan Ost](#) (General Plan for the East) called for deporting the population of occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to Siberia, for use as slave labour or to be murdered.^[254] To



determine who should be killed, Himmler created the *Volksliste*, a system of classification of people deemed to be of German blood.^[255] He ordered that those of Germanic descent who refused to be classified as ethnic Germans should be deported to concentration camps, have their children taken away, or be assigned to forced labour.^{[256][257]} The plan also included the **kidnapping of children** deemed to have Aryan traits.^[258] The goal was to implement *Generalplan Ost* after the conquest of the Soviet Union, but when the invasion failed, Hitler had to consider other options.^{[254][259]} One suggestion was a mass forced deportation of Jews to Poland, Palestine, or Madagascar.^[250]



Crematorium at Auschwitz I

Somewhere around the time of the failed offensive against Moscow in December 1941, Hitler resolved that the Jews of Europe were to be exterminated immediately.^[260] Plans for the total eradication of the Jewish population of Europe—eleven million people—were formalised at the **Wannsee Conference** on 20 January 1942. Some would be **worked to death** and the rest would be killed in the implementation of *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage* (the **Final Solution** of the **Jewish question**).^[261] Initially the victims were killed with **gas vans** or by *Einsatzgruppen* firing squads, but these methods proved impracticable for an operation of this scale.^[262] By 1941, killing centres at **Auschwitz concentration camp**, **Sobibor**, **Treblinka**, and other Nazi extermination camps replaced *Einsatzgruppen* as the primary method of mass killing.^[263] The total number of Jews murdered during the war is estimated at 5.5 to six million people,^[208] including over a million children.^[264] Twelve million people were put into forced labour.^[233]



A Jewish woman protects a child with her body as *Einsatzgruppen* soldiers take aim, Ukraine, 1942

German citizens had access to information about what was happening, as soldiers returning from the occupied territories would report on what they had seen and done.^[265] Most German citizens disapproved of the genocide.^[266] Some Polish citizens tried to rescue or hide the remaining Jews, and members of the Polish underground got word to their government in exile in London as to what was happening.^[267]

In addition to eliminating Jews, the Nazis also planned to reduce the population of the conquered territories by 30 million people through starvation in an action called the **Hunger Plan**. Food supplies would be diverted to the German army and German civilians. Cities would be razed and the land allowed to return to forest or resettled by German colonists.^[268] Together, the *Hunger Plan* and *Generalplan Ost* would have led to the starvation of 80 million people in the Soviet Union.^[269] These partially fulfilled plans resulted in the **democidal** deaths of an estimated 19.3 million civilians and prisoners of war.^[270]

Persecution of other groups

Further information: [Nazi eugenics](#)

Under the provisions of a law promulgated 14 July 1933, the Nazi regime carried out the **compulsory sterilization** of over 400,000 individuals labelled as having hereditary defects.^[271] More than half the people sterilised were those considered mentally deficient, which included not only people who scored poorly on intelligence tests, but those who deviated from expected standards of behaviour regarding thrift, sexual behaviour, and cleanliness. Mentally and physically ill people were also targeted. The majority of the victims came from disadvantaged groups such as prostitutes, the poor, the homeless, and criminals.^[272]

See also: [Porajmos](#) and [Nazi crimes against ethnic Poles](#)

Like the Jews, the Romani people were subjected to persecution from the early days of the regime. As a non-Aryan race, they were forbidden to marry people of German extraction. Romani were shipped to concentration camps starting in 1935 and were killed in large numbers.^{[151][152]} **Action T4** was a programme of systematic murder of the physically and mentally handicapped and patients in psychiatric hospitals that mainly took place from 1939 to 1941 but continued until the end of the war. Initially the victims were shot by the *Einsatzgruppen* and others, but **gas chambers** were used by the end of 1941.^[273] Between June 1941 and January 1942, the Nazis killed an estimated 2.8 million **Soviet prisoners of war**.^[274] Many starved to death while being held in open-air pens at Auschwitz and elsewhere.^[275] The **Soviet Union** lost 27 million people during the war; less than nine million of these were combat deaths.^[276] One in four Soviets were killed or wounded.^[277] In Poland, in addition to the loss of 3.3 million Jewish citizens, 1.8 to 1.9 million non-Jewish civilians were killed.^[278] Other groups persecuted and killed included Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, social misfits, and **members of the political and religious opposition**.^{[152][279]}



Naked Soviet prisoners of war in Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp

Society

Education

Further information: [University education in Nazi Germany](#)

Antisemitic legislation passed in 1933 led to the removal all of Jewish teachers, professors, and officials from the education system. Most teachers were required to belong to the *Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund* (**National Socialist Teachers League**; NSLB), and university professors were required to join the National Socialist Association of University Lecturers.^{[280][281]} Teachers had to take an oath of loyalty and obedience to Hitler, and those who failed to show sufficient conformity to party ideals were often reported by students or fellow teachers and dismissed.^{[282][283]} Lack of funding for salaries led to many teachers leaving the profession. The average class size increased from 37 in 1927 to 43 in 1938 due to the resulting teacher shortage.^[284]



Frequent and often contradictory directives were issued by Reich Minister of the Interior **Wilhelm Frick**, **Bernhard Rust** of the *Reichserziehungsministerium* (Ministry of Education), and various other agencies regarding content of lessons and acceptable textbooks for use in primary and secondary schools.^[285] Books deemed unacceptable to the regime were removed from school libraries.^[286] Indoctrination in National Socialist thought was made compulsory in January 1934.^[286] Students selected as future members of the party elite were indoctrinated from the age of 12 at **Adolf Hitler Schools** for primary education and **National Political Institutes of Education** for secondary education. Detailed National Socialist indoctrination of future holders elite military rank was undertaken at **Order Castles**.^[287]

The Nazi salute in school (1934).
Children were indoctrinated at an early age.

Primary and secondary education focused on racial biology, population policy, culture, geography, and especially physical fitness.^[288] The curriculum in most subjects, including biology, geography, and even arithmetic, was altered to change the focus to race.^[289] Military education became the

central component of physical education, and education in physics was oriented toward subjects with military applications, such as ballistics and aerodynamics.^{[290][291]} Students were required to watch all films prepared by the school division of the [Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda](#).^[286]

At universities, appointments to top posts were the subject of power struggles between the education ministry, the university boards, and the [National Socialist German Students' League](#).^[292] In spite of pressure from the League and various government ministries, most university professors did not make changes to their lectures or syllabus during the Nazi period.^[293] This was especially true of universities located in predominately Catholic regions.^[294] Enrolment at German universities declined from 104,000 students in 1931 to 41,000 in 1939. But enrolment in medical schools rose sharply; Jewish doctors had been forced to leave the profession, so medical graduates had good job prospects.^[295] From 1934, university students were required to attend frequent and time-consuming military training sessions run by the SA.^[296] First-year students also had to serve six months in a labour camp for the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (National Labour Service); an additional ten weeks service were required of second-year students.^[297]

Oppression of Christian religions

Main article: [Religion in Nazi Germany](#)

About 65 per cent of the population of Germany was Protestant when the Nazis seized power in 1933.^[298] As part of his plan to bring all organisations in Germany under the regime's control, Hitler created what he hoped would become a single state church, the [Protestant Reich Church](#), and made efforts to disband or nazify the 28 existing Protestant churches. The [German Christians](#), a pro-Nazi pressure group, gained control of the new church. They called for the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible, claiming it was Jewish in origin, and demanded that Jews who had converted to Protestantism be barred from church attendance. Opposition groups and a rival church called the [Confessing Church](#) were formed by 1934. Some 700 pastors who refused to support the Nazis were jailed or placed in concentration camps. When the Confessing Church became popular, especially in rural areas, Hitler abandoned his plan to amalgamate all the Protestant churches, but the oppression of the Confessing Church continued.^[299]

Most Catholic Germans had voted for the [Centre Party](#), which self-dissolved in summer 1933. The *Reichskonkordat* (the Concordat), treaty was signed in July and ratified in September 1933. This treaty between the German state and the [Holy See](#) called for the regime to honour and uphold the independence of Catholic institutions, in return for a promise that the clergy would not get involved in politics. Catholic lay persons were free to engage in politics outside church activities. But within a month, the political police were already forbidding the activities of Catholic lay organisations and banning Catholic periodicals.^[300] While Protestant youth organisations had been disbanded and their members enrolled in the [Hitler Youth](#), most Catholic youth groups refused to dissolve themselves. Hitler Youth leader [Baldur von Schirach](#) encouraged its members to attack Catholic boys in the streets.^[301] Participation in the girls' wing—the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* ([League of German Girls](#))—was low among Catholics, in part because priests in some areas refused to grant absolution to girls who joined.^[302]

By 1935 until the end of the war oppressive measures against Catholics included propaganda campaigns claiming the church was corrupt, restrictions on public meetings, and censorship of Catholic publications. Catholic schools were required to reduce the amount of religious instruction and crucifixes were removed from all state buildings.^[303] Cardinal Pacelli, later [Pope Pius XII](#), repeatedly protested these violations of the Concordat. On 21 March 1937, his "*Mit brennender Sorge*" ("With Burning Concern"), a statement of protest against the oppression, was read aloud in every Catholic church in Germany.^[304] In response, propaganda minister Goebbels announced further crackdowns and launched a media campaign denouncing alleged homosexual activity within the church. The campaign resulted in a sharp drop in enrolment in denominational schools, and by 1939 all such schools were disbanded or converted to public facilities.^[305] About 30 per cent of Catholic priests were disciplined at the hands of the police during the Nazi era; many were jailed or placed in concentration camps.^{[306][307]}

Health

Nazi Germany had a strong [anti-tobacco movement](#). Pioneering research by Franz H. Müller in 1939 demonstrated a causal link between tobacco smoking and lung cancer.^[308] The Reich Health Office took measures to try to limit smoking, including producing lectures and pamphlets.^[309] Smoking was banned in many workplaces, on trains, and among on-duty members of the military.^[310] Government agencies also worked to control other carcinogenic substances such as asbestos and pesticides.^[311] As part of a general public health campaign, water supplies were cleaned up, lead and mercury were removed from consumer products, and women were urged to undergo regular screenings for breast cancer.^{[312][313]}

Government-run health care insurance plans were available, but Jews were denied coverage starting in 1933. That same year, Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat government-insured patients. In 1937 Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jewish patients, and in 1938 their right to practice medicine was removed entirely.^[314]

Medical experiments, many of them unscientific, were performed on concentration camp inmates beginning in 1941.^[315] The most notorious doctor to perform medical experiments was SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Dr [Josef Mengele](#), camp doctor at Auschwitz.^[316] Many of his victims died or were intentionally killed.^[317] Concentration camp inmates were made available for purchase by pharmaceutical companies for drug testing and other experiments.^[318]

Role of women and family

Further information: [Women in Nazi Germany](#)

Women were a cornerstone of Nazi social policy. The Nazis opposed the feminist movement, claiming that it was the creation of Jewish intellectuals, and instead advocated a [patriarchal](#) society in which the German woman would recognise that her "world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home."^[220] Soon after the seizure of power, feminist groups were shut down or incorporated into the [National Socialist Women's League](#). This organisation coordinated groups throughout the country to promote motherhood and household activities. Courses were offered on childrearing, sewing, and cooking.^[319] The League published the *NS-Frauen-Warte*, the only NSDAP-approved women's magazine in Nazi Germany.^[320] Despite some propaganda aspects, it was predominantly an ordinary woman's magazine.^[321]

Women were encouraged to leave the workforce, and the creation of large families by racially suitable women was promoted through a propaganda campaign. Women received a bronze award—known as the *Ehrenkreuz der Deutschen Mutter* ([Cross of Honour of the German Mother](#))—for giving birth to four children, silver for six, and gold for eight or more.^[319] Large families received subsidies to help with their utilities,



Statues representing the ideal body were erected in the streets of Berlin for the 1936 Summer Olympics.

school fees, and household expenses. Though the measures led to increases in the birth rate, the number of families having four or more children declined by five per cent between 1935 and 1940.^[322] Removing women from the workforce did not have the intended effect of freeing up jobs for men. Women were for the most part employed as domestic servants, weavers, or in the food and drink industries—jobs that were not of interest to men.^[323] Nazi philosophy prevented large numbers of women from being hired to work in munitions factories in the build-up to the war, so foreign labourers were brought in. After the war started, slave labourers were extensively used.^[324] In January 1943 Hitler signed a decree requiring all women under the age of fifty to report for work assignments to help the war effort.^[325] Thereafter, women were funnelled into agricultural and industrial jobs. By September 1944, 14.9 million women were working in munitions production.^[326]



Young women of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) practising gymnastics in 1941

The Nazi regime discouraged women from seeking higher education. The number of women allowed to enrol in universities dropped drastically, as a law passed in April 1933 limited the number of females admitted to university to ten per cent of the number of male attendees.^[327] Female enrolment in secondary schools dropped from 437,000 in 1926 to 205,000 in 1937. The number of women enrolled in post-secondary schools dropped from 128,000 in 1933 to 51,000 in 1938. However, with the requirement that men be enlisted into the armed forces during the war, women comprised half of the enrolment in the post-secondary system by 1944.^[328]

Women were expected to be strong, healthy, and vital.^[329] The sturdy peasant woman who [worked the land](#) and bore strong children was considered ideal, and athletic women were praised for being tanned from working outdoors.^[330] Organisations were created for the indoctrination of Nazi values. From 25 March 1939, membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory for all children over the age of ten.^[331] The *Jungmädelbund* (Young Girls League) section of the Hitler Youth was for girls age 10 to 14, and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM; [League of German Girls](#)) was for young women

age 14 to 18. The BDM's activities focused on physical education, with activities such as running, long jumping, somersaulting, tightrope walking, marching, and swimming.^[332]

The Nazi regime promoted a liberal code of conduct regarding sexual matters, and was sympathetic to women who bore children out of wedlock.^[333] Promiscuity increased as the war progressed, with unmarried soldiers often intimately involved with several women simultaneously. The same was the case for married women, who liaised with soldiers, civilians, or slave labourers. Sex was sometimes used as a commodity to obtain, for example, better work from a foreign labourer.^[333] Pamphlets enjoined German women to avoid sexual intercourse with foreign workers as a danger to their blood.^[334]

With Hitler's approval, Himmler intended that the new society of the Nazi regime should de-stigmatise illegitimate births, particularly of children fathered by members of the SS, who were vetted for racial purity.^[335] His hope was that each SS family would have between four and six children.^[335] The *Lebensborn* (Fountain of Life) association, founded by Himmler in 1935, created a series of maternity homes where single mothers could be accommodated during their pregnancies.^[336] Both parents were examined for racial suitability before acceptance.^[336] The resulting children were often adopted into SS families.^[336] The homes were also made available to the wives of SS and NSDAP members, who quickly filled over half the available spots.^[337]

Existing laws banning abortion except for medical reasons were strictly enforced by the Nazi regime. The number of abortions declined from 35,000 per year at the start of the 1930s to fewer than 2,000 per year at the end of the decade. In 1935 a law was passed allowing abortions for eugenics reasons.^[338]

Environmentalism

Main article: [Animal welfare in Nazi Germany](#)

Nazi society had elements supportive of animal rights, and many people were fond of zoos and wildlife.^[339] The government took several measures to ensure the protection of animals and the environment. In 1933 the Nazis enacted a stringent animal-protection law that had an impact on what was allowed for medical research.^[340] But the law was only loosely enforced. In spite of a ban on vivisection, the Ministry of the Interior readily handed out permits for experiments on animals.^[341]

The Reich Forestry Office, under Göring, enforced regulations that required foresters to plant a wide variety of trees to ensure suitable habitat for wildlife. A new Reich Animal Protection Act became law in 1933.^[342] The regime enacted the Reich Nature Protection Act in 1935 to protect the natural landscape from excessive economic development. The act allowed for the expropriation of privately owned land to create nature preserves and aided in long-range planning.^[343] Perfunctory efforts were made to curb air pollution, but little enforcement of existing legislation was undertaken once the war began.^[344]



[Hermann Göring](#) was an animal lover and conservationist.

Culture

The regime promoted the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a national German ethnic community. The goal was to build a classless society based on racial purity and the perceived need to prepare for warfare, conquest, and a struggle against Marxism.^{[345][346]} The German Labour Front founded the *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF; [Strength Through Joy](#)) organisation in 1933. In addition to taking control of tens of thousands of previously privately run recreational clubs, it offered highly regimented holidays and entertainment experiences such as cruises, vacation destinations, and concerts.^{[347][348]}

The *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) was organised under the control of the Propaganda Ministry in September 1933. Sub-chambers were set up to control various aspects of cultural life, such as films, radio, newspapers, fine arts, music, theatre, and literature. All members of these professions were required to join their respective organisation. Jews and people considered politically unreliable were prevented from working in the arts, and many emigrated. Books and scripts had to be approved by the Propaganda Ministry prior to publication. Standards deteriorated as the regime sought to use cultural outlets exclusively as propaganda media.^[349]

Radio became very popular in Germany during the 1930s, with over 70 per cent of households owning a receiver by 1939, more than any other country. Radio station staffs were purged of leftists and others deemed undesirable by July 1933.^[350] Propaganda and speeches were typical radio fare immediately after the seizure of power, but as time went on Goebbels insisted that more music be played so that people would not turn to foreign broadcasters for entertainment.^[351]

See also: [List of authors banned during the Third Reich](#)

As with other media, newspapers were controlled by the state, with the Reich Press Chamber shutting down or buying newspapers and publishing houses. By 1939 over two-thirds of the newspapers and magazines



were directly owned by the Propaganda Ministry.^[352] The NSDAP daily newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Ethnic Observer), was edited by **Alfred Rosenberg**, author of *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, a book of racial theories espousing Nordic superiority.^[353] Although Goebbels insisted that all newspapers in Germany should publish content uniformly favourable to the regime, publishers still managed to include veiled criticism, for example by editorialising about dictatorships in ancient Rome or Greece. Newspaper readership plummeted, partly because of the decreased quality of the content, and partly because of the surge in popularity of radio.^[354] Authors of books left the country in droves, and some wrote material highly critical of the regime while in exile.^[355] Goebbels recommended that the remaining authors should concentrate on books themed on Germanic myths and the concept of **blood and soil**.^[356] By the end of 1933 over a thousand books, most of them by Jewish authors or featuring Jewish characters, had been banned by the Nazi regime.^[357]

Main article: [Nazi architecture](#)

Hitler took a personal interest in architecture, and worked closely with state architects **Paul Troost** and Albert Speer to create public buildings in a **neoclassical** style based on **Roman architecture**.^{[358][359]} Speer constructed imposing structures such as the **Nazi party rally grounds** in **Nuremberg** and a new **Reich Chancellery** building in Berlin.^[360] Hitler's plans for rebuilding Berlin included a gigantic dome based on the **Pantheon** in Rome and a **triumphal arch** more than double the height of the **Arc de Triomphe** in Paris. Neither of these structures were ever built.^[361]

Main article: [Art of the Third Reich](#)

Hitler felt that **abstract**, **Dadaist**, **expressionist**, and **modern art** were decadent, an opinion that became the basis for policy.^[362] Many art museum directors lost their posts in 1933 and were replaced by party members.^[363] Some 6,500 modern works of art were removed from museums and replaced with works chosen by a Nazi jury.^[364] Exhibitions of the rejected pieces, under titles such as "Decadence in Art", were launched in sixteen different cities by 1935. The **Degenerate Art Exhibition**, organised by Goebbels, ran in Munich from July to November 1937. The exhibition proved wildly popular, attracting over two million visitors.^[365]

Composer **Richard Strauss** was appointed president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reich Music Chamber) on its founding in November 1933.^[366] As was the case with other art forms, the Nazis ostracised musicians who were not deemed racially acceptable, and for the most part did not approve of music that was too modern or **atonal**.^[367] Jazz music was singled out as being especially inappropriate, and foreign musicians of this genre left the country or were expelled.^[368] Hitler favoured the music of **Richard Wagner**, especially pieces based on Germanic myths and heroic stories, and attended the **Bayreuth Festival** each year from 1933.^[367]

Main article: [Nazism and cinema](#)

Movies were popular in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, with admissions of over a billion people in 1942, 1943, and 1944.^{[369][370]} By 1934 German regulations restricting currency exports made it impossible for American film makers to take their profits back to America, so the major film studios closed their German branches. Exports of German films plummeted, as their heavily antisemitic content made them impossible to show in other countries. The two largest film companies, **Universum Film AG** and **Tobis**, were purchased by the Propaganda Ministry, which by 1939 was producing most German films. The productions were not always overtly propagandistic, but generally had a political subtext and followed party lines regarding themes and content. Scripts were pre-censored.^[371]

Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), documenting the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, and *Olympia* (1938), covering the **1936 Summer Olympics**, pioneered techniques of camera movement and editing that influenced later films. New techniques such as telephoto lenses and cameras mounted on tracks were employed. Both films remain controversial, as their aesthetic merit is inseparable from their propagandising of national socialist ideals.^{[372][373]}

Legacy

The Allied powers organised war crimes trials, beginning with the **Nuremberg Trials**, held from November 1945 to October 1946, of 23 top Nazi officials. They were charged with four counts—conspiracy to commit crimes, crimes against peace, **war crimes**, and **crimes against humanity**—in violation of international laws governing warfare.^[374] All but three of the defendants were found guilty; twelve were sentenced to death.^[375] The victorious Allies outlawed the NSDAP and its subsidiary organisations. The display or use of **Nazi symbolism** such as flags, **swastikas**, or greetings, is illegal in Germany and Austria.^{[376][377]}

Nazi ideology and the actions taken by the regime are almost universally regarded as gravely immoral.^[378] Hitler, Nazism, and the Holocaust have become symbols of evil in the modern world.^[379] Interest in Nazi Germany continues in the media and the academic world. Historian Sir **Richard J. Evans** remarks that the era "exerts an almost universal appeal because its murderous racism stands as a warning to the whole of humanity."^[380]

The Nazi era continues to inform how Germans view themselves and their country. Virtually every family suffered losses during the war or has a story to tell. For many years Germans kept quiet about their experiences and felt a sense of communal guilt, even if they were not directly involved in war crimes. Once study of Nazi Germany was introduced into the school curriculum starting in the 1970s, people began researching the experiences of their family members. Study of the era and a willingness to critically examine its mistakes has led to the development of a strong democracy in today's Germany, but with lingering undercurrents of antisemitism and **neo-Nazi** thought.^[381]

See also

- [Collaboration with the Axis Powers during World War II](#)
- [German Resistance to Nazism](#)
- [Glossary of German military terms](#)
- [Glossary of Nazi Germany](#)
- [List of books about Nazi Germany](#)



Plans for Berlin called for the **Volkshalle** (People's Hall) and a **triumphal arch** to be built at either end of a wide boulevard.



Leni Riefenstahl (behind cameraman) at the **1936 Summer Olympics**



Defendants in the dock at the **Nuremberg Trials**



- [List of books by or about Adolf Hitler](#)
- [List of field marshals and grand admirals of the Third Reich](#)
- [List of Nazi Party leaders and officials](#)
- [Nazi rule over the Danube River](#)
- [Nazi songs](#)
- [Orders, decorations, and medals of Nazi Germany](#)
- [Sino-German cooperation until 1941](#)
- [Vergangenheitsbewältigung](#)

Notes

1. ^{^ a b c} Including de facto [annexed](#)/incorporated territories.
2. [^] The office formally became vacant on Hitler's death. His titles were [Führer und Reichskanzler](#) from August 1934. See [Gesetz über das Staatsoberhaupt 1934](#).
3. [^] In 1939, before Germany acquired control of the last two regions which had been in its control before the Versailles Treaty—Alsace-Lorraine, Danzig, and the Polish Corridor—its area was 633,786 square kilometres (244,706 sq mi). See [Statistisches Jahrbuch 2006](#).
4. [^] The party's name in German was *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*.
5. [^] On 29 November 2006 State Secretary in the [Federal Ministry of the Interior Christoph Bergner](#) said the reason the statistics do not match is because Haar only includes people who were directly killed. The figure of 2 to 2.5 million also includes people who died of disease, hunger, cold, air raids, and other causes. [Koldehoff 2006](#). The [German Red Cross](#) still maintains that the death toll from the expulsions is 2.2 million. [Kammerer & Kammerer 2005](#), p. 12.
6. [^] More such districts, such as the [Reichskommissariat Moskowien](#) (Moscow), [Reichskommissariat Kaukasus](#) (Caucasus), and [Reichskommissariat Turkestan](#) (Turkestan) were proposed in the event that these areas were brought under German rule.

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3. [^] [Lauryssens 1999](#), p. 102.
4. [^] [Evans 2003](#), p. 103–108.
5. [^] [Evans 2003](#), pp. 186–187.
6. [^] [Evans 2003](#), pp. 170–171.
7. [^] [Goldhagen 1996](#), p. 85.
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9. ^{^ a b} [Kershaw 2008](#), p. 81.
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18. [^] [Evans 2003](#), p. 351.
19. [^] [Shirer 1960](#), p. 196.
20. [^] [Evans 2003](#), p. 336.
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23. [^] [Evans 2005](#), pp. 109, 637.
24. [^] [Evans 2005](#), p. 109.
25. [^] [Cuomo 1995](#), p. 231.
26. ^{^ a b} [McNab 2009](#), p. 54.
27. [^] [McNab 2009](#), p. 56.
28. [^] [Overy 2005](#), p. 63.
29. [^] [Shirer 1960](#), pp. 226–227.
30. [^] [Kershaw 2008](#), p. 317.
31. [^] [Shirer 1960](#), p. 230.
32. [^] [Kershaw 2001](#), pp. 50–59.
33. [^] [Evans 2003](#), p. 344.
34. [^] [Evans 2008](#), map, p. 366.
35. [^] [Evans 2005](#), pp. 338–339.
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38. [^] [Kitchen 2006](#), p. 271.
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External links

- Wikimedia Atlas of Germany
- Third Reich in Ruins (Photos)
- Lebendiges Museum Online (German)

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VTE	Nazism
Organizations	Nazi Party (NSDAP) Sturmabteilung (SA) Schutzstaffel (SS) Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo) Hitler Youth (HJ) National Socialist League of the Reich for Physical Exercise (NSRL) League of German Girls (BDM) National Socialist Women's League (NSF)
History	Early timeline Adolf Hitler's rise to power Machtergreifung Re-armament Nazi Germany Night of the Long Knives Nuremberg Rally Anti-Comintern Pact Kristallnacht World War II Tripartite Pact The Holocaust Nuremberg Trials Denazification
Ideology	Architecture Gleichschaltung Anti-democratic thought Hitler's political views <i>Mein Kampf</i> National Socialist Program New Order Propaganda Religious aspects Women in Nazi Germany
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Atrocities	Doctors' Trial Final Solution Human experimentation
Outside Germany	American Nazi Party Arrow Cross (Hungary) German American Bund Greyshirts (South Africa) Hungarian National Socialist Party Nasjonal Samling (Norway) Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (Netherlands) National Movement of Switzerland National Socialist Bloc (Sweden) National Socialist League (UK) National Socialist Movement (United States) National Socialist Workers' Party of Denmark National Unity Party (Canada) Ossewabrandwag (South Africa)
Lists	Books by or about Hitler Ideologues Leaders and officials Nazi Party members Former Nazi Party members Speeches given by Hitler SS personnel
	Adolf Hitler Joseph Goebbels Heinrich Himmler Hermann Göring Martin Bormann Reinhard Heydrich Adolf Eichmann



People	Albert Speer Rudolf Hess Alfred Rosenberg Wilhelm Frick Rudolf Höss Hans Frank Josef Mengele Richard Walther Darré Baldur von Schirach Ernst Röhm Dietrich Eckart Ernst Hanfstaengl Julius Streicher Ernst Kaltenbrunner Joachim von Ribbentrop George Lincoln Rockwell	
Related topics	Esoteric Nazism Far-right politics Glossary of Nazi Germany Nazi salute Neo-Nazism Stormfront Völkisch movement	
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German administrative territories 1939–1945		
German Reich (1939–1945)	Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia Incorporated Eastern Territories General Government	
Military Administrations	France (1940–1944) Belgium and Northern France (1940–1944) Serbia (1941–1944) Greece (1941–1945) Poland (1939) Soviet Union (1941–1944)	
Reichskommissariat	Founded	Norwegen (1940–1945) Niederlande (1940–1945) <i>Ostland (1941–1945) Ukraine (1941–1944)</i> Belgien-Nordfrankreich (1944)
	Planned	<i>Don-Wolga Moskowien Kaukasus Turkestan Ural</i>
Administrations within or including Soviet territory shown in <i>italics</i> .		
Constituent states of the Third Reich		
Sovereign states	Anhalt Baden Bavaria Brunswick Hesse Lippe Mecklenburg-Schwerin Mecklenburg-Strelitz Oldenburg Prussia Saxony Schaumburg-Lippe Thuringia Württemberg	
City-states	Bremen Hamburg Lübeck	
German Reichs		
First (Holy Roman Empire), 962–1806 Second (German Empire), 1871–1918 Third (Nazi Germany) , 1933–1945 Fourth (hypothetical)		
Germany topics		
History	Timeline Military history Germanic peoples Migration Period Frankish Empire Holy Roman Empire East Colonisation Confederation of the Rhine German Confederation North German Confederation German Empire World War I Weimar Republic Nazi Germany Divided Germany Allied occupation Expulsions East Germany West Germany Reunification Reunified Germany	
Geography	Administrative divisions States Districts Cities and towns Islands Lakes Mountains Rivers	
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Book Category Portal WikiProject		
Fascism		
Theory		
Core tenets	Nationalism Imperialism Authoritarianism Single-party state Dictatorship Social Darwinism Social interventionism Proletarian nation Propaganda Eugenics Heroism Militarism Economic interventionism Anti-communism	
Topics	Definitions Economics Fascism and ideology Fascism worldwide Symbolism	
Ideas	Actual Idealism Class collaboration Corporatism Heroic capitalism National Socialism National syndicalism State capitalism Supercapitalism Third Position Totalitarianism	
Movements		
Africa	Greyshirts Ossewabrandwag	
Asia	Brit HaBironim Ganap Party Sakurakai Tōhōkai	
Western Europe	Black Front (Netherlands) Breton Social-National Workers' Movement British Fascists British People's Party (1939) British Union of Fascists La Cagoule Clerical People's Party Faisceau Falange Flemish National Union French Popular Party General Dutch Fascist League Imperial Fascist League National Fascisti National Front (Switzerland) Nationalist Party (Iceland) National Socialist Dutch Workers Party National Socialist League National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands National Socialist Movement of Norway National Union (Portugal) New Party (UK) Rexistm	
Central Europe	Arrow Cross Party Austrian National Socialism Fatherland's Front Hungarian National Socialist Party Italian Fascism Italian Social Republic Nasjonal Samling National Fascist Community National Fascist Party National Radical Camp Falanga National Socialist Bloc National Socialist Workers' Party (Sweden) Nazism Nazi Party Pērkonkrusts Republican Fascist Party Sammarinese Fascist Party Sudeten German Party Ustaše ZBOR	
Eastern Europe	Albanian Fascist Party Crusade of Romanianism Greek National Socialist Party Iron Guard Lapua Movement Metaxism National Fascist Movement National Italo-Romanian Cultural and Economic Movement National Social Movement (Bulgaria) National Romanian Fascia National Renaissance Front Patriotic People's Movement (Finland) Romanian Front Russian Fascist Party Russian Women's Fascist Movement Slovak People's Party Union of Bulgarian National Legions	
North America	Fascism in Canada Canadian Union of Fascists Parti national social chrétien Red Shirts (Mexico) Gold shirts German American Bund Silver Legion of America	
South America	Falangism in Latin America Brazilian Integralism Bolivian Socialist Falange National Socialist Movement of Chile Revolutionary Union	
People		
Abba Ahimeir Nimio de Anquín Sadao Araki Marc Augier Maurice Bardèche Jacques Benoist-Méchin Henri Béraud Zoltán Bőszőrmény Giuseppe Bottai Robert Brasillach Alphonse de Châteaubriant Corneliu Zelea Codreanu Gustavs Celmiņš Enrico Corradini Carlo Costamagna Richard Walther Darré Marcel Déat Léon Degrelle Pierre Drieu La Rochelle Gottfried Feder Giovanni Gentile Joseph Goebbels Hans F. K. Günther Heinrich Himmler Fumimaro Konoe Adolf Hitler Hideki Tojo Ikki Kita Vihtori Kosola Agostino Lanzillo Dimitrije Ljotić Leopoldo Lugones Curzio Malaparte Ioannis Metaxas Robert Michels Oswald Mosley Benito Mussolini Eoin O'Duffy Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin Sergio Panunzio Giovanni Papini Ante Pavelić William Dudley Pelley Alfred Ploetz Robert Poulet Vidkun Quisling José Antonio Primo de Rivera Lucien Rebatet Dionisio Ridruejo Alfredo Rocco Konstantin Rodzaevsky Alfred Rosenberg Plinio Salgado Rafael Sánchez Mazas Margherita Sarfatti Carl Schmitt Ardengo Soffici Othmar Spann Oswald Spengler Ugo Spirito		



Works	
Literature	<i>The Doctrine of Fascism</i> Fascist manifesto <i>Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals</i> <i>Mein Kampf</i> <i>My Life</i> <i>The Myth of the Twentieth Century</i> <i>Zweites Buch</i> <i>Zaveshchanie russkogo fashista</i>
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Film	<i>Der Sieg des Glaubens</i> <i>Tag der Freiheit: Unsere Wehrmacht</i> <i>Triumph of the Will</i>
Sculpture	Allach
Related topics	Art of the Third Reich Fascist architecture Heroic realism Nazi architecture Nazism and cinema Nazi plunder

Organizations	
Institutional	Ahnenerbe Chamber of Fasci and Corporations Grand Council of Fascism Imperial Way Faction Italian Nationalist Association Nationalsozialistischer Reichsbund für Leibesübungen Quadrumvirs
Activist	Fascist Union of Youth German American Bund Russian Fascist Organization Union of Fascist Little Ones Union of Young Fascists – Vanguard (boys) Union of Young Fascists – Vanguard (girls)
Paramilitary	Albanian Militia Black Brigades Blackshirts Blueshirts Einsatzgruppen Gold shirts Greenshirts Greyshirts Hitler Youth Heimwehr Iron Wolf (organization) Lánčieri Makapii Silver Legion of America Schutzstaffel Sturmabteilung Waffen-SS Werwolf
International	Axis powers NSDAP/AO ODESSA

History	
1910s	Arditi Fascio
1920s	Aventine Secession Acerbo Law March on Rome Beer Hall Putsch Italian economic battles
1930s	March of the Iron Will German federal election, November 1932 German federal election, March 1933 Enabling Act 6 February 1934 crisis 1934 Montreux Fascist conference Spanish Civil War Anti-Comintern Pact
1940s	World War II The Holocaust 25 Luglio Denazification Nuremberg Trials

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Category Portal	

VTE	A history of empires	
Ancient empires	Akkadian Egyptian Kushite Assyrian Babylonian Aksumite Hittite Armenian Iranian Median Achaemenid Parthian Kushan Sasanian Tuoba Greek Macedonian Ptolemaic Seleucid Indian Maurya Gupta Chinese Qin Han Jin Roman Western Eastern Teotihuacan Xianbei Xiongnu	
Medieval empires	Byzantine Nicaea Trebizond Hunnic Arab Rashidun Umayyad Abbasid Fatimid Córdoba Ayyubid Moroccan Idrisid Almoravid Almohad Marinid Iranian Tahirid Samanid Buyid Sallarid Ziyarid Persianate Ghaznavid Great Seljuq Khwarezmian Timurid Bulgarian First Second Aragonese Benin Latin Oyo Bornu Indian Chola Gurjara-Pratihara Pala Eastern Ganga dynasty Delhi Mongol Yuan Golden Horde Chagatai Khanate Ilkhanate Serbian Songhai Khmer Carolingian Holy Roman North Sea Angevin Mali Chinese Sui Tang Song Yuan Wagadou Aztec Inca Srivijaya Majapahit Ethiopian Zagwe Solomonid Somali Ajuuraan Mogadishan Warsangali Adalite Ifatite	
Modern empires	Tongan Ashanti Indian Maratha Sikh Mughal Indian (colonial) Chinese Ming Qing China Ottoman Iranian Safavid Afsharid Zand Qajar Pahlavi Moroccan Saadi Alaouite Ethiopian Somali Gobroon Majeerteen Hobyo Dervish French First Second Austrian Austro-Hungarian German German Empire German Reich Russian Swedish Mexican First Second Brazilian Korean Japanese Haitian First Second	
Colonial empires	Belgian British English Danish Dutch French German Italian Japanese Portuguese Spanish Swedish United States	
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