

Governments, Parties and Elections in Weimar Germany: 1919-1933

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

← SOURCE 1 - Weimar governments 1919-33

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

† Not a member of a party.

↓ SOURCE 2 - The role of the Reichstag and the President 1930-32

	1930	1931	1932
Presidential decree laws	5	44	66
Reichstag laws	98	34	5
Reichstag: days sitting	94	42	13

↓ SOURCE 3 - Reichstag elections, 1919-33

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

* From 1930 known as the German States Party.

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

ACTIVITY 1

1. Study Source 1. What does it reveal about:
 - a) the number of governments during the Weimar Republic
 - b) their approximate time in office?
2. Look at the final column of Source 1. How many minority governments were there? How must they have survived?
3. How many government changes were there which were not the result of elections? How healthy was this for democracy?

Political Parties in Weimar Germany

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

ACTIVITY 2

- Using the Chart above. Copy & complete this table:
- Copy out the names of the following parties, arranging them in order from left wing to right wing: **NSDAP, KPD, SPD, DDP, DNVP, Z, BVP, DVP.**

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