E) Why did people support the Nazis?

ACTIVITY 9
We will begin to investigate the reasons why some people voted for the Nazis by examining Nazi propaganda in the form of leaflets and posters.

1. Draw and complete a table like the one below, using Sources 23-32.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Group directed at</th>
<th>Their grievances</th>
<th>What the Nazis offered</th>
<th>Other comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. What overall conclusions can you reach from these sources?
3. How valuable are these sources as evidence of why people voted for the Nazis?
4. SUMMARY - List the range of reasons why people voted for the Nazis.
5. SUMMARY - Which of these reasons do you consider the most important?
6. SUMMARY - How have historians’ interpretations changed in recent years?

The years 1914-18 involved the destruction of the German Reich’s economic pre-eminence and thus the freedom of German labour. November 1918 did not result in the deposition [overthrow] of the feudal lords to the benefit of the workers. Instead the 9th November brought the defeat of Germany as a state. But the German worker paid the price.

His masters today are the irresponsible, faceless, international big capitalists and the Jews of the banking world… National Socialism demands a transformation from the utterly unscrupulous profit-motivated economy to an economy geared to need.

GERMAN WOMEN! GERMAN MOTHERS!
Our Young People Defiled.
The present Prussian Welfare Minister… has confirmed… that in a German Grammar School for Girls 83 per cent of the girls had experienced sexual intercourse and 47 per cent had some form of sexual disease… The number of sexual offences and cases of incest pole up in the most gruesome manner!… This is the result of the many years during which our people, and in particular our youth, have been exposed to a flood of much and filth, in word and print, in the theatre and in the cinema. These are the result of the systematic Marxist destruction of the family…
The National Socialists must win the election so that they can put a halt to this Marxist handiwork, so that once again women are honoured and valued, and so that the cinema and the theatre contribute to the inner rebuilding of the nation. German women and mothers, Do you want your honour to sink still further?
Do you want your daughters to be playthings and the objects of sexual lust?
if NOT, then vote for a National Socialist majority on July 31st. Then vote for:

LIST TWO: HITLER-MOVEMENT
NAT. SOCIAL GERMAN WORKERS PARTY

Source 24 – A leaflet from July 1932
Source 23 – Nazi publication, Der Betriebs-Sturmer, 1931
Source 25 – A 1924 Nazi poster: ‘First bread! Then reparations’
Source 26 – An anti-Jewish poster. It says: ‘The puppet master. Head and Hand vote Nazi.’
Source 27 – A 1932 Nazi election poster showing Marxism as the guardian angel of big business. The angel has SPD on his helmet – the Nazis called the moderate Socialists Marxists to discredit them.
TRADERS!
SMALL PRODUCERS! ARTISANS!
For a long time you have kept out of sight and let corruption, favouritism and the nepotism of others run all over you. You believed that obeying law and order was the first duty of the citizen. But what has this led to? Ever more exploitation by those in power. The tax-screw being turned ever tighter. You are helots of this system. Your only job is to work and pay taxes which go into the salaries and pensions of ministers. What have your parties done for you? They promised the world but did nothing. They made coalitions, prattled away before the elections then disappeared into parliament until the next. They didn’t unite against the treacherous leaders of Marxism. They horse-dealt over ministerial posts and never gave you a thought. They have ruled with Social-Democrats and forgotten the aim of that party – Death to the Middle Class!

Have you forgotten the inflation? How were you robbed of your savings and commercial capital?
Have you forgotten how the Department Stores and Co-operatives have ruined you?
... Middle classes, why is it so bad? Why are your shops empty? Why are you out of business?
Look at the banks and their massive profits! They are eating you out of existence!
Marxism is guilty of pawning the German economy to international high finance. Therefore citizens, you belong to the ranks of those who make no pact with Marxism, but fight it wherever it is to be found.

GERMAN NATIONAL SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

↑ Source 28 – A 1929 leaflet

↓ Source 31 – A 1932 Nazi poster: ‘Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future. Save the German family. Vote for Adolf Hitler!’

↑ Source 29 – ‘We’re for Adolf Hitler!’

↑ Source 30 – A Nazi election poster, 1932: ‘We want work and bread!’

↓ Source 32 – A 1929 leaflet

GERMAN FARMERS!
Farmers, it’s a matter of your house and home!
Factories, forests, railways, taxes and the state’s finances have all been robbed by the Jew. Now he’s stretching his greedy fingers towards the last German possession – the countryside.
Insatiable [never satisfied] Jewish race-lust and fanaticism are the driving forces behind this devilish attempt to break Germany’s backbone through the annihilation [destruction] of the German farming community.
Doesn’t it open your eyes when you see the economy of the countryside being crippled by unnaturally high taxes, while you have insufficient income to set off against this because of low prices for livestock and grain? Huge imports of frozen meat and foreign grain, at lowest prices, undercut you and push down your earnings... You cannot obtain credit to tide you over these hard times. If you want money the usurious [very high] interest rates will wring your neck. Under the protection of the state it won’t be long before the greater part of the land-owning farmers will be driven from their farms and homes by Jewish money lenders.

Help us build a new Germany that will be
NATIONALIST AND SOCIALIST
NATIONALIST because it is free and held in respect.
SOCIALIST because any Germany who works and creates will be guaranteed not just a slave's ration of bread, but an honourable life, decent earnings and the sanctity of his hard-earned property.
Farmers, it is a matter of the most holy possessions of a people, THE LAND AND THE FIELDS WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN US.
Farmers, it is a matter of house and home, Of life and death, of our people and our fatherland!

THEFORE FARMERS – WAKE UP!
JOIN THE RANKS OF OUR DEFENCE FORCE. FIGHT WITH US IN THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMAN WORKERS PARTY
Historians’ assessments of Nazi support

Mood, manipulation or money: why did Germans vote Nazi?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One commonly held view that is no longer propounded by historians is that virulent (poisonous/bitter) anti-semitism was a major contributor to Hitler’s mass support. It was indeed a powerful attraction for many of the original Nazis and for some who joined the party, but not especially for voters. Other parties, such as the DNVP, were also anti-semitic. Hitler was deeply anti-semitic but
played down Nazi anti-semitism as the prospects for power increased, instead stressing anti-communism which was much more attractive to the elite upon whom his chances might depend. Even the American Jewish historian Goldhagen, who caused a storm in 1996 with his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* where he argued that Germany alone developed a strong desire to eliminate Jews, accepts that anti-semitism was not crucial in the Nazis’ electoral success.

**Source 33** – In a survey of Nazi Party members, the following reasons were given as the main factor for joining the Nazis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for joining the Nazi Party</th>
<th>% of those surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Marxism</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Community</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernationalism</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitler Cult</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-semitism</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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


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

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

**ACTIVITY 10**

Study Sources 34 and 35:

1. Explain the differences between Bullock's and Brustein's views.
2. Why do you think Brustein called his book *The Logic of Evil*?
3. 'Complementary rather than competing.' Using the sources and your own knowledge, explain how far you agree with this comment on Brustein's and Bullocks opinions on the reasons for the Nazis' support.