

Hitler's Effective Management of Party and State

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During and after the consolidation of power as dictator of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler strategically employed different tactics and actions to achieve his goals. Hitler's dictatorship worked to achieve Lebensraum, militarism, and racial purity in Germany to assert Germany as a global power. However, Hitler could not achieve these goals alone, as no dictator can consolidate and use power alone, making management of their parties and government essential to maintaining and using absolute authority. Hitler was an effective dictator as he managed his party with centralized authority, used political repression and selective promotion, controlled the normative and prerogative state, and used his personality to gain support from party members and civilians.

By gaining centralized authority constitutionally, Hitler was effective at achieving absolute power. In response to the Reichstag fire in February 1933 which placed blame on communists for destroying the home of parliament, an emergency decree was written under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. This suppressed freedoms such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and allowed the arrests of political opposition without trial.²³ This decree demonstrates how Hitler could begin the process of removing political opposition, allowing the Nazi Party to have authority over other parties and obtain federal power over states.²⁴ Hitler sought to eliminate the *Reichstag's* remaining powers, which was "legally only achievable through the passing of an enabling act," that could only be passed with a two-thirds majority vote.²⁵ To achieve this majority, Hitler used two significant means. The first being the use of intimidation with the Sturmabteilung lining the auditorium where the vote was

²³ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*, (2nd ed., Oxford, England: Routledge, 2013), 68.

²⁴ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (1st Vintage Books ed., New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 107.

²⁵ D.G. Williamson, *The Third Reich*, (Fifth edition., Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018,) 26-7.

held, and the second being the imprisonment of opposition, mostly communists, under the Reichstag Fire Decree.²⁶ The Enabling Act became integral to Hitler's success as he was able to rule by decree, allowing him to pass any law he sought without opposition from parliament, and in combination with the Reichstag Fire Decree, was able to put aside any existing law in the face of communist terrorist threat.²⁷ Hitler's centralized authority gained by the Enabling Act is significant in demonstrating how Hitler was effective at managing his party by growing its authority. When Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933, only two other cabinet members were a part of the Nazi Party; however, after the Enabling Act was passed, Hitler's individual authority became absolute and the cabinet, which consisted of other party members became redundant, allowing the Nazi Party to grow in influence and authority.²⁸

Hitler used his centralized authority to meet the ends he sought by passing and enforcing laws that eliminated opposition and began processes of racial purity. With his ability to rule by decree enforced by the Enabling Act, Hitler was able to pass laws to push forward his ideas for making Germany racially pure and ensure Germany was fascist without communist, or other opposing ideological, threat.²⁹ One of the most prominent laws passed without parliament approval or debate were the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. The Nuremberg Laws added law to already existing anti-semitism, which forbade Jewish and non-Jewish Germans from marriage, sexual relationships, among other restrictions.³⁰ These laws were of significant importance for Hitler to accomplish his goal of a racially pure Germany. Another significant example of Hitler using his centralized authority to serve his own goals and his party is the Law against the Formation of Parties, which legalized the one-party state when passed in 1933,

²⁶ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, (London: Little, Brown, 2015,) 101.

²⁷ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 108

²⁸ Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, 92.

²⁹ Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, 95.

³⁰ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, (Jerusalem: International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, 2008,) 161.

thus removing any other political influence from the Nazi Party and German government.³¹ These laws are significant examples of how Hitler was able to use his rule by decree to continue progressing Germany towards the Nazi ideal without legal opposition.

Hitler used political repression and violence to eliminate and prevent opposition, resulting in fewer obstacles for him to reach his aims. The Night of the Long Knives in June 1934 is the most prominent example of this, as Hitler ordered the Schutzstaffel to kill opponents to his party and the SA as he feared the power they were gaining. It was important for Hitler to eliminate these threats as after the passing of the Enabling Act, the only threats that could stop Hitler came from within the armed forces or within the Nazi Party. Internal threats included the leader of the SA, Ernst Rhöme, who was feared because the SA was becoming too powerful, and because there was a possibility of an attempted *Putsch*.³² Although it was Rhöme's murder that kickstarted the killings, the number of those deemed a threat who were killed reached as high as 150-200, and included members of the SA, those who had formally opposed Hitler such as Kurt von Schleicher, and left wing members of the Nazi Party such as Gregor Strasser.³³ These killings are a profound part of what made Hitler successful in his consolidation of power as they prevented any kind of uprising from within the Nazi Party or SA, which protected Hitler's authority and helped the SS gain strength over the SA. This is important as the SS worked directly under Hitler's orders and were not bound constitutionally. In addition to preventing immediate risks to Hitler's life and rule, these killings acted as a warning to any remaining opposition by demonstrating Hitler's power and willingness to eliminate opposition. This is significant in Hitler's management of his party by removing threats and preventing threats to his authority, allowing him to focus solely on his goals in full force.

³¹ Robert Gellately, *The Oxford History of the Third Reich*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2023,) 76.

³² Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 37.

³³ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 108.

Following the Night of the Long Knives, Hitler promoted and replaced party members to gain more loyalty within the Nazi Party. Hitler promoted members who had stronger loyalties and posed no threat of opposition. One of the most prominent members who benefited from the Night of the Long Knives was Heinrich Himmler, whose leadership of the SS in the attacks against the SA was rewarded with the responsibility of administering concentration camps.³⁴ Himmler's position of *Reichsfürher-SS* gained power with the SS's superiority over the SA, making Himmler the second most powerful man in Germany.³⁵ This is significant for Hitler as giving the responsibility of concentration camps, which were to be used to remove opposition and later to achieve Hitler's goal of racial purity when the camps were used as an instrument of genocide, was given to someone who had proved his loyalty and who Hitler could trust to carry out these goals of his. Himmler's new responsibility along with other leaders who contributed to the Night of the Long Knives, such as Göring, demonstrated how Hitler gained control and security over his party by ensuring he could trust whom he delegated responsibility to, to achieve his goals.

Hitler pursued his goals by controlling and using factions. Factions were right-wing organizations that replaced previously dissolved left-wing organizations, and controlled areas of German lives such as education, propaganda and entertainment.³⁶ Hitler used factions strategically to spread the Nazi Party's ideology to civilians. One of the most significant factions was the Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda led by Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels described propaganda as, "not enough to terrorize non-supporters into submission...[but that] the objective must be 'to work on people until they have capitulated to us,'" showing how crucial propaganda was in instilling ideology in civilians, making them submissive and unquestioning to Hitler as the *Führer*.³⁷ Propaganda was made in

³⁴ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 41.

³⁵ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 42.

³⁶ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 31.

³⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 96.

multiple mediums including film and radio broadcasts, which showed Nazi speeches and ceremonies. The most prominent broadcast being the *Wunschkonzert für das Winterhilfswerk*, which had around eighty percent of Germans tuning in making civilians ‘one big family’.³⁸ This is an important way the Nazi Party could boost nationalism and boost civilian opinion of the party. Another important faction was the Reich Education Ministry, which served to inculcate German youth with Nazi ideology, by means of radically changing curriculum to instill Nazi values such as teaching anti-semitism in ‘racial-science’ courses.³⁹ Plebiscites were held regarding the changes to curriculum and other education policies; however, parents were intimidated and coerced into voting in agreement with the new Education Ministry policies.⁴⁰ The control of education and propaganda is integral to Hitler’s ability to manage his party as public support of the Nazis was necessary to prevent civilians from opposing Hitler, and the Nazi Party relied on civilians to help accomplish goals by being enthusiastically nationalist and eager to take action.

Parallel organizations were crucial to Hitler’s control of the prerogative state, which also helped him to achieve his goals. A prominent parallel organization was the SS, as they were vital to Hitler’s steps toward racial purity because they were central to the creation and management of concentration camps. Because the German police was removed by the normative state via the SS, they were under complete control of Hitler without being barred by law or constitution, and were also protected from Hitler’s rivals in the Ministry of the Interior, who had traditionally controlled the German police.⁴¹ This allowed the SS to carry out their management of concentration camps without interference from the law and constitution or opposition, as they only needed to respond to Hitler’s command. Another important parallel organization was the Hitler Youth, which acted as an educational institution that prepared young

³⁸ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 62.

³⁹ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 64.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Evans, *The Hitler Conspiracies*, (Oxford University Press, 2020,) 103.

⁴¹ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 108- 33.

Germans to be obedient under Hitler's authority, and to be educated in and trained in military affairs from the age of ten until they reached university.⁴² The Hitler Youth was the prominent method, even more so than schools, in which children could be educated and indoctrinated of the Nazi ideology without requiring the same plebiscites that were held by the Reich Education Ministry.⁴³ This is a notable way Hitler could prepare Germany's future by ensuring youth had already begun military training thus creating new soldiers ready to be integrated in the military, and by ensuring children from a young age were given no ability to form their own ideology but rather forced to accept Nazi ideology. Parallel organizations were an effective method Hitler used to achieve his goals under his direct command without legal or oppositional interference, making his ability to achieve goals such as racial purity, done in part by the SS, and militarism, done in part by the Hitler Youth, more obtainable for Nazi Germany.

Hitler's personality and leadership styles allowed him to be an effective dictator due to the trust and loyalty he obtained from his party. Throughout his political career, Hitler gained the trust of followers as he "never wavered about the certainty of his ideas," demonstrating the strength and conviction his followers admired.⁴⁴ Compared with other early Nazi leaders who were either introverted, lacking ideological vision, or had personalities that were too cold or inhuman to gain public appeal; Hitler's charisma and extraversion that had earned him a personality cult made him stand out.⁴⁵ Hans Frank, who later became one of Hitler's cabinet members, said that when he joined the SA in 1923, he was "positively spellbound" by Hitler's personality, demonstrating the impact Hitler's leadership had on party members.⁴⁶ The way Hitler was perceived by party members was not limited by his charisma and

⁴² Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 141.

⁴³ Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 64.

⁴⁴ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 18.

⁴⁵ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 31-2.

⁴⁶ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 33.

ability to speak, but also in portraying himself as an intellectual with members such as Goebbels calling him a “genius”. With his own party members as a captivated audience, they were more likely to heed his instructions and follow his ideology, which he communicated with certainty and passion. Party members trusted Hitler due to his conviction and genius, but also with his ability to act as a prophet for an improved Germany. This was profound for Hitler to succeed as a dictator, as he needed unwavering support and shared enthusiasm for improving Germany; he had to delegate to his party members since no dictator can rule alone, especially dictators like Hitler who had extreme and ambitious aims for Germany.

Hitler’s influence extended to civilians as he gained their trust and loyalty. In order to achieve Hitler’s desire for a unified and nationalistic Germany, he relied on having a mass following. This was important for certain aims of making Germany a more powerful nation, such as expanding militarism and increasing production, as these require a desire from civilians to serve Germany. That is, civilians who are not enthusiastic about serving Germany are less likely to get involved in military efforts and other efforts that Hitler aimed for. Hitler achieved support from the masses by using his skills as an orator, in which he portrayed himself as a “self-styled” prophet.⁴⁷ Even those who were unenthusiastic about the Nazi Party and supported other parties in 1933, “would find something, even a great deal, to admire in the Third Reich” over time.⁴⁸ Although this could be true as a result of the elimination and repression of opposition occurring simultaneously, it could have also come from Hitler’s speeches that were broadcast, allowing Hitler the ability to change civilians’ opinions of him and his party due to his ability to speak passionately about Germany and German nationalism. The gained support as a result of Hitler’s ability to pose as a prophet who speaks of the greatness of Germany was vital to Hitler himself,

⁴⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 34.

⁴⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 89.

as he relied on civilian support and action to accomplish goals such as militarism and to reduce opposition from the civilian masses.

Through utilizing lawful means of gaining increasing authority, elimination of opposition and inclusion of loyalty, control of factions and parallel organizations, and the use of his prophetic and tenacious style of speaking, Hitler was able to manage his party to achieve his goals. Although the Third Reich fell in 1945, Hitler had succeeded in multiple aims before then. He was able to achieve a degree of Lebensraum and militarism, which was made achievable due to his ability to gain support from and indoctrinate civilians. Hitler was also able to achieve a degree of racial purity due to his ruling by decree, which enabled him to pass laws that instigated measures to achieve racial purity, as well as using parallel organizations and trusting loyal members to carry out the Holocaust. Hitler's complete control of party and state allowed him to effectively rule and bring Germany closer to his ideal model of the state.

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