# **National Socialism and Hitler's Nazi Party**

By Encyclopaedia Britannica, adapted by Newsela staff

National Socialism was a movement led by Adolf Hitler. It is also called Nazism. Hitler was the head of the Nazi Party in Germany. National Socialism was popular in Germany after World War I. It was hostile toward outsiders and ruled by Hitler. The goal of the Nazi party was to destroy all enemies of the Germanic people. Their goals led to World War II and the Holocaust, in which millions of people died.

## **The Origins of National Socialism**

Germany was once called Prussia. In the 1600s through 1800s, Prussians modeled their lives after the Prussian army. By the 1800s, they adored science and the laws of nature, which they believed to be above any ideas of good and evil. This led German thinkers in the 1800s to claim that the Germanic peoples were superior to all other Europeans and all other races.

Hitler was influenced by these ideas. He was also influenced by pro-German and anti-Semitic political movements in Austria. Hitler hated eastern European people and the Jews — who are a Semitic people. His hatred began with his experiences as an unsuccessful artist in Vienna, Austria, a city filled with many different ethnicities. He had trouble making a living there and became bitter.

Germany's defeat in World War I also paved the way for National Socialism's growth. The defeat led to sadness and frustration in Germany, and Hitler and the Nazis took advantage of those feelings. Germany was punished harshly after World War I. They had to give up land and money. From the beginning, Hitler called for revenge. Many supported his plan to build up the military. In 1923, many middle-class families had their savings wiped out, which led to more anger.

## **Hitler Exploited Fears of Communism**

The growth of communist power in the Soviet Union (today Russia) aroused fear in Germany and around the world. Hitler exploited those fears, winning him the support of many people who didn't realize how brutal his plans were.

Hitler had a deep understanding of how people think and what makes them angry and afraid. He made sure even the least intelligent people could understand his message. He focused more on winning people over than on honesty.

Hitler identified the Jews with both Russian communism and evil. The Jews were to be discriminated against. National Socialism declared the Jews to be fundamentally different from and harmful to other Germans.

National Socialism rejected democracy, the rule of law, human rights, cooperation and peace. Instead, it stressed blind obedience to leaders. It also put forward the idea that not all races are equal and that strong races had the right to rule the weak ones.

## **Totalitarianism and Expansionism**

The Nazi Party originated in 1919. It was led by Hitler starting in 1920. The party took control of the government in Germany in 1933 and held it until 1945, when Hitler committed suicide and Germany was defeated and occupied by the Allies at the end of World War II.

The history of National Socialism after 1934 can be divided into two periods of about equal length. Between 1934 and 1939 the party controlled all phases of life in Germany. The public welcomed the government provided by the Nazis. Jobless people were put to work on large projects, like building roads, cars, and factories for guns and weapons. Germans were swept up in this movement designed to make Germany great again. People were making money again after the Great Depression had weakened their economy. Germany became more patriotic. These were key factors in National Socialism’s appeal. Further, Hitler was successful in getting land for Germany from other countries during the early years of World War II, which won him support from most Germans. Even many who had previously opposed him began to support him.

## **Nazis Ruled by Terror**

Despite its economic and political success, National Socialism maintained its power by manipulation. The Nazis constantly spread propaganda through all media. The Nazis held giant rallies to show how powerful they were. The Nazis also relied on terror, with its secret police and concentration camps, where Jews and other victims were sent. It encouraged people to see Jews as a symbol of all that was hated and feared. The Nazis portrayed the Jews as the enemy of society.

Justice in Germany was built around the needs and interests of the Aryan people. Political opponents were branded as enemies. Special camps were created. In these camps, the Nazi police introduced a system of brutality unseen in modern times. The Nazis killed millions of Jews and other people in the Holocaust.

Germany invaded Poland which started World War II in 1939. It was the logical outcome of Hitler’s plans. His first years were spent preparing the Germans for the struggle for world control and building up Germany's military, and then he aimed to unite all people of German descent within what he believed was their historical homeland. His next step was acquiring enough land for Germany to become self-sufficient and powerful. The Germans ruled over other peoples ruthlessly. His military campaigns of 1939–41 were successful, so he began to think of expanding into other continents and eventually the entire world.

## **Mass Movement Ends with the Death of Hitler**

Nazism came to an end with Germany’s defeat in 1945, after nearly six years of war. National Socialism as a mass movement ended on April 30, 1945, when Hitler committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of Soviet troops completing the occupation of Berlin. Germany was divided until 1990, though parts of National Socialism remained in Germany after Hitler’s suicide, and a small number of Nazi-oriented political parties and other groups were formed in West Germany from the late 1940s. In the 1990s, gangs of neo-Nazi young people in eastern Germany staged attacks against immigrants, desecrated Jewish cemeteries, and engaged in violent confrontations with protesters and police.