SOURCE 7.17 J. Noakes, 'The Rise of the Nazis', *History Today*, January 1983, p. 11

The Nazis did best in the rural areas and small towns of the Protestant parts of Germany, particularly in the north and east. They won much of their support from the most rooted and traditional section of the German population – peasant farmers, self-employed artisans, craftsmen and small retailers . . . In urban areas the party did best in those towns and cities which were administrative or commercial centres with large civil servant and white collar populations, rather than in industrial centres; and they tended to win most support in upper-middle-class districts. Nazi support also tended to be strongest among the younger generation. This was particularly true of the membership, which was also overwhelmingly male.

SOURCE 7.18 J. Falter, 'How likely were workers to vote for the NSDAP?', in *The Rise of Nationalism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany*, ed. C. Fischer, 1996, pp. 34 and 40

According to our estimates, probably one in three workers of voting age backed the NSDAP . . . From July 1932 onwards more workers would have voted NSDAP than voted KPD or SPD . . . On a regular basis more than a quarter of National Socialist voters were workers . . .

In terms of its electoral support the NSDAP was clearly Protestant dominated, but otherwise in social terms it was a distinctly heterogeneous [mixed] party . . . There is unmistakable over-representation of voters from the middle classes, a fact certainly disputed by no one as yet. On the other hand, it no longer appears admissible, given so high a proportion of voters from the working class, to speak of a middle class party. The National Socialists' electoral successes were nourished by so many different sources, that the NSDAP might really best be characterised as an integrative [all-embracing] protest movement . . . Its composition was so socially balanced . . . that . . . it possessed the character of a people's party or national party more than any other large Weimar party.

Historical debate: who voted Nazi?

ACTIVITY

The issue of who voted for the Nazis has been the subject of great historical controversy. To some extent this is because behind it lies the extremely sensitive question, 'Who was to blame for Hitler?' This activity will help you to identify the main trends in historians' explanations.

1 Copy the table below. Mark a tick if the historian identifies a group as prone to vote Nazi.

Group	1 Noakes (Source 7.17)	2 Peterson (Source 7.19)	3 Fischer (Source 7.20)	4 Falter (Source 7.18)	5 Geary (Source 7.21)
Working class					
Petty bourgeoisie/ middle class, e.g. shopkeepers, white-collar workers					
Wealthy, i.e. upper middle class					
Protestants					
Wide range, i.e. a people's movement					

2 What degree of historical consensus about Nazi support emerges from this exercise?

3 These are only extracts from the analyses of these historians so care has to be taken when assessing their views. However, the paragraph from Peterson (Source 7.19) is complete. Is there any surprising omission from his discussion of Nazi supporters? How might this be explained?

4 'The traditional stress on the petty-bourgeois base of Nazi support need not be discarded, but instead incorporated into a broader picture.' How far do these extracts substantiate this opinion?

SOURCE 7.19 B. Peterson, 'Regional Elites and the Rise of National Socialism' in *Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany*, 1989, p. 172

Most [historians] now generally agree that the social class most inclined to join and vote for the National Socialists was the petty bourgeoisie, including artisans, shopkeepers, and peasants. Substantial support, however, has been shown to have come from higher social strata. Recent studies have demonstrated that residents of affluent neighbourhoods, vacationers, cruise ship passengers, civil servants and RENTIERS *– all arguably elite – supported the National Socialist German Workers Party. On the other hand, big business and Junkers – the core groups of the ruling class in Weimar Germany – were generally disinclined to join or vote for the Nazis, although some of them gave various other kinds of direct and indirect support.*

SOURCE 7.20 Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis*, 1995, pp. 63 and 99

[The Nazis] intended to MOBILISE *all 'ethnic' Germans, tried to do so and enjoyed a degree of success in crossing class, regional, confessional [religious], gender and age barriers which was unprecedented in German political history . . .*

An impressive body of evidence . . . supports the overall picture of National Socialism as a predominantly Protestant, middle-class rassemblement [movement], and this line of interpretation has provided the starting point and the conclusion for most of the general histories of Nazism . . . The latest EMPIRICAL *work on the National Socialist constituency [voters] has now created problems for this long-standing consensus which have yet to be fully addressed. It appears that some 40 per cent of voters and party members were working class and some 60 per cent of SA members were working class, leading to the typification of Nazism as a popular or people's movement instead of a class movement.*

SOURCE 7.21 R. Geary, *Hitler and Nazism*, 1993, p. 27

The NSDAP was most successful where it did not have to cope with strong pre-existing IDEOLOGICAL *and organisational loyalties. Where these did exist, as in Social Democratic and Communist strongholds, it did far less well. The same applied to Germany's Catholic community, strongly represented over decades by the Centre Party (or the BVP in Bavaria). Loyalty to the party was reinforced by a plethora [great range] of Catholic leisure organisations which penetrated daily life and also by the pulpit, from which the NSDAP was sometimes denounced as godless. On the other hand, Nazi success in Protestant rural and middle class Germany was facilitated by the fact that political loyalties there were either weak or non-existent.*

Until the 1980s the predominant view was that the key group was the petty bourgeoisie (*Mittelstand*) who provided the Nazis with mass support. They shared responsibility with the elite (who intrigued to get Hitler appointed) for the catastrophe of the Nazis coming to power. Left-wing historians could thus blame the Right and portray the working class as largely without blame. By the 1990s two developments challenged this view. Firstly, the centrality of the whole concept of class has been questioned. The phenomenon of many workers voting for right-wing governments in Britain and the USA led to more sophisticated analysis of political support and voting behaviour. Other factors, such as religion and the local community, have been identified as additional important influences on voting. The end of the Cold War and the decline of Marxism as a major force in Western universities have also encouraged a more empirical approach.

Secondly, more sources have been examined, with new techniques. The use of computers and refined statistical methodology have allowed more data to be viewed in different ways. There has been a growth in local studies, so the German people have been looked at in small groups and as individuals, not as classes. This has inevitably led to more complex views emerging. The collapse of the East German communist regime has further opened up many records. As a result, recent historians such as Falter, Conan Fischer and Brustein have all produced convincing arguments that German workers were far more attracted to the Nazis than many have argued in the past.

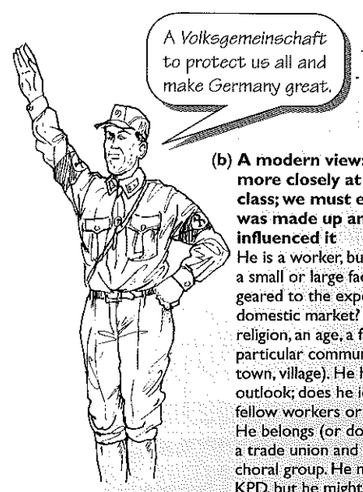
This does not mean, however, that the long-standing stress on the importance of support from the petty bourgeoisie can be rejected. The evidence does powerfully suggest that this class voted disproportionately for the Nazis, but far less than used to be thought. Religion and local community influences seem to have been a greater determinant of voting behaviour than class.

SOURCE 7.22 J. Falter, 1996, p. 10

The range of living and working conditions concealed behind the collective term 'worker' was huge. Thus the East Prussian or Pomeranian farm labourer who was paid largely in kind [goods] and received an hourly cash payment of 10 pfennig or less belonged to this group as much as the factory-employed craftsman or the highly specialised skilled worker who might earn ten times as much in the industrialised conurbations. Similarly, the foreman who had worked in the same Württemberg family for thirty years was as much a 'worker' according to the census as the young labourer in an Upper Silesian ironworks, the homeworker from the Erzgebirge or the daily help in a villa in Berlin-Zehlendorf. One might be in everyday contact with 'his' trade union and the workers' parties, while the other might have scarcely heard of either and align his voting intentions according to the political preferences of the estate manager or the proprietor of the small workshop with whom he went to school and who, possibly, belonged to the same hunting association or sporting club. In view of this it appears all the less likely that the working class as a whole would manifest even a degree of homogeneity in its voting behaviour.

■ 7D The working class and Nazism

(a) The traditional view: class is crucial
He is an industrial worker and this will determine his voting. He will not vote Nazi.



(b) A modern view: we must look more closely at the working class; we must examine how it was made up and what influenced it
He is a worker, but does he work in a small or large factory? Is his work geared to the export or the domestic market? He also has a religion, an age, a family. He lives in a particular community (city, small town, village). He has a particular outlook; does he identify with fellow workers or is he ambitious? He belongs (or does not belong) to a trade union and other bodies, e.g. choral group. He may vote SPD or KPD, but he might vote NSDAP!