

# Consolidating Leadership: Referendums in Nazi Germany and Postwar France

MIN SHU

WASEDA UNIVERSITY

# Outline of the Lecture

2

2024/11/19

- ▶ Consolidating leadership through direct democracy
- ▶ Referendums in Nazi Germany
- ▶ Referendums in Post-War France
- ▶ Discussions

# Consolidating leadership through direct democracy

- ▶ Legitimizing function
  - ▶ Direct approval by the people
  - ▶ Winning a strong mandate
- ▶ Weakening the opposition
  - ▶ Avoiding being constrained by other representative bodies (e.g., the Parliament)
  - ▶ Exploiting division and disagreement among the opposition
- ▶ Combining the policy and the personal
  - ▶ Bargaining for a favourable *policy* package
  - ▶ Enhancing the **personal political standing**

# Referendums in Nazi Germany

4

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- ▶ Institutional changes in the Nazi Germany
  - ▶ Initiation: an exclusive privilege vested in the cabinet
  - ▶ Centralization: Lander subordinated to the Reich
  - ▶ Voting rules: simple majority of the registered voters → simple majority of ballot voters
- ▶ The wording of the ballot question in 1933
  - ▶ A printed page summed up the complete policy towards the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference, plus  
'Do you, German man and German woman, approve of the policy of your government of the Reich and are you willing to declare it as expression of your own perception and to formally confess to it?'

# Referendums in Nazi Germany

5

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## ► The wording of the ballot question in 1934

'The office of the President of the Reich is unified with the office of the Chancellor. Consequently, all former powers of the President of the Reich are demised to the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich Adolf Hitler. He himself nominates his substitute.

Do you, German man and German woman, approve of this regulation provided by this Law?'

## ► Propaganda during the referendum campaigns

- 1933: patriotic discourse
- 1934: the need for coordinated and centralized political leadership in Germany

# Referendums in Nazi Germany

- ▶ 1933 Withdrawal from the League of Nations
  - ▶ Turnout: 96.27%; Yes vote: 95.08%
- ▶ 1934 Merging the offices of President and Chancellor
  - ▶ Turnout: 95.65%; Yes vote: 89.93%
- ▶ 1936 Re-militarization of the Rhineland
  - Approval by the Reichstag and the Fuehrer
  - ▶ Turnout: 98.1%; Yes vote: 98.9%
- ▶ 1938 Annexation of Austria by Germany
  - ▶ Turnout: 99.59%; Yes vote: 99.01%

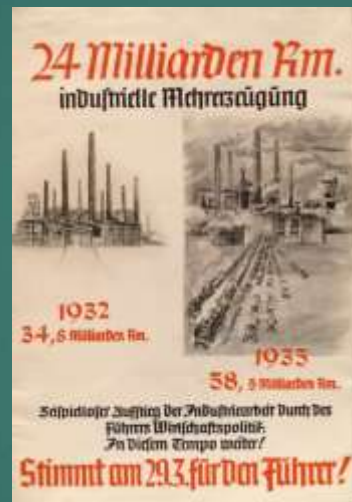


# Referendums in Nazi Germany

7

- Posters in the Nazi referendums of 1936 and 1938

2024/11/19



# Referendums in Post-War France

- ▶ De Gaulle returned to the Government following the Algerian crisis in 1958
- ▶ The referendum in 1958 was mandatory
  - ▶ The Constitution claims 'France and the French overseas territories composed a community'
  - ▶ It also **allows the President to call a referendum**
- ▶ All subsequent referendums were called by de Gaulle. These popular votes were simultaneously a **vote of confidence** in himself





# Referendums in Post-War France

- ▶ 1958 approving the Constitution (Fifth Republic)
  - ▶ Turnout 80.48%, yes vote 85.15%
- ▶ Two referendums on Algeria held in 1961 and 1962
  - ▶ Turnout 73.76% and 75.34%; yes vote 74.99% and 90.81%
  - ▶ Ballots: Algerian self-government (1961); the Evian Treaty (1962)
- ▶ 1962 Direct election of the President
  - ▶ Turnout 76.97% yes vote 62.25%
- ▶ 1969 devolution of power from the Senate (rejected)
  - ▶ Turnout 80.13% yes vote 47.59%

# The French Referendum in 1969

10

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- ▶ Student protest, general strike and violent demonstration across France in 1968
- ▶ In a televised address to the nation, de Gaulle asked the French people **to back his program of reform - or accept his resignation** in a referendum
- ▶ The proposal was to give more power to the regions and reform the Senate
- ▶ The popular vote, held in 1969, was rejected
- ▶ De Gaulle announced his resignation on the following day
- ▶ A video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhIDyc8Zf8o>

# Discussions

11

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- ▶ How did Hitler and his regime exploit the direct democracy's function of consolidating leadership in Nazi Germany?
- ▶ Why did de Gaulle choose to resign after his last referendum was defeated in 1969?
- ▶ Do you think it is appropriate to link popular ballots with a confidence vote in leadership?
- ▶ How different is the referendum as a political tool for consolidating leadership in authoritarian and democratic regimes? Is it possible to distinguish between the two?

# Suggested Reading for next week's class

- ▶ Leduc, Lawrence (2003) 'Referendums on Sovereignty, National Self-Determination, and Devolution ', in *The Politics of Direct Democracy: Referendums in Global Perspective*, Broadview Press.