

Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis

Robert Gellately

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In his historical study *Hitler's True Believers*, Robert Gellately examines the motivations and rationalizations behind German popular support for the Third Reich.

Hitler's rise to power in 1933 is one of the most important and horrifying political events of the twentieth century. The question of how he attracted and maintained a nationwide following in spite of—and in many cases because of—his authoritarian and antisemitic policies has occupied scholars ever since. Gellately lays out the varying reasons why so many Germans supported one of history's most infamous dictators.

The book begins by discussing how Hitler and other prominent members of the Nazi party honed their political positions during the Weimar Republic, and how those positions were inextricably intertwined with their virulent antisemitism. It then moves into the opinions of the people themselves, from soldiers to civilians, who came to support the Nazis' swift and brutal consolidation of power. Finally, the book explores why the public continued to support the regime to the end of World War II, and why some continued to admire its perceived merits decades afterward.

Gellately challenges the notion that Hitler's charisma alone was sufficient to win public support. Rather, he offers ample evidence that Hitler's success stemmed from his ability to tap into existing resentments, fears, and biases. He draws on a wide range of sources, including diaries, memoirs, and historical documents, to show that ordinary Germans, even non-Nazis, were swayed by the creation of social programs and the easy reclamation of lands lost in World War I.

Gellately's study is a thorough treatment of an intellectually and emotionally difficult subject, as well as a sobering reminder of people's willingness to forget that their fellow human beings are, in fact, human. *Hitler's True Believers* sheds light on one of the twentieth century's most puzzling yet crucial questions.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2020)

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