



At the height of Nazi popularity in July 1932, 37% of the German electorate voted for the Nazis. But how many of these Germans were actually members of the party? In other words, how many people in Germany actually joined the Nazi Party? By this we mean how many people were actual card-carrying members and wore the Nazi party pin at work or in public. The Nazi Party had a hierarchy or a pecking order. The smallest but most respected group within the party was known as the 'Old Fighters.' These were men who had been with Hitler since the beginning, during the "years of struggle," 1923-1933. The Old Fighters were Nazis who had joined the party early on and who had been part of Hitler's rise to power. These would include early members in the SA and people close to Hitler, like Goebbels (Minister of Propaganda,) Himmler (Head of the SS), and Goering (Head of the German Air Force.) As a point of proof that the Old Fighters were an extremely small, but elite group, in 1929 the Nazi party had 130,000 members out of a German population of 65 million.

Then there were the 'March Violets.' This was the name given to Germans who joined the party in the spring of 1933, hence the name March Violets. These Germans joined the party after Hitler came to power in January 1933, not because they were deep-down, hard core Nazis, but because they wanted to keep their jobs. After April of 1933, German civil servants had to join the Nazi party or they would be fired. Civil servants are people who work for the federal, state or local government. Below is a partial list of German civil servants:

- City workers: street cleaners, garbage collectors, bus and trolley workers, secretaries
- College professors
- Federal, state and local government workers
- Firefighters
- Hospital workers
- Judges and anyone employed in the German legal system
- Police and anyone employed in the German police system
- Postal workers
- School Administrators
- Tax collectors and anyone employed in the German tax system
- Teachers
- Railway workers

After the destruction of Hitler's III Reich in 1945 the majority of the German population claimed two things. One, "I was not a Nazi," and two, "I didn't know what was happening to the Jews." The body of evidence we have today shows that both of these statements were not true. By 1945, millions of Germans were card-carrying members of the Nazi party. The current estimate is ten to fifteen million Germans had joined the party by 1945. When Germans refused to join the party in 1933 they were not shot or taken to a KZ, but instead they lost their jobs. With recent memories of the Great Depression still fresh in many Germans' minds, the thought of losing a job was more than most people could bare. Thus they joined the Nazi party for economic reasons.

The evidence is also overwhelming that if Germans really wanted to find out what was happening to the Jews, they could. The signs were everywhere. People knew that something awful was happening to the Jews in Poland and Russia, especially after 1942. The reality was, many Germans simply didn't ask or didn't want to know.

Finally, how widespread was German anti-Semitism in 1933? In April 1933, the Nazis organized an economic boycott against Jewish shops and businesses. A boycott is when people refuse to buy from certain stores or buy certain products with the hope of driving the owners out of business. On the morning of 1 April 1933, the SA stood menacingly in front of Jewish-owned department stores and retail establishments, and the offices of professionals such as doctors and lawyers. The Star of David was painted in yellow and black across thousands of doors and windows, with accompanying anti-Semitic slogans. Signs were posted saying "Don't Buy from Jews" and "The Jews Are Our Misfortune." For the Nazis, the April boycott was a disaster. With some rare exceptions, the German population refused to participate. People tended to ignore the SA and go in and out of Jewish establishments, like nothing had ever happened. The April 1933 boycott was a huge embarrassment for the Nazi party. The message from the population seemed to be that for most Germans, Jew-hating was not a major theme in their daily lives. The Nazis called off the boycott for a number of reasons. First, many of the large businesses and banks targeted by the Nazis employed large numbers of Germans. With unemployment still over 5 million in 1933, the Nazis were afraid that if these establishments were driven out of business, tens of thousands of Germans would lose their jobs and then they would blame the Nazis. Second, the Nazis were afraid of the effects of world public opinion. The German economy was still in shambles in 1933. Germany desperately needed foreign loans for economic recovery. If Germany appeared like a backward and brutal, Jew-hating society, few foreign powers would loan the Reich money.

Then what happened? If this was the case in 1933, then how would six million Jews be dead by 1945?