

## Yesterday's News: Media Framing of Hitler's Early Years, 1923-1924

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### Abstract

*This research used media framing theory to assess newspaper coverage of Hitler published in The New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, and The Washington Post between 1923 and 1924. An analysis of about 200 articles revealed “credible” and “non-credible” frames relating to his political influence. Prior to Hitler’s trial for treason in 1924, the credible frame was slightly more prevalent. Following his subsequent conviction, the non-credible frame dominated coverage, with reports often presenting Hitler’s failure to overthrow the Bavarian government as evidence of his lack of political skill. This research provides insight into the way American media cover foreign leaders before and after a tipping point—one or more events that call into question their political efficacy.*

### I. Introduction

The resentment, suspicion, and chaos that defined global politics during the Great War continued into the 1920s. Germany plunged into a state of political and economic turmoil following the ratification of the punitive Treaty of Versailles, and the Allies watched with trepidation as it struggled to make reparations payments. The bill — equivalent to 33 billion dollars then and more than 400 billion dollars today — grew increasingly daunting as the value of the mark fell from 400 to the dollar in 1922 to 7,000 to the dollar at the start of 1923, when Bavaria witnessed the improbable rise of an Austrian-born artist-turned-politician who channeled German outrage into a nationalistic, anti-Semitic movement that came to be known as the Nazi Party.<sup>1</sup> American media outlets, intent on documenting the chaotic state of post-war Europe, took notice of Adolf Hitler as he attracted a following and, through their coverage, essentially introduced him to the American public. This research examines the way the American press portrayed his early activities in an effort to understand why Americans either recognized his political potential or considered his actions those of an insignificant extremist who was merely an irritant to the Weimar Republic and an oddity to the Western world.

This research uses media framing theory to assess newspaper coverage of Hitler published in *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Washington Post* between 1923 and 1924. Nearly 350 articles contained at least passing mentions of Hitler, and of those articles, about 200 offered substantial information about his activities and influence and warranted closer examination. An analysis of the selected articles revealed “credible” frames that emphasized Hitler’s persuasive and oratorical ability, popular support,

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<sup>1</sup> William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 61.

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military capability, diplomatic efforts, influential relationships, and, in some cases, the illegality of his actions. It also revealed “non-credible” frames that undermined his credibility by focusing on his non-German citizenship, artistic background, lack of popular support, lack of military capability, political impotency, and, in other contexts, the illegality of his actions. Prior to Hitler's trial for high treason in 1924, however, the credible frame was slightly more prevalent than the non-credible frame. After his conviction in the spring of that year, the non-credible frame dominated coverage, for reports often presented Hitler's failure to overthrow the Bavarian government as evidence of his lack of political skill and frequently emphasized his Austrian heritage and his artistic background as proof of his supposed incompetence.

## II. Theoretical Context

The power of mass media to inform public opinion has fascinated scholars for decades. Grounded in cognitive psychology and sociology, media framing theory offers a way to determine how the organization and content of media texts and images affect cognitive processing of information. Goffman, who pioneered the framing method, posited that individuals employ a multitude of frameworks, or “schemata of interpretation,” to “locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.”<sup>2</sup> Though Goffman didn't focus exclusively on media effects, his work demonstrated that frames exist within language and communicating texts. Other champions of the framing approach, including Gitlin and Tuchman, used Goffman's conception of frames to determine how news media provide a sketch of reality for media audiences.<sup>3</sup> From their seminal works grew media framing theory, a theory that acknowledges media's effect on the masses while taking into account the factors that influence individual interpretation. Like other social constructivist theories, it attempted to strike the middle ground between the hypodermic and minimal effects models. Several subsequent studies determined the particular effectiveness of news frames related to sociopolitical issues,<sup>4</sup> leading Gamson and de Vreese to argue that news media “dominate the issue culture for most people on most issues” and contribute to the shaping of public opinion and political socialization.<sup>5</sup> Operating on this assumption, Gamson and Modigliani defined frames as interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue and emphasized the complexity of the process by which journalists and individuals construct meaning.<sup>6</sup> Entman further clarified the meaning of media frames by defining them as aspects of a perceived reality that are made salient to the receiver in a communicating text.<sup>7</sup>

This study employs Pan and Kosicki's linguistic approach to determine the presence and prevalence of certain frames within the articles included in the analysis. Comprehensive and objective, the linguistic approach analyzes the syntactical, scriptural, thematic, and rhetorical dimensions of news text and is well suited for inductive frame analysis. Although the selection of newspapers may seem somewhat narrow, it is possible to gain ample insight into the national discourse using these sources. Daily newspapers reached more than 22.4 million people in 1910, and the number continued to grow as World War I drew to a close, illustrating both the popularity and pervasiveness of print journalism.<sup>8</sup> Of the three dailies included in this study, *The Times* offered the most coverage of Hitler and Europe in general. Its weekly and Sunday circulation numbers reached

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2 Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974), 21.

3 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 1.

4 Russell Neuman et al., *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

5 Claes de Vreese, “News Framing: Theory and Typology,” *Information Design Journal* 13 (2005): 51-62; William Gamson, “A Constructionist Approach to Mass Media and Public Opinion,” *Symbolic Interaction* 11 (1988): 161-174.

6 William Gamson and Andre Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1989): 2-3.

7 Robert Entman, “Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 51.

8 David Copeland, *The Media's Role in Defining the Nation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 130.

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327,275 and 499,924 in 1920, and each grew by several thousand by 1930.<sup>9</sup> *The Monitor* had achieved a daily circulation of about 120,000 at the start of the 1920s, and the number increased throughout the decade.<sup>10</sup> Though *The Washington Post* failed to achieve the same influence during the course of the 1920s,<sup>11</sup> *The Post*, as well as *The Times* and *The Monitor*, carried stories provided by wire services, including the Associated Press and United Press International. The Associated Press expanded the size of its network during the first decades of the twentieth century, and by 1920, it supplied news to about 1,200 newspapers.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, United Press International had 745 newspaper customers.<sup>13</sup> The three papers' coverage, combined with the wire service reports that reached readers nationwide, provided a broad sample of news coverage of Hitler during the 1920s. This research builds on Henson's study of American and British news coverage of the National Socialist party between 1922 and 1933 and takes into consideration the historical arguments put forward by Lipstadt, Leff, and Klein, particularly those relating to American anti-Semitism and *The Times*' willingness to cover news of Jewish persecution.<sup>14</sup>

### III. Historical Context

During the 1920s, mentions of Hitler appeared largely within coverage of two related issues: the fall of the mark, and the French occupation of the Ruhr, an industrial zone in western Germany that supplied four-fifths of Germany's coal and steel after Poland laid claim to Upper Silesia.<sup>15</sup> The American press took particular interest in Germany's economic state; as the mark fell, many questioned whether Germany could continue to pay its war debts. In fall 1922, Germany was already struggling to make payments, and that winter, it defaulted on timber deliveries, causing the French Premier Raymond Poincaré to order the occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923. Workers there declared a general strike, further devastating the German economy, and the government's campaign of passive resistance was met with arrests and deportations carried out by the French.<sup>16</sup> The occupation dealt the final blow to Germany's ailing economy. An economic depression, along with widespread anger at the Allied nations and the Weimar government, gave rise to a number of extremist factions that spanned the political spectrum. Hitler's National Socialists were generally regarded as one of many groups that wished to repudiate the Treaty and restore Germany's former power, and he appeared most often in articles regarding Germany's economic and political stability.

On January 2, 1923, a lengthy analysis by Lincoln Eyre, then a Central European correspondent for *The Washington Post* and *The New York Herald*, began on the first page of that day's *Post* edition. The article listed and explained in detail four overarching issues that threatened to destabilize the fledgling Weimar Republic: anti-republicanism, inflation, the occupation of the Ruhr, and a rise in the price of food and fuel.<sup>17</sup> Eyre's story can be classified as an issue story rather than an action-oriented story, for he cited a number of different events, sources, and propositions in an effort to support his hypothesis that a host of political ills plagued Republic and undermined its strength.<sup>18</sup> He dedicated two subsections to political unrest in Bavaria and Hitler's emergence as a leader "foremost among the anti-republican agitators." In Bavaria, he wrote, hundreds of thousands of people were joining political and military associations in an effort to destroy democracy across Germany. Inspired by, but not altogether similar to, Mussolini's blackshirts, he wrote that these extrem-

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9 "Adolph S. Ochs Dead at 77; Publisher of Times Since 1896," *The New York Times*, April 9, 1935.

10 Steven Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 99-100.

11 *Ibid.*, 576; *Advertising & Selling 29* (Advertising and Selling Co., Inc., 1920), 33.

12 Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 508.

13 *Ibid.*, 555.

14 Andrew Henson, "Before the Seizure Of Power: American and British Press Coverage of National Socialism, 1922 to 1933," (Master's thesis, Clemson University, 2007); Gary Klein, "When the News Doesn't Fit: *The New York Times* and Hitler's First Two Months in Office, February/March 1933," *Journalism & Mass Communications Quarterly* 78; Lauryl Leff, *Buried by the Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

15 Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 61.

16 *Ibid.*, 61.

17 Lincoln Eyre, "Sees German Government Powerless in Face of Ills Economic and Political," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 1923, 1.

18 Zhongdang Pan and G. M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 60.

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ists could be called fascisti “for the want of a better term.” He cited an instance where 7,000 armed men marched in military formation under protection of the Bavarian government to the applause of the Bavarian populace, a demonstration that could be explained “only as a move toward reactionary revolution.” Using the anecdote to segue into a brief description of Hitler, Eyre wrote that he had “openly proclaimed the intentions of his cohorts some day to pit themselves against the forces of the republic if resistance is offered to his dictatorial aspirations.” He noted that Hitler’s “fascisti” were intertwined with a number of militarist and monarchist groups both secret and “legal.”

Contained in Eyre’s analysis are many of the frames and subframes that appeared in articles involving Hitler and his party throughout the duration of the decade. To assert that “hundreds of thousands” of Bavarians wished to destroy the republic quantifies support for Hitler and Hitler-like factions while simultaneously undermining the political potency of his specific organization, one intertwined with a number of other groups. Eyre’s hesitancy to fully employ the term “fascisti” and his use of quotations when describing such reactionary factions as “legal” suggests Hitler and his followers were quasi-Fascist, quasi-legal militants who enjoyed some popular and governmental support but could potentially undermine the stability of the republic and its ability to pay the reparations outlined in the Treaty of Versailles.

A number of rhetorical structures constituted subframes of the credible and non-credible frames, including quotations, quantification, context, metaphors, lexical choices, exemplars, depictions, and catchphrases.<sup>19</sup> Articles that supported the credibility frame examined Hitler’s politics more frequently than they explored his personality or tendencies, and articles that supported the non-credible frame examined his personality, habits, and sanity about as often as they explored his political ideas. Of course, these frames are not mutually exclusive; issue stories, such as Eyre’s, demonstrate how both can exist simultaneously within a given text. But a dominant frame emerged from most articles that warranted analysis, particularly action stories.<sup>20</sup>

#### IV. Hitler as a Non-Credible Political Power

On January 4, 1923, another lengthy analysis of the political turmoil in Bavaria appeared on page four of *The Post*. Written again by Eyre, this issue story differed slightly from that published on January 2. In his lead paragraph, he noted that Bavaria was “literally infested with political and military organizations, animated by animosity toward the republican regime and all it represents, including the acceptance of the Versailles treaty.”<sup>21</sup> With this, Eyre implicitly identified Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers’ Party as one of many groups of extremists vying for power and influence, but in a subsequent paragraph, he again asserted that the party was “foremost among antirepublican groups.” Eyre dedicated nearly half of the article to coverage of Hitler, who he called the “most outstanding figure today in Bavaria, if not all of Germany.” Hitler, he wrote, was “a sign painter with a gift for demagogic oratory, limitless energy, and an education self-acquired but extensive.” He likened him to a German Mussolini, one whose followers possess the same “fanatical patriotism” and potentially the same amount of political strength as the Italian fascist party. However, he tempered that assertion by noting that a fascist uprising in Bavaria would not likely spread throughout the rest of Germany. As this was an analysis, rather than a brief, subsequent paragraphs both reinforced and qualified subframes introduced in Eyre’s initial description. He quantified the strength of Hitler’s forces as nearly 100,000 and wrote that “there is no doubt whatever” that Hitler is backed by certain industrialists, including Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, and Hugo Stinnes, a German mining magnate and founding member of the conservative German People’s Party, illustrating the range of people to which the party supposedly appealed and suggesting that Hitler had fostered connections with some influential individuals. After twenty minutes of Hitler’s “vocal incendiarism” at a party meeting in Munich’s Hofbrauhaus, Eyre observed, his audience was so inflamed it probably would have followed him to Paris and back.

Such descriptions attest to Hitler’s popular support, military capacity, influential relationships, and oratorical skills, but ultimately, the non-credible frame dominated the story. Eyre’s depiction of Hitler as a “sign

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19 William Gamson and Andre Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1989): 1-37; Pan and Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse,” 55-76.

20 Pan and Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse 60.

21 Lincoln Eyre, “German Republic Opposed by Political and Military Organizations in Bavaria,” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 1923, 4.

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painter” with a “gift for demagogic oratory” suggested a certain superficiality that undermined Hitler’s political efficacy, and Eyre later wrote under the subhead “Hitler a Trick Orator” that “his foes say he is a shallow demagogue whose ruthless lack of scruple is a danger to the community. The truth seems to be that he is a mob leader par excellence, an opportunist who has sensed the spirit of the moment and many [sic] yet make it carry him far, but who is without that constructive genius requisite to lasting political achievement.” The lexical choices used in these descriptions — “demagogue,” “shallow,” “mob leader,” “opportunist,” “trick orator” — may have discredited not only Hitler’s political intelligence but also that of his followers. Eyre mentioned he made a call to Hitler’s headquarters, a “suite of dingy rooms in a café,” and was greeted by “lowbrow” party adherents, further discrediting the party’s influence.

Eyre’s analyses demonstrate how both frames can exist, to some extent, within a single article, for he produced some of the most explanatory coverage of Hitler that appeared during the 1920s. Shorter articles allowed for fewer nuances and often contained just one of the two frames. A *Monitor* editorial published March 13, 1923, explored the Nationalist movement in Bavaria, the “home of peasant proprietors” who remain “boorish, superstitious, good-natured, and politically backward element[s] of Germany.”<sup>22</sup> In this “milieu,” the editorial argued, the National Socialists were able to gain influence under the leadership of Hitler, a “Viennese decorative painter imitating the mannerisms of Benito Mussolini.” In this context, the reference to Hitler’s artistic background seems to discredit his success, and use of the word “imitating” suggested he had less political wherewithal than his supposed Italian counterpart. The notion that he gained a following among the “politically backward” further eroded his credibility.

Other articles discounted Hitler’s influence almost entirely. A review of an analysis of the “European situation” by Max Kemmerich, a German author, published in *The Post* in May 1923 predicted that Hitler would soon lose control over his party.<sup>23</sup> In response to Kemmerich’s assertion that Germany was on the brink of civil war between the extreme right and the extreme left, the writer noted that Hitler’s “fascisti” movement was believed to be dying because the nationalists had decided that “an excitable little person of insignificant origin is not worthy of the leadership of such a movement as nationalism has grown to be.” The nationalist movement, according to the article, had “become a veritable Frankenstein that will probably wipe Hitler off the political map in the near future.” The allusion to Hitler’s Austrian nationality detracts from his political credibility, and the depiction of him as “little” and “excitable” may have helped to support the notion that he was defenseless against the larger nationalist movement. The subject of Hitler’s citizenship surfaced again the following month in *The Times* as part of a series of updates about the situation in Germany. The brief stated that Hitler had become a Bavarian citizen by naturalization. An Austrian by birth, it said, Hitler had been made “the target of considerable ridicule because of his posing as the exponent of 100 per cent Germanism,”<sup>24</sup> a statement that may have undercut reports of his prominence in the nationalist movement.

Articles consistent with the non-credible frame appeared intermittently throughout the first half of 1923 and increased in prevalence at the end of September when Chancellor Gustav Stresemann ended passive resistance in the Ruhr and authorized the resumption of reparations payments. Anticipating revolt from both sides of the political spectrum, Stresemann had President Friedrich Ebert declare a state of emergency, which placed executive power in the hands of Minister of Defense Otto Gessler and Reichswehr Chief Hans von Seeckt.<sup>25</sup> Bavaria responded by declaring its own state of emergency and appointed Prime Minister Gustav von Kahr state commissioner with dictatorial powers. Much coverage of the shift conveyed the idea that Kahr’s appointment severely limited Hitler’s political power.<sup>26</sup> A *Times* editorial published September 29 went as far as to argue that Hitler’s “reactionary Bavarians” had been quieted for the time being, and that the “rantings of the blond Aryan chosen people who represent the German variety of Fascism can hardly offer much attraction for any large portion of the population.”<sup>27</sup> October saw a similar rise in the number of articles that

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22 “The Bavarian Reaction,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), March 13, 1923, 18.

23 “Predicts Reign of Terror in Germany Starting Soon; Sees Great Nation Arise,” *The Washington Post*, May 20, 1923, 40.

24 “Berlin to Munich, 400 Miles, for \$2.50 Rail Fare — German College Rules Lightened,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 1923, XX5.

25 Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 64.

26 “Hitler Virtually Eliminated,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 1923, 2; “Extremist Party in Bavaria Gets Severe Setback,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), September 29, 1923, 1; “Bavaria’s Teeth Had Been Drawn,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 28, 1923, 2; “All Bavaria Quiet, Berlin Resumes Talk with Entente,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1923, 1.

27 “Communism by Consent,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1923, 6.

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supported the non-credible frame.<sup>28</sup> An analysis that appeared on the front page of *The Times*' special features section on October 14 described in great detail the economic and political turmoil Germany faced. Anne O'Hare McCormick, then a foreign correspondent who covered the rise of Mussolini and other European affairs, wrote that German citizens would "follow any leader, like Hitler in Bavaria, who promises any change, but what they really want is a brave, upstanding, ruthless, ultimatum-breathing autocrat like Mussolini. . . . Hitler is no Mussolini, either, and his attempt to organize Bavaria on the Fascist plan lacks the drama, poetry, the sheer physical courage and daring that swept the Italians into power."<sup>29</sup> This description contrasted Hitler and Mussolini, thereby contradicting the "Bavarian Mussolini" catchphrase so often used in articles that supported the credibility frame.

Reports documenting growing political unrest in Bavaria and other parts of the Reich marked the beginning of November.<sup>30</sup> By November 5, rumors that Hitler might stage a coup in Bavaria and then march on Berlin began to circulate. But a number of articles suggested that such claims should not be taken seriously.<sup>31</sup> *The Times* wrote that the "Bavarian rumblings have a suggestion of stage thunder" and that government officials in Berlin were "disposed to dismiss the Bavarian troop concentrations on the Thuringian border and the Fascist's threatened advance on Berlin as a typical Hitler bluff and are informed that the units there constitute what they call the 'rag-tag and bob-tail' of Hitler's youthful guard."<sup>32</sup> The descriptors used here — "stage thunder," "typical Hitler bluff," "rag-tag and bob-tail" — contrast the notion that Hitler posed any real threat, and in this context, "youthful guard" may have connoted inexperience. But Hitler was not bluffing about his intentions. On the evening of November 8, 1923, Hitler and his storm troopers charged into the Buergerbraukeller in Munich where Kahr was reading a manifesto against Marxism to a crowded hall while Otto von Lossow, commander of the Bavarian Reichswehr, and Hans Ritter von Seisser, former chief of the State Police, stood by. With 600 armed men behind him, Hitler jumped onto a table, fired his revolver at the ceiling, and announced that the Bavarian and Reich governments had been overthrown and that he would form a new government with Ludendorff, a prominent World War I general who secured German victories in several major battles. He forced Kahr, Lossow and Seisser into a private room and attempted to persuade them to join his efforts to create a new Bavarian government. Nonetheless, the three men refused to cooperate, and when the meeting in the main hall began to break up, they managed to slip away. Hitler was arrested two days later.

American media correspondents descended upon the chaos. For days, Hitler's failed coup was featured prominently on the front pages of *The Times*, *The Monitor*, and *The Post*. Once the dust settled, the number of articles that portrayed Hitler as politically impotent increased as the number of articles that portrayed him as a legitimate political force decreased, signifying that the putsch indeed constituted a tipping point in American media coverage of his rise to power. More than half of the November 10 front page of *The Times* carried articles that described the putsch and speculated on its implications for Germany and its neighboring countries. Brown, in a full-column article, wrote that in the aftermath of the "craziest farce pulled off in memory" Hitler and Ludendorff were "down and out and thoroughly discredited, even if they should get light sentences for treason."<sup>33</sup> He reiterated this point in a later paragraph by stating that the "amateurish and abortive putsch . . . clears the air and definitely eliminates Hitler and his National Socialist followers as well as Ludendorff." Brown noted at the end of the article that the bulk of Bavarians considered Hitler and Ludendorff to be "interlopers, outsiders, and non-Bavarians," and he had used the term "rebellious outsiders" to describe the pair in an earlier paragraph. He argued that the failed coup gave power to the "real reactionaries" of Bavaria, a Catholic and monarchist state. "Now that Hitler and Ludendorff are removed, the real show has a chance of starting on clean lines," he wrote in conclusion.

Brown's article contains several subframes found in a large number of articles and editorials published after the putsch, many of which ran in *The Times*. The depictions of and lexical choices used to describe Hitler (rebellious outsider, non-Bavarian, interloper) and his failed effort (craziest farce, amateurish, abortive) called into question his political legitimacy and wherewithal and, to some degree, his sanity. The 28 "Bavarian workers looking to Berlin," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Oct. 1, 1923, 2; "Dr. von Kahr, Bavaria's Nominal Dictator, Shows Resolve to Clash with German Reich," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Oct. 3, 1923, 1; "Berlin files objections," *The New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1923, 2.

29 Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Germany, Seeking a Moses, Turned to Dr. Stresemann," *The New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1923, XX1.

30 "Monarchist forces at the Thuringian line," *The New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1923, 3.

31 "Bavarian Fascist Impatient," *The New York Times* (Associated Press), November 7, 1923, 1.

32 "Stresemann may Act without Cabinet," *The New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1923, 3.

33 Cyril Brown, "Brief Battle Ends Revolt," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1923, 1.

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supposed contrast between Hitler and the “real reactionaries” of Bavaria may have further delegitimized his political power and supported the idea that he was “thoroughly discredited.” *The Monitor* ran an editorial on the same day that supported the idea that Hitler and his followers were rather anomalous in Bavaria. Though the piece did not speculate on whether his prominence would endure, it distinguished his National Socialist party from the more powerful conservative elements in a state where political change depended largely on the peasantry and the Catholic Church. Bavaria was not at heart “revolutionary,” the editorial claimed, and that it had become “the base of two such ill-matched leaders as Gen. Eric von Ludendorff, the former chief of the German army staff, and Adolf Hitler, originally a Viennese scene painter but now an imitator of Benito Mussolini, results from exceptional circumstances.”<sup>34</sup> The editorial noted that Hitler’s band — composed mainly of Munich students, Bohemians, adventurers, and young commercial employees — had weak roots in the Bavarian countryside, where the peasantry subsided, a point reiterated in *The Times* at the beginning of January.<sup>35</sup> The subframes found within *The Monitor* editorial echoed those found within the paper’s March 13 editorial. Again, the reference to Hitler’s artistic vocation likely undermined his political credibility, and the depiction of him as an “imitator” suggested he didn’t naturally possess Mussolini’s political prowess. The depiction of his followers as young (students, commercial employees) and non-Bavarian (Bohemians) supported the “rag-tag and bob-tail” and “non-German” descriptions found in articles previously discussed. The “non-German” subframe continued to proliferate that month.<sup>36</sup>

A *Times* editorial published November 10 reinforced the non-credible frame and several of the subframes found within Brown’s front-page article that day, for it clearly portrayed Hitler as politically incompetent and directly questioned his sanity. The editorial writers expressed agreement with President Ebert’s declaration that the failed coup was “the work of lunatics” and called the effort a “crazy movement inspired and directed by persons better fitted for the comic opera stage than for a serious effort to overthrow the Berlin Government.”<sup>37</sup> A December 2 article again highlighted the “comic opera aspects” of the putsch.<sup>38</sup> As Hitler led Kahr, Seisser, and Lossow into a room adjacent to the beer hall, the article reported, one of his officers yelled to the crowd, “Stay here, gentlemen, and — drink beer!” The article’s headline and deck — the most powerful framing devices of an article’s syntactical structure<sup>39</sup> — contained this purported utterance as well, and may have decreased the likelihood that readers would take seriously Hitler’s political intentions and influence.

A five-judge panel chaired by Georg Neithardt presided over Hitler and Ludendorff’s trial, which began in Munich on February 26. The proceedings afforded Hitler a considerable advantage over the prosecution, an indication of his political influence. But many press reports downplayed that aspect of the trial and focused more closely on Ludendorff, a well-known figure even beyond the German border, an angle that sometimes relegated Hitler’s status to that of a co-conspirator — or even a follower — of Ludendorff. Others paid greater attention to the derisive remarks launched at Hitler and Ludendorff by the prosecution, German newspapers, and certain political circles.<sup>40</sup> The court issued its verdicts on April 1. Ludendorff was acquitted, and Hitler was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment in the Landsberg fortress with the possibility of parole after six months. Later that month, *The Times* published on the front page of its special features section a lengthy interview with Count Harry Kessler, a German economist, diplomat, and former Minister to Poland, who had been in the United States at the time. In the lede, writer Russell Porter acknowledged the “anxiety with which many people in America and Europe are looking forward to the Reichstag elections,” but noted that Kessler saw “no danger to either the German Republic or to the Dawes program for the economic settlement of Europe.”<sup>41</sup> Porter wrote that Kessler, who resembled “the athletic type of golf playing American business man much more than the typical German diplomat or politician,” spoke “excellent English and has acquired the American

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34 “The Political Background in Bavaria,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), November 10, 1923, 20.

35 Joseph Gollomb, “Peasant Ruled Bavaria Wants Monarchy,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 1924, XX5.

36 “Hitler a Bavarian Agitator,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 1923, 2.

37 “Bavarian Opera Bouffe,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 1923, 12.

38 “Beer Hall Scene Gave Comic Opera Touch to Hitler ‘Coup,’” *The New York Times*, December 2, 1923, XX5.

39 Pan and Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse,” 59.

40 T.R. Ybarra, “Ludendorff’s Talk at Trial Dismays His Party,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924, 1; T.R.

Ybarra, “Marx Denounced Ludendorff,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1924, 3; T.R. Ybarra, “Two Dozen Parties in Reichstag Race,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1924, 4; T.R. Ybarra, “Bavaria Worries Reich,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 1924, 23; “Woman Peace Delegate Holds German Monarchy Impossible,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), April 21, 1924, 5.

41 Russell Porter, “Kessler Expects German Republic to Stand,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 1924, XX1.

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viewpoint in many things.” Kessler, in the interview, asserted that the trade union movement and the Catholic Church dominated German politics and would not lend their support to an anti-Republican movement. The angle from which Porter approached the interview attests to the fact that Americans were largely concerned about the effect extremist groups might have on the stability of the Weimar Republic and its ability to repay its debt to the Allies. But the fact that Kessler, framed from the outset as an educated and knowledgeable source, saw little reason to fear political gains by the National Socialists and other groups likely tempered readers’ perception of Hitler’s influence. Porter’s comparison of Kessler to an American businessman who held an “American viewpoint in many things” probably reinforced Kessler’s credibility in the minds of most American readers.

In early July, it came to light that Hitler had ostensibly resigned as head of his party because he wished to use his time at Landesberg to work on a book (later revealed to be *Mein Kampf*), leading to reports throughout the summer and fall that Ludendorff, not Hitler, would from then on lead the National Socialist movement, which — along with other extremist parties — had been losing ground.<sup>42</sup> On November 9, a year after the attempted coup, *The Times*’ magazine published an interview with Mussolini in which the Fascist dictator denied any association with Hitler and his party. “One of them, I forgot who, even came here and asked me to receive him,” Mussolini told the interviewer. “I refused, of course, to have anything to do with them.”<sup>43</sup> The direct quotes from Mussolini regarding his perspective on National Socialism contradicted the “Bavarian Mussolini” catchphrase frequently used to describe Hitler during his political ascent in 1923 and likely served to undermine any credibility it may have conveyed. Hitler, who was released on parole on December 19, found the political climate much changed since his entrance into Landesberg. *The Times* reported that he left for Munich a “much sadder and wiser man” than he had been during the spring and that his behavior during his imprisonment had convinced the authorities that he, like his political party, was no longer to be feared.<sup>44</sup> According to the article, “it is believed that he will retire to private life and return to Austria, the country of his birth.” The mention of his Austrian nationality again reinforced the non-German subframe and dealt another blow to his credibility as 1924 drew to a close.

## V. Hitler as a Credible Political Force

The French occupation of the Ruhr on January 13, 1923, was just the event Hitler needed to arouse the nationalist and anti-foreign sentiment so central to his party’s agenda. From the outset, journalists covering the effects of the occupation noted that the sheer quantity of Hitler’s forces demonstrated both his political appeal and a real, widespread contempt for the French occupation.<sup>45</sup> At the end of January, Hitler attracted the attention of the writer of “The World’s Great Capitals,” a weekly feature in *The Monitor*. The paper devoted half of its “This Week in Berlin” subsection to Hitler’s growing popularity. According to the article, his appeal to both the masses and the middle class enabled him to carry out his “real intentions, which are, in the words of the Fascisti, the overthrowing of the present democratic regime to make way for a dictatorship after the fashion of Signor Mussolini in Italy.”<sup>46</sup> Emphasis on his wide appeal, coupled with the comparison of his plans to those of Mussolini, contradict the non-credible subframes that cast doubt upon his influence and his similarity to the Italian dictator.

As tensions in the Ruhr intensified, an “illegality” subframe emerged in several articles that supported Hitler’s credibility. At the end of January, *The Times* reported the situation caused by the occupation had

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42 “Hitler Asks Leisure for Writing,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), July 8, 1924, 4; “Ludendorff shelves Hitler; Heads Party,” *The Washington Post* (Associated Press), July 8, 1924, 4; “Germany Feels Good Effect of London Parley,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), August 19, 1924, 1; “Asks Jarres to Act Against Racialists,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1924, S6; “Liberal Press Warns Bavaria Against Split,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), November 8, 1924, 1.

43 Oscar Levy, “Mussolini says ‘Live Dangerously,’” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 1924, SM7.

44 “Hitler Tamed by Prison,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 1924, 16.

45 Cyril Brown, “German Protest now World Wide,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1923, 1; “Bavarian Fascisti to Turn Out,” *New York Times* (Jewish Telegraphic Agency), January 19, 1923, 2; “Hitler Activities Grow in Germany,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), January 20, 1923, 3.

46 “The World’s Great Capitals: This Week in Berlin,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), January 26, 1923, 2.

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entered a “critical phase,” for the French had taken measures to separate the Ruhr from the rest of Germany.<sup>47</sup> In spite of the Bavarian government’s orders for him to lie low, Hitler proclaimed that nothing would stop him from launching an attack on those he called the “enemies of November 9, 1918,” and that he “did not give a damn” whether the government or the police liked it. The article noted that “the Munich government, which once encouraged Hitlerism, is now, according to a correspondent of the Catholic Germania, actually frightened at it, for it has penetrated all public offices, even the police and the army, and may prove stronger than the Cabinet itself.” The attribution of quotes to Hitler and facts to the German correspondent constituted a syntactical framing device that heightened the credibility of the information presented and the depiction of Hitler as a forceful leader who had little respect for the law. Other articles presented similar observations.<sup>48</sup>

As Hitler’s prominence increased, *The Times* and other papers published a number of articles that affirmed Hitler’s immense persuasive and oratorical abilities, perhaps one of the most impactful subframes that supported Hitler’s credibility. On January 21, *The Times*’ special feature section carried an article headlined “Hitler New Power in Germany,” a syntactical framing device that explicitly affirmed Hitler’s credibility as a political power. The piece was an account of one of Hitler’s speeches according to a correspondent for the conservative *Kölnische Zeitung* (Cologne Gazette). A reporter for a conservative publication in the Ruhr area likely harbored a biased perspective toward Hitler and his followers, but regardless, *The Times* carried his full description of the meeting and published nothing to qualify or contradict his observations. While sitting in a meeting hall waiting for Hitler to arrive, the correspondent took note of his neighbors. On his left sat “an old aristocrat, a general in the World War,” and on his right sat a Munich worker whose “honest eyes alone redeem his desperate face.”<sup>49</sup> The worker told the correspondent that he had once been a committed Communist, and that “only through Hitler [had] he learned to feel himself a German.” The hall erupted in applause when Hitler entered and took the platform. Unimpressed at first, the correspondent initially found Hitler’s ideas unremarkable and similar to those held by many prominent government officials. But gradually, he wrote, “one is gripped as much by his strictly logical construction as by what one may almost call the overpowering strength of his conviction . . . In astonishment I note that the condescending look of the old General on my left is gradually making way for an expression of wrapt [*sic*] attention . . . and at every slight pause in the speaker’s address, [the Communist] roars his approval with all his might.” After a two-and-a-half-hour speech, the general and the communist walked “fraternally” to a table to enroll in the National Socialist Party. “No college instructor can excel this man in the unshakeable logic of his construction or the power of his conviction,” a professor told the correspondent as they exited the hall. The thematic and rhetorical structures found within this action story support the credible frame first introduced in the headline. Thematically, the piece contained a great number of the journalist’s observations and quotes from Hitler’s followers. Many of his observations contained rhetorical elements that supported the overall theme of the piece, most notably the juxtaposition of the old aristocrat and the former communist. Two men that once occupied opposite ends of the political spectrum were able to walk “fraternally” to enroll in the same party, a demonstration of Hitler’s wide appeal.

The three subframes discussed above — strength of forces, illegality, and persuasive abilities — provided a foundation for news coverage found throughout the rest of 1923.<sup>50</sup> The prevalence of each subframe depended on the situation in the Ruhr, the political environments in Bavaria and Berlin, the health, or lack thereof, of Germany’s economy, and, come late September, Hitler’s proposed plans to overthrow the Bavarian government. On Sedan Day, a holiday commemorating Germany’s victory in the 1870 Battle of Sedan, political rallies held in Nuremberg on September 2 allowed Hitler to issue a call for “revolution, bloodshed, and a dictatorship” to a crowd of 200,000 assembled by Ludendorff,<sup>51</sup> and when Stresemann ended passive resis-

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47 “Hitler Threatens Munich Outbreak,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 1923, 2.

48 “Hitler Loudly Cheered,” *The New York Times* (Associated Press), January 28, 1923, 2; “Bavaria gives in to Hitler threats,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 1923, 2.

49 “Hitler New Power in Germany,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1923, XX12.

50 Cyril Brown, “2-Million Mark Train to Disprove a Rumor,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 1923, 1; “Hitler Issues Warning Against Invading Bavaria,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1923, 1; “Bavarian Reaction Still Holds Red,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1923, E5; “Say French Imitate German Capitalists,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1923, E5; “War Talk Heard at Berlin Meeting,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1923, 3; “Royalist Movement Grows,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 1923, 2; Cyril Brown, “Hitler Organization Declared Illegal,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 1923, 14; “Plot in Bavaria Laid to Cabinet,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 1923, E7; “Links Ludendorff to Plot to Overthrow Bavarian Government,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 1923, 1.

51 “Ludendorff Hails Prince as Ruler,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1923, 1.

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tance in the Ruhr at the end of the month, Hitler continued his call for revolution. As Bavaria entered a state of emergency and Kahr assumed the role of state commissioner with dictatorial powers, Hitler "demanded civil war in Germany" and called for fourteen mass meetings, leading some to anticipate "at least a little bloodshed," if not war, according to an article in *The Times*.<sup>52</sup> Another *Times* article that appeared the same day explained that it had long been considered "only a question of time" before Hitler and his reactionary followers sufficiently centralized their power to overthrow the Berlin government, an event the Munich press had long foreseen.<sup>53</sup> In an effort to mitigate the chance of an uprising, Kahr forbade all fourteen mass meetings.<sup>54</sup> Hitler professed his intent to ignore the order, claiming it was his right to "act as he saw fit," supporting the idea that he considered himself above the law.<sup>55</sup> The next day, the front page of *The Post* carried a photo of Hitler, "Germany's stormy petrel," that showed his head and shoulders.<sup>56</sup> The two-column photo was the first image of Hitler to reach the United States in an American newspaper and accompanied an article that cited a "military source" who said his strength was serious. Hitler could raise 10,000 men easily and equal the strength of the German government, according to the article, but had lost some followers as a result of the national government's efforts to curtail his plans of revolt. Though reports of actions taken by both the Berlin and Bavarian governments may have tempered the American perception of the threat Hitler posed, the quantification of the strength of his forces coupled with the publication of his photo likely added a tangible quality to the nature of his influence in Germany. At the end of the month, *The Washington Post* ran a standalone photo depicting Hitler at a demonstration in Nuremberg attended by 50,000 of his supporters, again illustrating his movement in a way readers could see and understand in terms of size and power.<sup>57</sup> *The Monitor*, perhaps in response to readers' increased interest in Hitler and his activities, secured an interview with the "Bavarian Mussolini" and published it, along with a description of his headquarters, on the front page of the October 3 paper. The correspondent noted that Hitler had "a potential armed strength not to be taken lightly and which the writer is informed Dr. von Kahr does not regard lightly."<sup>58</sup> The next day, *The Times* reported that *The Daily Mail* sent a correspondent to Hitler's headquarters and found that his party of "dangerous fanatics" had "plenty of rifles and machine guns," despite an apparently lack of a clear ideology, suggesting that Hitler and his supporters had the physical and mental wherewithal to accomplish their goals, if not a cohesive means of doing so.<sup>59</sup>

November opened with reports of Hitler's storm troopers and other militant groups amassed at the Thuringian border, perhaps with the intent to march on Berlin, and on November 5, rumors of a putsch surfaced.<sup>60</sup> Three days later, the rumored putsch materialized. News of the coup dominated the front pages of American newspapers for days. Much of the initial coverage either explained the chronology of the event and its aftermath or speculated on whether Hitler could retain any influence in the wake of his failure. Though many articles asserted he could not, some supported the credible frame by describing and sometimes quantifying the support he managed to maintain after the putsch.<sup>61</sup> An Associated Press article that appeared in *The Times* a week after the conflict reinforced the idea that Hitler retained at least some semblance of power during his confinement to the Fortress of Landsberg, a prison about thirty-six miles outside of Munich, where his guards had been "selected for their powers of resistance to [his] magnetic personality." The article stated that "everyone who had had the Bavarian fascist leader under close observation agrees that he radiates a

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52 "Grave Crisis Now at Hand in Germany," *The New York Times* (Associated Press), September 27, 1923, 1.

53 "Long Bavarian Agitation," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1923, 2.

54 Cyril Brown, "Hitler Coup Forestalled," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1923, 1.

55 "Kahr Prohibits Meetings," *The New York Times* (Associated Press), September 28, 1923, 2.

56 "Great Military Coup in Germany Prevent Civil War, is Belief," *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1923, 1.

57 "Pictorial Section," *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1923, 89.

58 "Ruhr Should Vanish from the Earth since it 'No Longer Belongs to Us,' Declares Bavarian Mussolini," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), October 3, 1923, 1.

59 "Hitler Storms at Foes," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1923, 3.

60 "Monarchist Uprising Against Republic Planned for Wednesday, Berlin Hears," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1923, 1; "Revolt in Germany by Monarchists is Set for Wednesday," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1923, 1; "Berlin Foodshops are Stormed by Hungry Populace," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), November 6, 1923, 1.

61 "Munich Mobs Defy von Kahr as Hitler Raises New Forces," *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1923, 1; "Bavarian Riots Continue," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1923, 1; "Herr Hitler in Munich Regarded as Having Been Made Scapegoat," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), November 13, 1923, 2; "Military Academy Closed," *The New York Times* (Associated Press), November 14, 1923, 2.

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personal influence that his almost hypnotic.”<sup>62</sup> The lexical choices used here — “magnetic” and “hypnotic” — along with a number of firsthand observations of his oratorical giftedness bolstered the “persuasive abilities” subframe found throughout earlier coverage of his activities and later coverage of his trial in 1924.

Reports regarding Hitler’s whereabouts and activities appeared infrequently in December, and articles that appeared in January 1924 generally supported the non-credible frame. But by mid-February, reports that Hitler maintained a strong base of followers despite his imprisonment resurfaced and continued to appear throughout the spring. Hitler and Ludendorff continued to be mentioned in association with the formation of new nationalistic and anti-Semitic groups, and it was rumored that Hitler’s remaining followers would attempt another putsch if he was tried for treason.<sup>63</sup> A lengthy issue piece that appeared in the Sunday magazine section of the February 17 *Times* explained in great detail the appeal Hitler’s party and other nationalistic organizations held for thousands of German youth. The journalist, Joseph Gollomb, opened the piece by noting that both Matthias Erzberger, a key figure in the signing of the 1918 armistice between the Germans and the Allies, and Walter Rathenau, a key figure in the signing of the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, had been assassinated in plots orchestrated by young German students. In regard to the assassinations, he suggested the incidents weren’t unrelated, but in fact “the ripe fruit of what is being inculcated today in the minds and hearts of three-quarters of a million children and adolescents, the generation which in ten years will be Germany’s teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, civil servants, public officials, and political leaders” — a foreboding observation, given the strength Hitler had amassed by 1934. Gollomb recounted his visits to a number of German high schools, where he observed teachers — many of whom deeply resented the Republic — attempting to teach despite a dearth of books, shabby school supplies, and meager salaries. The Weimar flag was conspicuously absent from the walls, Gollomb noticed, and history lessons tended to emphasize nationalism and the greatness of pre-War Germany, a set of beliefs many of the children’s parents harbored as well. Outside of the classroom, thousands of military officers rendered jobless by the shrinking of the Germany army were “professionally engaged in recruiting youths in the cause of monarchy,” according to the article. These former officers guided “the spirit and the propaganda of the Hitler swastika chapters” and other nationalistic groups deemed illegal by Republican officials. Though not explicitly related to Hitler’s party, the incidents noted in the lede suggested that German youth — many of whom pledged allegiance to the National Socialists — saw violence as a means of accomplishing their goals, much like the older leaders of the nationalistic parties they joined. In this sense, the German youth seemed to disregard the laws enforced by Republican authorities, emboldened by anti-Republican teachers, parents who had fallen on hard times since the end of the war, and military officials who continued to “guide the spirit and propaganda” of Hitler’s party, despite his isolation from the public sphere. This depiction of youthful National Socialists stood in stark contrast to the depiction of the young “rag-tag and bob-tail” that constituted Hitler’s guard just prior to the putsch, a shift that likely bolstered Hitler’s credibility and suggested these youngsters could and would follow him and other nationalists for years to come.

Journalists who covered the opening of Hitler and Ludendorff’s trial in Munich on February 26 witnessed a confident, seemingly imprudent Hitler who enjoyed widespread support from many who attended the event. From the outset, the trial proceedings invariably favored Hitler. Neithardt, who chaired the five-judge panel, identified with the patriotic fervor of the National Socialist cause, and a journalist who witnessed Hitler’s first speech in the courtroom heard one judge exclaim, “What a tremendous chap, this Hitler!”<sup>64</sup> Hitler took full advantage of the panel’s leniency. He appeared in a suit adorned with his Iron Cross, First Class, rather than prison garb, and he frequently launched politically loaded questions at the defendants.<sup>65</sup> Because the panel showed reluctance to interrupt Hitler’s testimonies, the trial quickly became a means for him to disseminate his ideas and rally his followers, who flocked to the proceedings daily. In the United States, events of the trial often constituted front-page news.

The American correspondents in attendance cabled home reports that supported the credibility frame by highlighting Hitler’s lack of concern for the possible legal consequences of the November putsch and the oratorical tactics he employed upon taking the stand.<sup>66</sup> As the trial progressed, it became increasingly evident

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62 “Hitler a Prisoner in Landsberg Fort,” *The New York Times* (Associated Press), November 15, 1923, 2.

63 “Bavarians Reluctant to Try Monarchists,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1924, E3; “German Railroads Oust Republicans,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 1924, E7.

64 Ian Kershaw, *Hubris: Hitler 1889-1936* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1999), 216.

65 *Ibid.*, 216.

66 “Guilt Admitted by Adolf Hitler,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), February 27, 1924, 1; “Ludendorff Cool as Trial Begins,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1924, 19; “Unconcern Marks Ludendorff Trial on

that a great number of Bavarians were actively demonstrating support for Hitler. In mid-March, *The Post* ran a blurb from *The New York Herald* that reported swastika jewelry had become "all the rage as a feminine adornment" since the beginning of the trial. The writer had noticed "an increasing number of noblewomen [had] been attending the sessions wearing elaborately fashioned brooches, necklaces and chatelaines of hand-carved gold and silver in the form of a 'hakenkreuz,'" an emblem "used to designate the Hitler fascist troops."<sup>67</sup> The piece reinforced the idea that women, too, had become politically involved in Hitler's cause, and the fact that these were "noblewomen" who could afford hand-carved jewelry suggested the National Socialist party no longer appealed exclusively to those whose bank accounts had been ravaged by hyperinflation. Hitler and Ludendorff defended themselves in court one last time on March 27, and each played off the other in a way that earned them a standing ovation from the Bavarian audience members.

Hitler's supporters grew more vocal as the trial neared an end. Three days before the court was expected to issue a verdict, T.R. Ybarra, the top reporter in *The Times*' Berlin bureau, reported riots and parades in Munich led by bands of Hitlerites that had "secretly organized" by "masquerading as sport and social associations."<sup>68</sup> These bands, "ready for troublemaking," had "managed to offset the consequences of suppression of the Government of the Hitlerite newspapers by organizing a highly efficient news and courier service, whereby all members of the secret bands are kept thoroughly informed on anti-Government activities of their leaders." Ybarra noted that the "seriousness of the situation" in Munich could have been gauged by the fact that an ardently anti-government and pro-Hitler newspaper sold between 30,000 and 50,000 copies each day, "an enormous sale for a city of Munich's size, each edition being snatched up by eager Munichers the moment it appears on the street." If Hitler and Ludendorff were not acquitted, Ybarra reported, violent action would be expected. The "secret organization" of the bands, as well as their ability to obtain information about Hitler and maintain a popular news service, suggest that Hitler not only enjoyed widespread support, but also enabled his bands to operate above the law, just as he appeared to do. The quantification of pro-Hitler newspaper sale figures reinforced the credible frame.

The court's verdict thrilled Hitler's supporters and enraged the Republicans, for the Weimar Constitution stipulated life imprisonment as punishment for high treason.<sup>69</sup> American correspondents observed that many Germans considered Hitler's light sentence a joke and a victory for the anti-Republicans.<sup>70</sup> The reports made clear that despite his conviction, Hitler's followers saw light at the end of the tunnel and continued to pledge their support. Reports of Hitler's popularity continued to appear throughout May.<sup>71</sup> At the end of the month, *The Times* reported that one of Hitler's admirers had interviewed him at Landsberg. At the prison, according to the article, the visitor found "postcards on sale everywhere with Hitler's picture and evidence of the prisoner's immense popularity with the inhabitants." The interviewer called Hitler "a man who some day will be reckoned among the greatest of his people," confirming that Hitler managed to maintain an enormous amount of support at the beginning of his prison term.

But the number of articles that supported the credibility frame decreased significantly throughout the remainder of the year. Starting in June 1924, reports on the National Socialists' activities focused more heavily on Ludendorff than on Hitler, suggesting Hitler held a secondary position within the party.<sup>72</sup> Aside from the occasional report that Hitler's party had gained followers or staged some kind of demonstration, regular readers of the three papers would have had little reason to believe Hitler remained influential after his release from prison in December 1924, due at least in part to the upturn in the German economy during the second half of that year. Inflation had eased, the Dawes Plan had been implemented, and the French had begun to Treason Count," *The Washington Post*, February 17, 1924, 4; "Reichswehr Arms Given to Hitler's Men," *The New York Times* (Associated Press), March 5, 1924, 3; "Arms Plot Told in Trial at Munich," *The Washington Post* (Associated Press), March 5, 1924, 3.

67 "Swastika' Jewelry Popular in Germany," *The Washington Post* (*The New York Herald*), March 15, 1924, ES19.

68 Thomas Ybarra, "Munich in Ferment," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1924, 6.

69 Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 78.

70 Thomas Ybarra, "Ludendorff Freed, Acclaimed as Hero by Rapturous Crowds," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1924, 1; "Verdict Called April Fool Joke," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1924, 1; "Ludendorff Free, Hitler Convicted," *The Washington Post* (Associated Press) April 2, 1924, 3.

71 "Ex-Kaiser Joins Fascisti," *The New York Times*, May 19, 1924, 3.

72 "Ludendorff shelves Hitler; Heads Party," *The Washington Post* (Associated Press), July 8, 1924, 4; "Asks Jarres to Act Against Racialists," *The New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1924, S6; "Extremists Meetings Again in Germany," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1925, W16.

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relinquish the Ruhr.<sup>73</sup>

By the end of 1924, it became clear that Hitler no longer factored prominently into American media coverage of the political situation in Germany. A man who had appeared regularly on the front pages of *The Times*, *The Post*, and *The Monitor* prior to his conviction in April 1924 generally appeared only in the middle and back pages of each paper for the remainder of the year. The shift in frequency and placement of his coverage accompanied a shift in the nature of his coverage. Though credible and non-credible frames appeared simultaneously in 1923 and 1924, Hitler's front-page news status during those years added additional weight to the credible frame, characterized by its focus on his political capabilities. But after 1924, articles about Hitler and his activities almost always supported the non-credible frame, often characterized by its focus on his sanity and his non-German citizenship. The shift from political to personal frames helps to explain why Americans may have regarded Hitler as a political nonentity in the mid-1920s and provides insight into the way American media cover foreign leaders before and after a tipping point — one or more events that call into question their political efficacy.

## VI. Conclusion

This analysis shows that readers of *The Times*, *The Post*, and *The Monitor* during 1923 and 1924 would have had little reason to regard Hitler as a credible political power following his failed beer hall putsch. Though credible and non-credible frames often appeared side-by-side in all three papers during the two-year period of study, the non-credible frame generally appeared more frequently than the credible frame, especially in the wake of his trial for treason in spring 1924. Though media framing theory emphasizes the role frames play in an audience's understanding of a given news text, it also acknowledges that interpretation varies between individuals, thereby rendering it impossible to conclude that all readers regarded Hitler as a political nonentity by the end of 1924. But the methodological breakdown of the frames within the 200 articles included in this study revealed differences in rhetoric, structure and frequency that lent greater emphasis to the non-credible frame and likely had significant impact on American public opinion of Hitler in the 1920s. At the end of the decade, when his party entered into municipal elections and began laying the groundwork for his takeover the chancellorship in 1933, the American press would have had to reorient its coverage of a man who would one day trigger World War II and reevaluate his significance for readers who had long forgotten the goals of his movement.

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<sup>73</sup> Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 112.

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