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Hitler had made it to the chancellery in a brokered deal that conservative elites agreed to only because they were convinced they could hold him in check and make use of him for their own political aims. They underestimated his cunning and overestimated his base of support, which had been the very reason they had felt they needed him in the first place. At the height of their power at the polls, the Nazis never pulled the majority they coveted and drew only 38 percent of the vote in the country's last free and fair elections at the onset of their twelve-year reign. The old guard did not foresee, or chose not to see, that his actual mission was "to exploit the methods of democracy to destroy democracy."

By the time they recognized their fatal miscalculation, it was too late. Hitler had risen as an outside agitator, a cult figure enamored of pageantry and rallies with parades of people carrying torches that an observer said looked like "rivers of fire." Hitler saw himself as the voice of the *Volk*, of their grievances and fears, especially those in the rural districts, as a god-chosen savior, running on instinct. He had never held elected office before.

\u201cDon\u2019t worry about the guy who led the failed putsch, inflation is the real issue!\u201d is a special kind of historical ignorance.

— Don Moynihan (@donmoyn) June 11, 2022