

## MODERN HISTORY

### Account for the failure of German democracy by 1933.

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**Account means to state reasons for, report on. Give an account of narrate a series of events or transactions.**

The collapse of the Weimar Republic and the failure of democracy in Germany can be attributed to a number of reasons. The inherent flaws in the Weimar constitution and the unpopularity of the Weimar Republic by the German people due to a lack of democratic tradition and psychological disillusionment are important factors in the downfall of democracy. Also the Great Depression, which served as catalyst in the failure of democracy by providing the German people reasons to change their support from moderate parties that supported democracy to extremist parties that promised a better life by disabling democracy.

The constitution developed in 1919 and on which the republic was based upon was a factor in the fall of the Republic. The voting system determined by the constitution was one of proportional representation. This form of voting was ineffective as it allowed small parties able to gain representation in the Reichstag, which encouraged political instability and frequent elections. Due to proportional voting, no party ever had a majority and so every one of the 21 Weimar governments was a coalition.

The constitution also gave great power and influence to the president via Article 48 which was a clause intended to protect the democracy but instead became one of the methods used to overthrow democracy. This was because the article gave way to "Presidential government rule", which is the situation in which the president of Germany ruled by decree through the use of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. As parliamentary government collapsed from 1930, Chancellors' Brüning and von Papen both relied upon the president to enact legislation through decree. This process ignored the will of the elected parliament and was a step towards the failure of parliamentary democracy in Germany.

The Weimar constitution also provided a tolerant and liberal environment in which the enemies of democracy like the Nazi's could use the system to attack and finally destroy the system. Thus, all of these elements of the constitution, although written with good intentions, instead made Germany a country with insecure democratic foundations that contributed to its failure.

The people of Germany did not want a democratic socialist republican government. Germany had a tradition of strong, authoritarian rulers, dominant military and a powerful conservative governing elite. Thus, liberalism and democracy in Germany was always overshadowed by German nationalism and German unity.

The German nation suffered terribly by the harsh terms of what they called a "diktat", the Treaty of Versailles. In it they were forced to claim full responsibility for the First World War and pay back to the Allies a huge sum in reparations. This created bitterness and anger within the nation and they labelled the politicians of the Weimar government who had signed the Treaty, "November Criminals". It gave the German people reasons to hate and distrust the newly formed Weimar government who contrasted the stability, progress and honour of pre-war Germany with the instability and dishonour of Weimar Germany.

As the republic suffered humiliation, political disorder, violence and economic hardship, more and more Germans closed their minds to democracy and turned to extremist parties for solution. This psychological disillusionment with democracy is evident at the turn of the 1930's when the German people increased their vote for extremist parties like the Nazis for solutions to the succession of disasters that afflicted Weimar Germany, especially the Great Depression.

The political, social and economical instability caused by the GD was the catalyst for a revitalisation in the extremist movements and a major factor that carried the Nazis to power.

As outlined in the Dawes Plan of 1924, the German economy was able to prosper through high levels of foreign investment. This period, known as the “Golden Years” between 1924 and 1929 was substantial with 23 billion marks coming into Germany from the US. This high dependency on US finance proved to be a problem however in October 1929 when the New York stock market collapsed and the US began its slide into economic depression. American banks recalled their short- term loans to Germany and the Germany economy began to experience the t impact of economic collapse.

In 1930 unemployment rose to 3 million and exceeded 6 million in 1932, which was over half the labour force. The conditions got so bad that people were deliberately breaking the law to get in prison where at least there was some food and shelter.

It was during this time that the working classes turned away from the moderate centre parties to the more extreme right and left wing parties like the Communists and Nazi parties. The people blamed these moderate parties like the Social Democrats for giving in to the Allies in the Ruhr Valley and for submitting to the harsh terms of the reparations in the Treaty of Versailles. The people of Germany who had not trusted the Weimar government and democracy from the beginning and after the Great Depression were now convinced that it was not the answer for their problems.

The coalition governments of Weimar, spanning the whole spectrum of political viewpoints were divided on how to deal with the impacts of the Great Depression, such as the issue of unemployment benefits for the millions who were unemployed. Deadlocks within the Reichstag, lack of support for Chancellors Brüning and Papen and civil unrest in Germany gave Hindenburg no choice but to give the people what they wanted, which was a strong leader in Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi Party, which openly opposed democracy and sought its destruction.

The failure of democracy in Germany can be accounted to a number of reasons. The myriad of events and transactions that led to the establishment of a totalitarian state in Germany by 1933 include fundamental flaws in the Weimar Constitution, the wants or lack thereof of the German people towards democracy and the Great Depression which served as a catalyst for the rise of the Nazi Party and the collapse of democracy in 1933.