

## ANCIENT HISTORY

**Evaluate the challenges to the Roman Constitutional government during this historical period:**

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During the period 133-78BC, the Roman constitutional government faced many challenges to its traditional authority. These challenges mainly involved the growing power of the tribunate, the increasing use of violence as a political weapon and the politicisation of the Roman army. These challenges effectively diminished the Senate's power and the stability they had established for centuries, ultimately leading to the collapse of the Roman Republic.

Challenges to the Roman Constitutional government came through the growing influence and role of the tribunate. Prior to 133BC, the Senate was the governing body of Rome enacting all legislation. They were respected by all people despite having no real potestas or imperium and rather ruling by auctoritas and collective dignitas. Through the Gracchi however, as Scullard notes, a tribune truly became a "mouthpiece of the people". Plutarch adds that Tiberius' use of the Concilium Plebis undermined mos maiorum and highlighted the shortfalls of the Senate's power. It sent out a call to future generals of the capabilities of the people to pass legislation that would be otherwise rejected by the Senate. This sparked the start of the Senate's ever-growing challenges to its constitutional power.

Gaius Gracchus followed in his brother's direction, making great use of the tribunate where Plutarch notes, "Roman politics was transferred from an aristocratic to a democratic base". Scullard and Sinnigen and Boak both add that Gaius' diverse reforms such as the Lex Frumentaria and Lex Rubria that further rendered the Senate redundant in the law-making process. Gaius' Lex Acilia highlighted a direct threat to much of the Senate's power through the transfer of the control of the extortion courts to equites. In overcoming the challenges to their authority, the Senate looked towards tribunes or "Senatorial Stooges" as Kelly remarks to do their bidding. Whilst Appian comments on Octavius proving helpless against Tiberius, Livius Drusus successfully managed to tarnish Gaius' career by preventing him from holding a third tribunate and reducing his popularity. Whilst some of the auctoritas lost by the Senate had been restored by Drusus initiating legislation and re-establishing Senatorial control, the influence they held prior to 133BC would never be the same.

A further challenge to the Roman Constitutional government was evident through tribunes such as those in Marius' time like Saturninus and Sulpicius. As Appian remarks, the senate was forced to abide by Marius' wishes, where he used Saturninus to pass legislature to provide a pension of land for his veterans. The Senate was also incompetent in regard to their ability to handle issues of Rome's security. As Plutarch mentions, Marius was able to end the Jugurthine War in two years which is in stark contrast to the ten-year failure of the Senate. Perhaps this further undermined their auctoritas over external affairs prompting Marius to grow ambitious and take on further campaigns despite not obtaining the Senate's consent. One such case was using Sulpicius to transfer control of the Mithridatic War from Sulla to him. The Senate therefore only have themselves to blame for challenges to their rule further surmounting and their passive voice in Roman politics.

The increasing use of violence highlighted another inherent weakness in the Senate as the traditional governing body of Rome. Plutarch notes, in their failure to deal with the Gracchi's burgeoning influence and supposed tyrannical reign, the Senate took an unprecedented step through condoning the use of violence. They demonstrated through example the value of

violence to achieve one's means which would be similarly exploited by Marius however on a much more devastating scale through having the backing of an army.

The senate faced an unforeseen threat through Marius opening the army to the proletarii and capite censi classes where they enjoyed success in the Jugurthine and Germanic campaigns. The once

impoverished proletarii became prosperous as soldiers which established a dangerous patron-client relationship between a commander and his men. Kelly note's that this lead to the lack of need for the senate in assisting one to climb up the cursus honorum, therefore highlighting yet another challenge in their rule.

An event of greater challenge/impact came about through client armies fighting against each other, as was the case with Marius and Sulla. Furthermore, Appian conveys that both these men marched their armies on Rome murdering countless numbers of innocent people. Thus, the Senate was clearly powerless in their ability to handle Rome from military threats as a result of increased violence and the politicisation of the army.

It is ultimately evident that challenges to the Roman Constitutional government such as tribunican power, the increased use of violence and the politicisation of armies were far too much for the traditional governing body of Rome to handle. By the end of 78BC, the Senate was made entirely redundant in the face of unscrupulous generals like Marius and Sulla, carrying out their own intentions without a regard for mos maiorum. Whilst they highlighted the lack of the need for the Senate, the challenges faced to the Roman government consequently ended in the destruction of the Roman Republic.