Democracy Under Pressure

Trace how crisis, political choices, and persecution changed Germany.

SS24.HOS.4 "Outline the historical events that allowed for the breakdown of democracy in Germany from 1929 to 1939.* 4a Analyze the Treaty of Versailles as a causal factor for the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party)..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two conditions that weakened Weimar democracy, circle a Nazi tactic for gaining support, and number three steps that turned Hitler's appointment into dictatorship.

From Republic to Dictatorship

1. Germany's Weimar Republic was a democracy formed after World War I. Many Germans blamed it for accepting the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which demanded reparations and took territory from Germany. Nazi leaders exploited that anger, although the republic had not written the treaty. The 1929 worldwide economic crash brought mass unemployment. As coalition governments struggled to agree, presidents increasingly used emergency decrees instead of ordinary lawmaking. These weaknesses made promises of swift action appealing.

2. The Nazis promised jobs and national renewal, winning more votes in 1930 and 1932, but never a majority in a free national election. They also repeated older antisemitic lies, falsely blaming Jews for Germany's defeat and economic troubles. This scapegoating offered a simple enemy and helped unite supporters. Some conservative politicians thought they could control Hitler. On January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed him chancellor, giving him power he had not won outright at the polls.

3. After the Reichstag building burned in February 1933, Hitler's government used an emergency decree to suspend civil liberties and arrest opponents. In March, the Enabling Act let his cabinet make laws without parliament's approval. Intimidation helped secure its passage. Other parties were banned, ending electoral competition. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of citizenship, and organized attacks in November 1938 destroyed Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues. By 1939, elections could no longer remove the Nazi dictatorship.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Nazis use anger over the Treaty of Versailles to gain support?

2. Why did the 1929 crash make Weimar democracy more vulnerable?

3. How did false antisemitic claims serve the Nazis' political aims?

4. How did the emergency decree and Enabling Act change Hitler's power in 1933?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 65 to 85 words explaining Germany's change from democracy to dictatorship by 1939. Connect an older grievance, the 1929 crisis, a political decision, and Nazi antisemitism.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two conditions that weakened Weimar democracy, circle a Nazi tactic for gaining support, and number three steps that turned Hitler's appointment into dictatorship. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Nazis use anger over the Treaty of Versailles to gain support?	**They exploited anger over reparations and lost territory, directing blame toward the Weimar Republic.**
2	Why did the 1929 crash make Weimar democracy more vulnerable?	**Mass unemployment increased demand for swift action while coalition governments struggled and presidents relied more on emergency decrees.**
3	How did false antisemitic claims serve the Nazis' political aims?	**The claims made Jews scapegoats for Germany's problems, offering supporters a common enemy.**
4	How did the emergency decree and Enabling Act change Hitler's power in 1933?	**The decree suspended liberties and enabled arrests of opponents. The Enabling Act let Hitler's cabinet make laws without parliament's approval.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Democracy did not collapse because of one election. Anger over the Treaty of Versailles weakened trust in the Weimar Republic, while the 1929 crash made promises of jobs attractive. Nazis spread false antisemitic claims to blame Jews and rally supporters. Conservative leaders helped Hitler become chancellor in 1933. His government then suspended liberties and gained power to legislate without parliament. The 1935 anti-Jewish laws and 1938 attacks show how dictatorship grew more violent by 1939.

Accept different causal chains grounded in the passage. Students should identify antisemitic accusations as false Nazi claims, not as facts.