Republic Under Pressure

Trace how political violence and military power changed Rome.

AWH.C.7.5 "Describe the collapse of the Roman Republic from the agrarian reform law of Tiberius Gracchus to the establishment of Julius Caesar's dictatorship."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions that broke Rome's political customs, circle their consequences, and number the three stages of the Republic's collapse: violence over reform, armies in politics, and Caesar's dictatorship.

How the Roman Republic Fell

1. In 133 BCE, Rome's expanding empire had made some citizens wealthy, while many small farmers struggled to keep land. Tiberius Gracchus, a tribune, proposed a law to distribute public land to poorer citizens. To push it through, he bypassed the Senate, which had traditionally guided major decisions. He also sought another term as tribune, alarming opponents who feared he wanted too much power. A crowd led by senators killed him in 133 BCE. His land law survived, but the murder showed that political rivals might use violence instead of compromise. His brother Gaius later pursued further reforms and also died amid political violence.

2. Decades later, generals gained power that elected officials could not easily control. Gaius Marius recruited soldiers who lacked property and served for long campaigns. Soldiers increasingly looked to commanders for pay, land, and rewards, making personal loyalty an advantage in political fights. In 88 BCE, his rival Sulla marched an army on Rome to seize control, breaking a major political taboo. After another civil war, Sulla became dictator in 82 BCE and used killings and constitutional changes to weaken his enemies and strengthen the Senate. He later gave up the dictatorship, but his march had shown that an army could decide who ruled Rome.

3. In 60 BCE, Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus formed an informal alliance that helped them steer politics around the Senate. Caesar then commanded troops in Gaul, winning territory and building an army loyal to him. When the alliance broke apart, Pompey backed senators who demanded that Caesar surrender his command. Caesar instead led troops across the Rubicon River into Italy in 49 BCE, starting a civil war against Pompey and his supporters. After defeating his rivals, Caesar took extraordinary powers and became dictator for life in 44 BCE. Republican offices still existed, but the Senate could no longer check his authority.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was the killing of Tiberius Gracchus a turning point in political disputes?

2. How did soldiers' loyalty to commanders make Sulla's march on Rome especially threatening to the Republic?

3. How did Caesar's alliance and his command in Gaul help him challenge the Senate?

4. How did Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon lead to a further loss of power for the Senate?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a senator just after Caesar crosses the Rubicon in 49 BCE. Write a five- or six-sentence speech recommending one action to protect the Republic, and use two earlier events from the passage to explain your reasoning.

ANSWER KEY

Republic Under Pressure

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.7.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions that broke Rome's political customs, circle their consequences, and number the three stages of the Republic's collapse: violence over reform, armies in politics, and Caesar's dictatorship. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was the killing of Tiberius Gracchus a turning point in political disputes?	**It showed that political rivals might use violence rather than compromise over a proposed reform.**
2	How did soldiers' loyalty to commanders make Sulla's march on Rome especially threatening to the Republic?	**Soldiers who depended on commanders for rewards could help those commanders fight political rivals. Sulla's march showed that an army could decide who ruled Rome.**
3	How did Caesar's alliance and his command in Gaul help him challenge the Senate?	**The alliance helped Caesar steer politics around the Senate. His command in Gaul gave him an army loyal to him.**
4	How did Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon lead to a further loss of power for the Senate?	**Crossing the Rubicon started a civil war. After defeating his rivals, Caesar became dictator for life, and the Senate could no longer check his authority.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Fellow senators, Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon has turned a political dispute into war. When Tiberius Gracchus was killed, violence replaced debate over reform. Sulla's march later proved that a commander could use soldiers to seize Rome. We should ask Pompey and Caesar to withdraw their armies while representatives negotiate a settlement. Neither side should control the talks with troops at its back. This step may fail, but it gives the Senate a chance to settle a dispute without rewarding another armed takeover.

Accept historically plausible recommendations that use two earlier events to explain how violence or military loyalty threatened republican government. Students need not propose the same action as the sample.