Empires Come Apart

Trace how wartime collapse led to struggles over power.

MWH.C.6.2.B "Explain post-war political instability (e.g., collapse of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian Empires)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one wartime pressure in each paragraph, circle who claimed power after the empire weakened, and number two problems that made stable government difficult.

Who Rules After an Empire?

1 In 1917, bread lines and battlefield losses exposed how badly Russia's imperial government was failing. Soldiers joined protests, and Tsar Nicholas II gave up the throne. A provisional government took power but kept Russia in World War I, while food shortages and demands for land continued. Later that year, Bolsheviks seized power with promises of peace and land. Their victory did not settle who should rule. Opponents fought the new government in a civil war that lasted into 1922. As armies crossed towns and farms, ordinary people faced changing authorities and violence. The empire's collapse opened a struggle over power, territory, and daily survival.

2 After the Ottoman Empire lost World War I, its government signed an armistice in 1918. Allied forces occupied parts of its territory, and Allied leaders proposed dividing much of it among other powers. The sultan's government in Istanbul accepted limits that many residents rejected. A nationalist movement based in Ankara organized an alternative government and fought occupying forces. People now faced rival claims about who had the right to govern. Fighting and disputes over land prevented a quick return to stable rule. In 1922, the nationalist government abolished the sultanate. In 1923, it established the Republic of Turkey.

3 Austria-Hungary also broke apart as World War I ended in 1918. Years of fighting strained its army and economy, while different national groups demanded self-rule. As the imperial army lost ground, national councils declared independence or joined new states. Austria and Hungary became separate countries, and Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes emerged. New borders did not place every ethnic group in a state it preferred. Governments had to claim authority, supply food, and settle border disagreements at the same time. The end of imperial rule created new choices, but it also left several governments struggling to gain trust and control.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the end of the tsar's rule not bring stable government to Russia?

2. How did the Ottoman defeat lead to rival claims about who should govern?

3. How did wartime pressures and demands for self-rule create problems for governments after Austria-Hungary broke apart?

4. Compare two empires in the passage. What caused instability in both, and how did their struggles differ?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph as an adviser to a new government in one of the former empires. Propose one concrete step to reduce instability, explain how it addresses two problems in the passage, and predict what could happen if leaders ignore your advice.

ANSWER KEY

Empires Come Apart

HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.6.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one wartime pressure in each paragraph, circle who claimed power after the empire weakened, and number two problems that made stable government difficult. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the end of the tsar's rule not bring stable government to Russia?	**The provisional government continued the war while food shortages and land demands persisted. Bolsheviks then seized power, and their opponents fought them in a civil war.**
2	How did the Ottoman defeat lead to rival claims about who should govern?	**Allied occupation and plans to divide territory followed the defeat. While the sultan's government accepted limits, nationalists formed an alternative government in Ankara.**
3	How did wartime pressures and demands for self-rule create problems for governments after Austria-Hungary broke apart?	**War weakened the army and economy, and national groups formed new states. Their governments then faced food needs, disputed borders, and the challenge of gaining authority.**
4	Compare two empires in the passage. What caused instability in both, and how did their struggles differ?	**Accept any supported comparison. For example, wartime defeat weakened both Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Russia then faced a civil war between Bolsheviks and opponents, while Ottoman lands saw a struggle between the sultan's government and nationalists amid Allied occupation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would advise a new state formed from Austria-Hungary to create local councils in disputed border areas. Each council should include residents from different ethnic groups and organize fair food distribution. This step would give people a way to raise concerns about borders while helping families facing shortages. It would also help the new government earn trust. If leaders ignored these problems, residents might reject the government's authority and border disputes could grow more serious.

Accept different evidence-based explanations of instability. For Part 3, look for one specific proposed step, clear links to two problems in the chosen empire, and a plausible consequence.