The Weimar Republic and its Reasons for Failure

Nazi Germany
In this presentation you will:

1. Compare the nature and significance of political problems faced by the new republic.

2. Analyse the causes and consequences of economic problems faced by the new republic.

Introduction

The **Weimar Republic** was set up in Germany after the **Kaiser** had been overthrown in 1918.

At the time, it was the most democratic government in the world – even women could vote.

However, only 15 years later it had collapsed into ruins, allowing Adolf Hitler to turn the country into one of the most brutal dictatorships the world has ever known.

**What went wrong?**
One major problem for the Weimar Republic was that its constitution had two serious flaws.

1. **Proportional representation (PR).** All votes were counted up centrally to divide seats fairly between parties.

2. **Article 48.** This was a clause that gave the president of the Weimar Republic the right to dismiss parliament and rule by himself if he decided there was a ‘state of emergency’.

To learn about the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of these two features, complete the activity on the next slide.
# Proportional Representation and Article 48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PR: Votes are counted centrally and then converted into seats in the Reichstag</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article 48: President can dismiss the Reichstag and rule alone if he declares a 'state of emergency'</td>
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- **Unstable coalition governments form as no one party can get a majority**
Proportional representation made it difficult for one party to get a **majority**. Weimar governments were usually weak coalitions of parties who had different ideas about how the country should be run.

Between 1919 and 1932 Germany had **21 different governments**.

It was difficult to pass laws in the Reichstag because the government was so weak. The **president** increasingly used his powers to pass legislation.

In 1930, three times as many laws were passed by the president as were passed by the Reichstag.
Political problems: revolts and rebellions

The first five years of the republic saw riots, strikes, shootings and attempts to overthrow Ebert’s coalition government. Two of the most important opposition groups were the Communists and the Freikorp.

**Communists** felt that Ebert and the socialists had failed to complete the revolution because they had not abolished private property.

**The Freikorps** (private armies) felt that Ebert and the socialists had ‘stabbed Germany in the back’ by signing the Treaty of Versailles.
Produce a table like this one in your book, then use the virtual interviews on the next slide to help you complete it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Left-wing</th>
<th>Right-wing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the group's name?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who are the leaders?</td>
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<td>What do they want?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do they do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does Ebert react?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Revolutionary groups

Choose a question to ask Rosa Luxembourg or Wolfgang Kapp.
Consider what you have learnt about the rebellions, then complete these statements and compare them with a partner:

1. The Weimar Republic did handle the rebellions with some degree of success...
2. However, there were serious flaws in their policies…
3. On balance, Ebert should instead have…

Discussion point: What are the main differences between your answers to statement 3? Does this mean that one of you must be wrong?
Economic problems: the 1923 crisis

In 1921, Germany’s final reparations bill was announced as being £6,600 million. The German government asked for permission to suspend payments until the German economy recovered, but the Allies refused.

Germany failed to make full payment in 1922, so in January 1923 France and Belgium invaded the Ruhr to seize industrial goods for themselves.

The Ruhr occupation, which lasted until the summer of 1925, sparked anger in Germany and civil disobedience in the Ruhr itself.
Post-war economic problems

Treaty of Versailles

Why was Germany unable to pay?
Useful definitions

What were the consequences of the Ruhr occupation? First, check that you understand the types of effect.

- Economic: To do with the actions of the people that run the country.
- Social: Experiences and conditions of people.
- Political: Actions of the people.
Passive Resistance: workers went on strike. As a result, the French and Belgian soldiers attacked the workers and many Germans were killed.

Hitler took passive resistance as an example to launch a rebellion against the republic.

Now link the type of effect to the matching event.
From the end of 1923, the Weimar government was able to bring the situation back under control.

This was largely thanks to the efforts of **Gustav Stresemann**.

In 1924, the **Dawes Plan** was agreed – Germany was given more time to pay reparations, and 800 million marks in US loans. Germany’s prosperity improved.

Stresemann also improved diplomatic relations. He signed the **Locarno Treaties**, promising to honour the Versailles agreement, and even secured German membership of the League of Nations in 1926.
1923–29: German recovery

Click on each button to see how Germany recovered between 1923 and 1929.
Despite Germany’s apparent recovery after 1923, there were still serious problems.

**Socially**: Many people’s life savings had been wiped out by hyperinflation and they were bitterly angry.

**Economically**: Germany was heavily dependent upon US loans, which could be recalled at any time.

**Politically**: Ebert had died in 1925 and was replaced by Hindenburg, a conservative leader. This showed how much support remained for the old, authoritarian Germany.

**Diplomatically**: Stresemann’s attempts to revise the Treaty of Versailles met with little success at the League of Nations.
Order these factors according to the seriousness of the threat they presented to the Weimar Republic.

1. Social
2. Economic
3. Political
4. Diplomatic
Economic problems: The Depression

Just before his death in 1929, Stresemann said: “The economic position is only flourishing on the surface. Germany is in fact dancing on a volcano. If the short-term credits are called in, a large section of our economy will collapse…”

This was shown to be true when, in October 1929, the Wall Street Crash saw the value of US shares collapse. US bankers and businesses started recalling their loans. The result was a worldwide depression.

This meant economic disaster for Germany. Companies went bankrupt overnight, workers were sacked and poverty gripped the nation again.
Economic impact: Unemployment

(i) Economic Impact - unemployment

% of labour force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1935</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0</td>
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</table>
Political impact: Extremism

(ii) Economic Impact – Extremism

Seats in the Reichstag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social Democrats</th>
<th>Catholic Centre</th>
<th>Nationalists</th>
<th>Nationalists</th>
<th>Nazis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1930</td>
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<td>Jul-32</td>
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<td>Nov-32</td>
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<td>Mar-33</td>
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Discussion point

Can you see any links between the unemployment graph and the election results?

How do you explain what you have found?
Conclusion

The Weimar Republic failed to deal effectively with the challenges it faced after the Wall Street Crash.

Economically, it was scared of raising unemployment benefits in case this led to hyperinflation again.

Politically, it was unable to take decisive action because proportional representation produced weak coalition governments which were unable to agree on a common policy.

The government’s lack of action helped the Nazis to become the largest party in the Reichstag. Hitler was appointed chancellor in January 1933.
How much can you remember about the Weimar Republic? Read the definition at the bottom and then 'shoot' the right answer... press start to begin.