

The Decline of the Roman Republic

<https://www.studentsofhistory.com/the-decline-of-the-roman-republic>

The Roman Republic lasted for 500 years. This system of government allowed people to vote for political officials and is the basis of many democracies we see today. The Roman Republic had a constitution, laws, elected officials and a governing body of senators.

The government was complex with many leaders and councils at different levels. However, many problems began to emerge with the growth of the republic. Economic problems, government corruption, crime and private armies, and the rise of Julius Caesar as emperor all led to its eventual fall in 27 BCE.

Rome's continued expansion resulted in money and revenue for the Republic. Corruption and bribery increased in the government for officials to gain power and access to this money.

Rich people bought votes and gave favors to friends. Bribery and corruption were rampant and led to the commoners distrusting the Senate. Many people were brought back as slaves from Rome's conquests. The capture of slaves created an influx of cheap labor and hurt the lower classes and disrupted the agricultural system. Many local farmers could not compete with the wealthy farms that used slave labor and eventually lost their land. When Rome's conquests declined, so did their sources of income. This decrease in money resulted in a loss of support for the people of Rome and created an enormous stress on the economy. Officials began to tax their citizens furthering discontent.

With no police force, crime was out of control in Rome and people feared for their safety. The wealthy hired their own private armies for protection. Many of these political armies killed people and stole their land. These grew large in some cases and they owed allegiance to a private citizen as opposed to the Roman government.

Historians believe the fall of the Roman Republic started in 59 BCE when Julius Caesar, Pompeii the Great, and Marcus Licinius Crassus formed an alliance to rule Rome. Crassus died in battle, leaving Caesar and Pompeii to turn against each other for the control of Rome. After his victory in the wars with Pompeii, Caesar declared himself emperor of Rome. Once Rome had a dictator, it was difficult to go back to a republic. Caesar only ruled for a short time before he was assassinated and Rome fell into political disarray never to return to the republic that once helped build the great power.

The problems that led to the fall of the Roman Republic

(<https://rome.mrdonn.org/republicfails.html>)

The Roman Republic was in trouble. It had three major problems. First the Republic needed money to run, second there was a lot of graft and corruption amongst elected officials, and finally crime was running wild throughout Rome.

1. Rome needed money to run.

The Republic needed money to pay the legions, to build roads, sewers, aqueducts, and arenas, and to pay for the welfare programs that fed the poor. To get this money Rome created a system called tax farmers.

A tax farmer was a person who bought the right from the Senate to tax all the people and business in a certain area. The biggest problem with this system is that the senate didn't set up any controls on the tax farmers. They didn't say how much taxes were, or who got taxed. They left all that up to the tax farmer.

Tax farming was a business, and the tax farmers were in it to make a profit. While most Romans were willing to pay taxes, and even allow the tax farmer some profit, many of the tax farmers went way beyond what people expected. Many of them saw this as a way to get rich. Plus, since the tax farmer decided who got taxed and who didn't, you could bribe the tax farmer to make your taxes low or maybe tax your competitors out of business, or if you had enough bribe money, maybe both. If a Roman citizen didn't pay their taxes at whatever amount the tax farmer set, you and your entire family could be sold into slavery.

Even with the tax farmer system, the Roman government wasn't getting enough money and Rome was going broke.

2. Elected officials were corrupt.

Under Roman law you could pay someone to vote for you. So rich people could actually buy their way into the senate. Once in the Senate, there were many ways to get huge amounts of money. Remember the tax farmer? Since they bought the position from the Senate, the Senate set the amount it cost and decided who actually got the job. Plus the Senate decided who got to build the roads, arenas etc. So construction companies bribed the Senate to get the construction contracts. Finally since the Senate made all the laws, people could bribe senators to make laws that they wanted. The Government of the Republic was rife with corruption and graft.

3. Rome was riddled with crime.

Criminals ran wild in Rome. Since there was no police force, there was no one to stop them. It was not safe to walk the streets without a guard. Wealthy Romans hired guards and even built their own small armies to protect their homes and families. This led to further problems when the guards of one wealthy family fought the guards of another family over insults or business territories. The Senate couldn't do anything since there was no money to hire police or even create a militia.

There were other problems in Rome to add to these. Senators didn't trust each other, and they really didn't trust the legions. They even passed laws making it illegal for a legion to enter Rome. Rome was a disaster. The people of Rome were tired of the mess and wanted the problems solved and the corruption ended. Julius Caesar told the people of Rome that he could solve all of Rome's problems.