



The Roman Senate

Addressing the Need for and Benefits of the
Roman Republic (49 BCE)

I. Introduction & Committee Background

The Roman Republic was established in 509 BCE after the overthrowing of Rome's monarchy. As a result, a system developed where the political authority was shared between the Senate, elected magistrates, and popular assemblies. The Republic aimed to prevent the concentration of power in a single ruler while enabling Roman citizens to participate in political life. However, by 49 BCE Rome faced some political instability and conflicts between powerful military commanders.

The Roman Senate was one of the most influential institutions in the Republic. It was made up of mostly experienced political leaders who advised officials and played a significant role in decisions concerning finances, foreign policy, military affairs, and provincial administration. Although the Senate was not the only governing body, its influence was central to the functioning of the Roman political system.

The Roman Republic experienced significant social and political challenges as it expanded across the Mediterranean. For example, wealth from conquest was distributed unevenly, creating economic difficulties for poorer citizens and outrage from those who were not paid fairly. The growing influence of military commanders became another major challenge. Julius Caesar amassed wealth, influence, and military loyalty through his campaigns in Gaul over a brief amount of time. Meanwhile, Pompey the Great became a leading figure who opposed Caesar's power. Their political rivalry intensified after the collapse of their alliance, causing disagreements and division within the Roman Government.

In January 49 BCE, the Senate called on Roman officials to protect the Republic during the escalating conflict with Caesar. When Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his army, he challenged the Senate's authority and started a civil war.

The Roman Senate should therefore consider the question: Delegates must examine how republican government can preserve shared political authority and stability while responding to the challenges threatening its survival such as the economic instability. The committee's discussions should result in resolutions and recommendations that address the question regarding the political climate and socio-economic climate of the Roman Empire.



II. Timeline of Key events leading to 49 BCE

- 509 BCE: Establishment of the Republic

Rome overthrew its monarchy and established a system of elected government representatives and shared political authority.

- 133–121 BCE: Political and social unrest

The Gracii brothers proposed changes to address land distribution and the needs of poorer citizens.

- 60 BCE: The First Triumvirate

Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Marcus Licinius Crassus formed an informal political alliance to advance their interests.

- 58–50 BCE: Caesar's campaigns in Gaul

Caesar expanded Roman control in Gaul and gained military prestige, wealth, and the loyalty of his soldiers. As a result, his influence worried political opponents in Rome.

- 53 BCE: Death of Crassus

Crassus died during his campaign against Parthia. The alliance between Caesar and Pompey grew into a rivalry, leaving them increasingly opposed to one another.

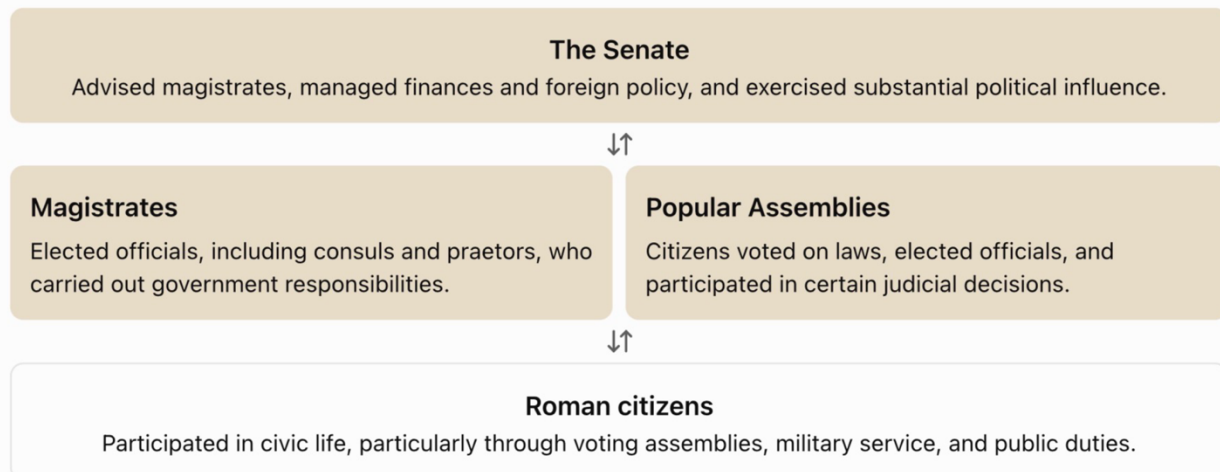
- January 49 BCE: The Senate's emergency decree

The Senate passed the *senatus consultum ultimum*, calling on magistrates to protect the Republic. Caesar's supporters, including the tribunes Mark Antony and Quintus Cassius, fled Rome after their political position became unsafe.

- January 49 BCE: Crossing the Rubicon

Caesar crossed the Rubicon with his troops, entering Italy and beginning the civil war. Pompey and many senators withdrew from Rome.

III. Political Structure of the Republic



The Roman government consisted of magistrates and various assemblies. Magistrates, which consisted of Consuls, Praetors, Aediles, Quaestors, Tribunes, and Censors, served on one-year terms. It is important to know that Consuls were the most powerful position in the Roman government. There were always two of them, and they implemented all civil and military policies in Rome. Tribunes, or *tribuni plebis*, were also important. Ten tribunes represented the will of the plebeians in the Roman government and could overrule any action of other magistrates or of the *Senatus Romanus*. They could also convene the assembly of plebeians which, unlike the *Senatus Romanus*, had actual lawmaking power. The Censors were the ones who chose the Senators. A dictator, who had complete unchecked power, could also be approved by the *Senatus Romanus* for a six month period.

IV. The rise of Julius Cesar



Recognizing the wealth to be gained through conquest, Caesar left Rome with his legions and went to Gaul in 58 BCE. He defeated the tribes there just as he had done in the Spanish invasion, Caesar built a bridge over the Rhine River, marched his legions across in a show of force, then marched them back and had the bridge dismantled. The Germans understood the message and never invaded. He defeated the tribes of the north and twice invaded Britain (Rome's first incursion into the British Isles). At the Battle of Alesia, in 52 BCE,

Caesar defeated the Gallic leader Vercingetorix and completed the conquest of Gaul. He was now effectively the sovereign of the province of Gaul with all the attendant wealth at his disposal.

Back in Rome, however, The First Triumvirate had disintegrated. Crassus was killed in battle against the Parthians in 54 BCE and, that same year, Julia died in childbirth. Without Caesar's daughter and his financial and political backer tying him to Pompey, the latter aligned himself with the Optimates faction in Rome which he had long favored. Pompey was now the sole man Caesar could be prosecuted for his actions when he was consul.

Pompey was unable to come to terms with this situation and took over the command of the Republic's armies in Italy in 49 BCE, the year that Caesar crossed the Rubicon and uttered the famous words, *alea iacta est* (the dice are thrown). He then moved the army from Brundisium to Macedonia, where he mobilised his forces. Rather than returning to Rome as ordered, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his legions and marched on the city in 49 BCE. This was considered an act of war as the Rubicon was the border between the province of Gaul and Rome. Due to all of these events the political climate was heavy and as a result a civil war began in 49 BCE.

V. Potential areas of debate

Constitutional and Political Reform:

One major area of debate will be the need for constitutional and political reforms within the Roman Republic. The Senate must consider whether existing political institutions are still effective in managing Rome's growing population and territory.



Delegates may debate how to strengthen the authority of the Senate while maintaining the role of elected political figures. They may also discuss ways to reduce political violence and abuse of power while ensuring that Roman citizens continue to have a role in government.

Military Authority:

Another important area of debate is the growing political influence of Roman military commanders. Generals such as Julius Caesar and Pompey have gained significant power through their military successes and the loyalty of their soldiers. This creates concerns about whether individual commanders have too much influence over Roman politics. Delegates may discuss establishing clearer limits on military commanders, determining when generals must surrender their armies, and creating rules to prevent Roman armies from being used to influence political decisions.

Economic and Social Inequality:

Economic and social inequality is another major issue facing the Republic. Rome's expansion has brought large amounts of wealth into the state, but this wealth has not been distributed equally among its citizens. Many small farmers have experienced financial difficulties, while wealthy landowners have accumulated large estates. Delegates may debate land distribution, taxation, and other economic reforms that could reduce social tensions. The Senate must consider how economic reforms could support ordinary Roman citizens while avoiding policies that create further conflict between different social groups.

Political Conflict Between Caesar and Pompey:



The conflict between Julius Caesar and Pompey poses an immediate threat to the stability of the Republic. Both men possess significant political and military influence, and their rivalry has divided the Roman political system. Delegates must debate whether negotiation or military action is the most appropriate response to the crisis. They may also consider whether political agreements can protect the interests of both sides while preventing further violence.

Provincial Administration:

As Rome has expanded across the Mediterranean, governing its provinces has become increasingly complicated. Provincial governors possess significant military, political, and financial authority which can make them powerful figures outside Rome. Delegates may debate how governors should be selected, how long they should remain in office, and how their actions should be monitored. The Senate may also consider ways to reduce corruption and ensure that provincial populations are governed effectively while maintaining Rome's control over its territories.

Preventing Future Civil Conflict:

Finally, delegates must consider how Rome can prevent future political disagreements from developing into civil wars. The events of 49 BCE demonstrate the consequences of political divisions combined with military power. Delegates may debate creating clearer legal procedures for resolving disputes between political leaders, establishing protections for defeated political opponents, and developing agreements/treatys that encourage peaceful transfers of power.

VI. KEY NOTE: TIMEFRAME



This committee is set in 49 BCE, during the outbreak of the civil war. Delegates should distinguish between what is known today and what Roman senators could reasonably know at the time. Caesar has crossed the Rubicon, but the outcome of the civil war is not yet known to the committee.

For example, Caesar's later appointment as dictator for life in 44 BCE and the establishment of the Augustan Principate lie in the future from the committee's perspective. Delegates should not treat those events as inevitable. The central challenge is to decide how Rome should respond to the crisis using the information, institutions, and political realities available in 49 BCE.

VII. Member List

- Julius Caesar
- Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (Pompey)
- Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus
- Marcus Porcius Cato
- Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Crus
- Gaius Claudius Marcellus
- Metellus Scipio
- Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus
- Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus
- Gaius Asinius Pollio
- Lucius Marcius Philippus

- Servius Sulpicius Rufus
- Lucius Julius Caesar
- Marcus Caelius Rufus
- Publius Cornelius Lentulus Spinther
- Lucius Afranius
- Marcus Terentius Varro
- Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony)
- Quintus Cassius Longinus
- Lucius Aemilius Paullus
- Publius Servilius Vatia Isauricus
- Quintus Hortensius Hortalus
- Marcus Licinius Crassus
- Titus Labienus

VIII. Works Cited

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