

Handout

Women in the Weimar Republic



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A crowd of women wait in line at a polling station in the Weimar Republic in 1919, the first year women were allowed to vote.

Directions: As you are reading, annotate the text by completing the following steps:

1. Circle words that are unfamiliar.
2. Put a question mark (?) in the margin in places where you feel confused.
3. Answer the questions that follow the text.

At the turn of the twentieth century, women throughout Europe and North America were demanding that their governments give them the right to vote. Germany was no exception; women began to hold demonstrations for women's suffrage there as early as 1910. They succeeded in 1919, when Article 109 of the Weimar Constitution stated that men and women have the same fundamental rights and duties as citizens, including the right to vote and to hold office:

Article 109: All Germans are equal in front of the law. In principle, men and women have the same rights and obligations.

During the years of the Weimar Republic, a majority of the electorate was female, in part because so many men had died in the war or were so physically or psychologically wounded that they were unlikely to vote. In 1919, the first year women could vote in Germany, they held 10% of the seats in the Reichstag, and their numbers continued to rise throughout the next decade.

During and after the war, the position of women in the workforce also began to change. While the proportion of women who had jobs remained about the same as before the war, women began to take new kinds of jobs that had previously been dominated by men. For instance, they began to fill more jobs that were visible throughout society, such as tram conductor and department store clerk, as well as (in smaller numbers) factory worker, lawyer, and doctor. While many of these positions would return to men after the war, women also moved into professions that many would continue to associate with women in the years that followed, such as teaching, social work, and secretarial work. All in all, more than 11 million women were employed in Germany in 1918, accounting for 36% of the workforce.¹

1. Record the title, and write a brief summary (three or four sentences) of this reading.
2. Why do you think women won the right to vote in Germany in 1919? What is significant about that date?
3. What were some of the reasons women were more represented in the German government after World War I than they had been before the war?
4. How might the changes discussed in this reading have affected Germany's universe of obligation?

¹ Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 96–97; Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 127.