

How far was the  
english civil war a  
consequence of rule  
over multiple  
kingdoms



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“ If the Remonstrance had been rejected I would have sold all I had the next morning and never have seen England more, and I know there are many other modest men of the same resolution”[1]. England, 1641, and the Grand Remonstrance has just been passed. The long list of grievances towards the present monarch, King Charles I included such issues like the ‘ catholic conspiracy’, local land distributions, right for parliament to bypass the Crowns decisions if necessary and other general foreign, legal and financial policies.

The quote from Oliver Cromwell, a puritan member of parliament during the run up to the Civil war, effectively spelt out the mass sentiment towards the monarchy at the time, that being the large dissatisfaction with Charles I’s tyrannical rule over England. Although Cromwell does indeed speak for the majority when he expresses relief over the ratification of the remonstrance, the causes of the English Civil war do undeniably stem from issues outside of the English domain. It must be stressed that rule over multiple kingdoms was indeed an element that was encompassed into the general causes of the Civil War and it can be argued that the Crowns rule in Scotland and Ireland did indeed make conflict inevitable but varying other factors do also need to be considered. Charles I installation of ‘ High Anglicanism’ and his decision to marry a Catholic fed into the grievances that protestant England had towards the Crown.

In addition to this the fear of popery, economic stagnation, the personal rule of Charles I and debts incurred from the Elizabethan era were amongst a whole array of other factors that formed the origins of the Civil war. In order to form an analysis on the causes of the English Civil War, one must consider <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-was-the-english-civil-war-a-consequence-of-rule-over-multiple-kingdoms/>

the claim that the question poses itself first, that being the rule over multiple kingdoms. Using this factor in addition to the existence of the huge economic problems present, I will be able to compare the relative significance of each factor in turn. The main problems that faced England through ruling multiple kingdoms were the existence of differing religions and governing political bodies in both Ireland and Scotland. Despite the fact the Civil War is often dubbed ' the English revolution' the real trigger factors that led to its existence do indeed originate from the risings in Scotland and Ireland.

Conrad Russell has drawn specific attention onto this and claims that: " it was not the English who started the Civil war, but the Scots and the Irish who gave them their opportunity"[2]. It is true that there were separate factors that led to the Civil War but the pressure that they potentially put onto the English parliament was less than that of the Scots and Irish risings, as will be discussed below. In the first instance, religion in Scotland and Ireland became a major concern for Charles I. As a result of Scotland and Ireland effectively being colonies of England during the 17th century, some sort of standardized religion was, in the eyes of Charles I necessary in order to gain greater unity in these areas to prevent instability[3].

In Scotland's case, the church structure was mostly Presbyterian and although it was protestant, Charles still advocated a church structure similar to that of England's. Charles I's installation of the 1636 Book of Canons, with its anti - Presbyterian stance resulted in widespread demonstrations, chief among which were the highly organized riots in the principal church of St Giles[4]. The difficulty of ruling over multiple kingdoms did pose a problem in

so far as the population of Scotland were clearly not as subservient as  
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Charles had first hoped. The fact that the tyrannical Charles was so out of touch with the interests of the Scots meant that further problems, some of which being financial, were inevitably going to be posed to the King. June 1639 saw Charles make a pact with the Scots that stated; all matters concerning Scotland should be left to the governance of the Scots themselves. Further still the Crown, under the terms of the subsequent 1640 treaty of Ripon forced Charles to pay compensation to the Scots as long as they remained in northern England, further showing a strong Scottish defiance against English rule[5].

Furthermore, after a failed English military effort to confront the Scots in the Tees, parliament was required to raise money to pay for the indemnity imposed by the Scots in 1640. This proposition was not received well in England as previous taxation was already burdening enough, as seen through the Ship money tax of 1634 that taxed seaside towns in order to bolster defences there[6]. It must also be duly noted that: “ until the burdens of the Scottish war were added, most people paid ship money with little open dismay”[7]. The situation in Scotland can therefore firmly be seen as a key factor that prompted the Civil war as previous payment of supposedly controversial taxation was paid before.

It became increasingly apparent to parliament that the king was less than able in governing England owing to the huge debts incurred from waging conflicts in Scotland and Ireland. Charles use of tyranny and sheer lack of educated consultation in parliament indeed prompted a rising sentiment amongst parliamentary members that Charles was not capable of governing England. Secondly there is Ireland’s case to consider. Ever since its <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-was-the-english-civil-war-a-consequence-of-rule-over-multiple-kingdoms/>

settlement, the English Crown has been attempting to, like in the case of Scotland, push for religious conformity in Ireland. Thomas Wentworth, under the consultation of Charles I had been instructed to undergo a large scale 'Anglicisation' of Ireland, attempting to convert all Catholics present to the predominantly English Protestant faith. It was only when Wentworth's military force was withdrawn from Ireland to deal with the present risings in Scotland that Irish dissatisfaction with the forced practise of Protestantism began to surface[8].

The position of Charles I was seriously weakened by the rebellion in Ireland as he had to yet again gain financial backing from parliament to raise another army to prevent further uprisings in Ireland[9]. The likelihood for other kingdoms to revolt against their ruler following the fall of one out of many kingdoms does indeed seem likely as news spreads and this possibility has been documented by varying historians, chief amongst which is Stevenson. The success of the Scots in the Bishops' wars had simultaneously inspired the Irish to revolt, created circumstances in which they could hope revolt could be successful, and made their revolt necessary"[10]. To a certain extent one may draw parallels of this occurrence of revolt in various separate kingdoms with the collapse of Soviet Satellite States during the collapse of communism in the late 20th century. Further still there is the case of France and Spain in the 17th century and their financial struggle to gain money to upkeep their military efforts in their kingdoms.

French war expenses were 5m livres at the beginning of the century, 33m in 1635 and 38m in 1640...major taxes brought in 10m livres... but the strains of war brought both the French and Spanish monarchies to the verge of <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-was-the-english-civil-war-a-consequence-of-rule-over-multiple-kingdoms/>

collapse”[11]. It may now seem obvious that the crippling financial burdens of the upkeep of multiple kingdoms inevitably led to the collapse of influence in those regions, and subsequent Civil War, as seen through the case of Scotland, Ireland. However, this view is too simplistic. Yes it is true that as long as influence was to be maintained in Scotland and Ireland, money was needed to create armies in these regions and as long as this was apparent, confrontations between the Crown and parliament were bound to occur in England. However, it was not the rule over multiple kingdoms alone that contributed towards Civil War.

Instead, factors such as the lack of a stable system of bureaucratic taxation and oppressive personality of Charles I did indeed feed into the grievances that led to Civil War. Further still one might even argue that the economic environment presented to both James I and Charles I following Elizabeth I's reign was one less than favourable stability owing to the: “ debts of at least ? 400, 000 at her death”[12]. One might also argue that without religious intervention and the lack of stable taxation there might never have been risings in either Scotland or Ireland. Another factor that potentially led to the English Civil war was the supposed ‘ personal rule’ or ‘ eleven years tyranny’ of Charles I[13].

We have seen previously in this essay that Charles I personality did indeed contribute to the conflicts in Ireland and Scotland due to his installation Anglicanism in both kingdoms but it was not him alone that led to the Civil war but rather the crippling financial burdens of rule over multiple kingdoms that also contributed. This section will focus mainly on Charles' political tyranny within England and the reasons why this led to national and local

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grievances. During the ' eleven years tyranny' Charles did indeed make a large effort to spread his influence and control throughout large sections of English society. One most apparent example of where this tyranny becomes most apparent is within court culture.

Charles was said to have wanted to: " control the external world as rigidly as he controlled his inner world"[14]. Charles' persistent control over litigation within court cases often took a violent and oppressive form. One such example involved the court minister; Alexander Leighton who had published articles that denounced bishops and supported the rule of parliament over the monarchy. Leighton was fined ? 10, 000 and was brutally whipped, had both his ears cut off and sentenced to five years imprisonment[15].

Although this sort of case was not hugely common it does elicit with it a huge degree of unprecedented tyranny that undeniably fuelled widespread discontent towards the unrepresentative and illegitimate king. And as Charles was very dismissive towards his ministers when handling court cases, many may have felt that they, as the representative body in England, should at least have a certain degree of influence in court decisions. Further examples of discontent towards the ' personal rule towards the king stem from the English peasantry who up until the eleven years tyranny had been fairly apathetic towards the administration of the King. However, " the enclosures of forests and wastes, marshes and fens, provoked violent conflicts between lords and tenants and left the peasants involved with little feeling of respect of loyalty for the king"[16].

To an extent, Charles was initiating this reform in order to gain popularity and support amongst the landed gentry but the unrepresentative and illegitimate nature of his policy making did prompt conflict with parliament that would feed into the causes for the Civil war. The peasants obviously made up a huge degree of the English population in the 17th and by alienating them; Charles was arguably setting himself up for a large fall. Lastly I will discuss the fear of popery and its relative significance in promoting the Civil War. At a glance Charles I's religious policies seemed reasonable. The condition of the church and clergy before the repairs that Archbishop Laud and Charles initiated was poor, as the authority and financial independence of bishops was low[17].

Although both Laud and Charles tried to combat this by introducing more ceremonial forms of practise such as a higher emphasis on communion the communion table often appeared to resemble a Catholic altar and this was interpreted as oppressive, popish and led to accusations that Laud and Charles were moving in the direction of Roman Catholicism[18]. In combination with the fact that Charles had decided to marry the Catholic Henrietta Maria in 1625, the seeds were effectively sewn for potential accusations towards the king that Protestantism was at risk from a popish rebellion. Conrad Russell claims that: " Fears of Catholic plots to murder Protestants and overthrow the established government and religion were clearly widespread in the years 1640-1642"[19]. Although fear was not totally widespread enough in England, it was present enough in order to stir up yet more negative sentiments towards the monarchy. Examples of this increasingly apparent fear are illustrated as follows.



Pamphlets and newspapers published after the 1642 do indeed seem to largely focus on the idea that the Civil war was a consequence of Catholic infiltration of the state. Furthermore almost all of the reports on the progress of Charles' armed forces described them as: " papistical, jesuitised and Romish" [20]. Bearing all this in mind, is it any wonder that groups of the English population began to express their doubts towards Charles and his duty to ' uphold the faith'. However, although all this did fuel into the mounting grievances towards Charles himself and the likelihood of a civil war, the fear of popery itself did not cause the conflict. The fear of a ' Catholic conspiracy' within England was one of many factors that led up to the Civil war but did not tip the balance. As claimed by Russell it seems much more likely that: " only when there was war with Scotland, rebellion in Ireland, and political deadlock in England that these accusations were taken seriously"[21].

In conclusion, the English civil war does indeed seem to be a consequence of rule over multiple kingdoms. As illustrated by the rebellions in Scotland and Ireland, the relationship between parliament and the Crown rapidly deteriorated after the repeated pleas for more finances to build an army to stop insurrection in these areas. In contrast to the later discussed factors including Charles' ' personal rule' and the ' fear of popery' the real essence and cause behind the Civil War was a result of the breakdown of relations between the Crown and parliament. Yes it is true that Charles' political tyranny did feed into mounting grievances that both members of parliament and the English peasantry had towards him as seen through the violent prosecution of Alexander Leighton and seizure of land from local peasants

but these disputes were often on a small/local scale. Although, the ' eleven years tyranny' of Charles did show the entire population of England how unrepresentative and illegitimate Charles actually was, the disputes that occurred were not large enough in size and far reaching enough to prompt a Civil War outright.

In addition to this, when contemplating the relative significance that the ' fear of popery' had on the development of the Civil war it does seem increasingly apparent that despite the resentment caused by the installation of alleged catholic altars in protestant churches the pamphlets and newspapers expressing this grievances were not far reaching enough as well. Furthermore, despite the situation in Scotland and Ireland effectively taking advantage of the growing discontent with the monarchy as borne out by the personal rule and fear of popery the significance of the rebellions there should not be underestimated and if anything they should be stressed in importance. In both cases, religious conformity was of the highest importance owing to its alleged effect of creating stability. The anti-Catholic expedition in Ireland and pro-Anglicisation in Scotland was met with huge objection and England had neither the money nor the physical resources to upkeep their influence in these regions.

It was as a result of this consistent demand for finances to build an army that created the largest causes of the war.