

# The first triumvirate

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Caesar, Crassus and Pompey were part of what is known as the 'First Triumvirate', a triumvirate being a legal political alliance between three men. Paterculus describes the triumvirate as a "partnership of power". Cicero regarded the triumvirate as 'uniformly odious to all sorts and classes and ages of men'... Cicero also regarded the political coalition as the main cause for the civil war in 49BC. The coalition lasted for approximately seven years- from about 60BC until 53BC. This secret, non-official alliance should not be called the first triumvirate because it was non-official.

The triumvirs- Pompey, Crassus and Caesar each used different methods in order to achieve their respective goals- whether it was for their personal interest or the interest of the political and social group of populares these men represented and were close to. Some of these varying methods were effective, and some were not. Each triumvir had different aims, or a number of goals. Each man wanted to gain something different from the coalition. Pompey wished for land for his veterans, as well as his eastern settlement ratified or approved 'en bloc', or altogether.

Crassus wanted a rebate for the equestrian tax farmers. Caesar needed a consulship for 59BC, as well as a province for 58BC to give scope for his military ability and in order to gain glory also. Caesar passed his land bill (lex Campania) using the threat of force, ignoring the bad omens as well as ignoring the veto of Bibulus, Bibulus was the optimate's representative and it shows the continuation of the struggle between two main political and social classes in Rome over power, wealth and equal rights. He was [Bibulus] the second consul. The lex Campania aimed at providing land for Pompey's veterans.

Pompey was apparently unhappy with the way the law was passed. Cicero, in a letter to Atticus said regarding Pompey's position: " Pompey has fenced so far with the important questions. When asked, he said that he agreed with Caesar's laws. But what about his methods? ' Caesar must answer that for himself, he replied. " During Julius Caesar's first consulship (59BC) a tribune, Vatinius was made to good use, He passed a bill and thus ratified Pompey's settlement en bloc, he gained a rebate for the equestrians in relation to the loss to the tax contract.

Vatinius also proposed to the assembly that Caesar should be given Illyricum and both Gauls for five years as well as an army of three legions, this was passed despite unfavourable omens. Due to Vatinius' help as a tribune in 59bc, each triumvir gained most of what they wanted. Julius Caesar also assisted in changing Clodius Pulcher's status, so that Clodius could help the triumvirate. Caesar helped Clodius change from the patrician to plebeian status. Clodius became a tribune and introduced four laws.

He also introduced free corn as a bribe, this obviously benefited the poor and masses, but had negative effects in politics since it was often used to manipulate the plebs as a form of bribe for their vote. Free corn was usually used by popular leaders to bribe the people for political interests. The two censors were able to expel senators only when they were both in agreement and after a judicial enquiry had been held. No magistrates could stop public business by the use of auspices or observing ill-omens. Clodius Pulcher as tribune in 58BC also exiled Cicero because of the threat he imposed on the triumvirs.

Clodius introduced to rid any magistrate who had put to death a Roman citizen without trial- this was obviously aimed at Cicero, because he had put to death the Catilinarian conspirators in 63VC, against Julius Caesar's wishes (warnings on the law). After Cicero's exile, according to Plutarch, it was obvious to others that Cicero was a shattered man- he ' remained for most of the time miserable and disconsolate, keeping his eyes fixed, like a distressed lover, on Italy. ' The triumvirate became under pressure between 58 and 56 BC for various reasons.

The enmity between Pompey and Crassus contributed largely. As Crassus and Pompey both achieved their goals, Pompey was embarrassed by Caesar's methods and Crassus was eager to humiliate Pompey was a reason for the triumvirate being under pressure. Cicero also attacked one of Caesar's bills in the senate- the lex Campania which threatened the unity of the coalition. Cicero continued to attempt to win Pompey away from the coalition with Crassus and Pompey. Cicero also undermined the coalition further by speaking for Pompey's special command by appointment.

The people were complaining about the high price of the corn as well as the shortage of it. It means that Clodius' law to provide free corn was unsuccessful. Cicero spoke for Pompey's command of the grain supply as the people demanded that Pompey should be appointed in charge of the supplies of grain. Plutarch suggests that the appointment ' made Pompey once again the master of all ROMAN possessions by sea and by land', and Crassus and Caesar would have not been happy with the appointment because Pompey would have more power than the rest of the triumvirs.

The conference at Luca in 56BC had the aim of solving these problems, and it successfully strengthened the position of the coalition between the three men overall- a public reconciliation between Pompey and Crassus largely achieved this. At the conference it was also agreed that Crassus and Pompey would stand for a consulship the following year- 55bc- a joint one. To achieve their aims of having a consulship together, Crassus and Pompey used some dodgy tactics in order to be elected.

They had powerful political enemies, Domitius Ahenobarbus in particular. They tried their best to delay the elections being held and also preventing the consuls in holding the election until the end of the term. THEY BOTH resorted to violence, among other things. By the end of the year no elections were held. An interrex was appointed- however this was a political friend-friendly to Pompey. This interrex suggested that only two candidates for the joint consulship be elected, obviously aiming at Crassus and Pompey as candidates.

During the elections, Ahenobarbus was wounded in a riot, and Pompey and Crassus were elected for a second time as consuls. POMPEY and Crassus aimed to gain valuable proconsular commands, and with the help of tribune C. Trebonius he awarded Crassus the province of Syria and Pompey the two Spains, as well as Caesar's Gallic command extended. Throughout the years 60-53bc, the peak of the triumvirate, the political coalition between these three men used a variety of methods to achieve their political goals/aims.

These three men met their goals through the use of tribunes- Vatinius and C. Trebonius. Both of these methods were effective as their goals were granted however they were mostly short lasting resolutions because soon the

triumvirate broke down and the civil war following which had devastating effects. ahOWEVER, the violence that Crassus and Pompey used in order to be elected for their joint consulship in 55BC was wrong and illegal. Caesar also used violence- the threat of force- to pass his lex

Campania during his first consulship in 59BC. Pompey became very unahappy with the way that Caear passed his lex Campana. The threat of force was a very strong factor in preventing the triumvirs' opponents from resorting to violence themselves, and many argue that it was a necessity for any of the three men to resort to threats, violence or illegal activity in order to achieve their political goals/or aims. The mehods used by the three men were on the effective, howevr sometimes the methods they used is not justified.