

A scenic view of a Swiss village, likely Lucerne, featuring a river in the foreground, traditional European architecture with wooden balconies, and a church with a tall steeple in the background. The scene is set against a backdrop of green hills and a clear sky.

Robbing Peter to Pay
Maria: Austrian
Succession, 1740

AUSTRIA

MUNUC 38

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Austrian Succession 1740 Committee at MUNUC 38! My name is Jonathan Trenholme and I am honored to serve as your Chair during our conference. I am a second year at the College double majoring in Philosophy and Law, Letters, & Society in hopes of moving on to law school. In my time with Model UN, I've served as Assistant Chair for Crisis Committees at both MUNUC 37 and ChoMUN, the university's collegiate conference. Additionally, I was the Vice President of my high school MUN team, and competed for three years. Outside of MUN, I row competitively with the Collegiate Crew team alongside being an active member of the Moot Court legal brief writing team, additionally I'm a huge film fanatic so please feel free to geek out about movies with me at any point.

Throughout the weekend, delegates in Austrian Succession will participate in the titular 1740 War of Austrian Succession. After the death of Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, there is a great power struggle as the legitimacy of his rightful heir, Maria Theresa, is being called into question and openly contested. Prussia has invaded Silesia, France and Bavaria are challenging Habsburg influence, and Britain and Spain debate whether or not to enter the conflict. Delegates are tasked with navigating the complexities of succession law, territorial expansion, and military mobilization whilst confronting the broader implications for European stability. How will each of you react to this crisis? Will you attempt to gain power through mediation and maintenance of the status quo or will you support the uprising in hopes of becoming the next leader? Addressing such issues of unstable political institutions necessitates both dialogue and delicate diplomacy. I

trust each of you will be prepared to bring nuanced perspectives and strategies as we navigate this tumultuous time in political history. Your actions shape the future of Europe.

While we're all for a good time in which you can hone in your Model UN skills, in order to ensure this is a fun and fruitful weekend for all involved, this committee is expected to respect and uphold sensitivity while approaching the intricate political turmoil of the region. Exclusivity and unkindness of any kind will not be tolerated. Please be mindful of inclusivity and fairness and remain open-minded and kind throughout the weekend. You can expect a fast-past, dynamic committee that will be engaging throughout the weekend. Please feel free to reach out to myself, Sophia, or Allen with any questions or concerns about anything related to the War of Austrian Succession, MUNUC 38, committee mechanics, or anything related to Model UN. Best of luck delegates, I look forward to seeing the amazing work you do!

Best,

Jonathan Trenholme

jtrenholme@uchicago.edu

Chair, Austrian Succession, MUNUC 38

CRISIS DIRECTOR LETTERS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to The Austrian Succession, 1740! My name is Sophia Ktsanes, and I will be serving as one of the Crisis Directors of this committee.

I am a fourth-year at the University of Chicago studying Political Science, Russian, and Quantitative Social Analysis. I am the Wing Commander of the Air Force ROTC Detachment here in Chicago, and am set to deploy to Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas after graduation as a 14N Intelligence Officer. I am also contracted with the Illinois State Police Division of Criminal Investigation, and work for the Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center. I like to spend my time reading, practicing Krav Maga and MMA, traveling with my fiancée, and playing the violin. I have experience with both participating in and running various crisis committees at high school and collegiate levels, but I am particularly thrilled to run this topic with you all in the coming year.

Our slate is excited to see how you will engage with this unique concept, which came about as a result of our collective love of mystery and conflict. We intend to test your skills in investigating the unknown, as well as your ability to adapt to changing circumstances with incomplete information. This background guide will ensure all of you are familiar and comfortable with the mechanics of a crisis committee, as well as our expectations and parameters for success. Finally, it is critical that we as a committee remain cognizant of the time period we are acting in. We expect you all to adhere to the values of this conference, and respect the views and beliefs of others without exception. We also recommend you spend time familiarizing yourself with the material in order to facilitate the best discourse possible. That being said, I

would challenge you all to think beyond the restraints of history, and work to shape the world in new ways.

I am very excited to engage in scandal and intrigue with you all. If you have any questions about expectations, preparation, our slate, or anything else under the sun, please do not hesitate to contact me at sktsanes@uchicago.edu.

Best,

Sophia Ktsanes

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the long-awaited MUNUC 38, and to our Austrian Succession committee. My name is Allen and I am proud to be one of your Crisis Directors, alongside Sophia. By way of background, I am a fourth-year in the College, thrilled to be back for my final MUNUC.

My collegiate MUN journey began with MUNUC 35 in my first-year, where I joined as an AC, before moving into moving into the EAC role the following year with the same group of friends. Last year, I served as MUNUC's USG of Crisis committees; this was an unforgettable experience that cemented my deep appreciation for this terrific conference. I've also been involved with our premier collegiate conference, ChoMUN, since my first year—once again serving as a CD to that extent. Building on this experience, I am more than excited to run one last crisis alongside the incomparable Jon and Sophia!

In this committee, the crown sits atop a composite monarchy with uneven courts, jealous estates, and a truly cash-strapped war machine. Naturally, this is a messy equation: shaky buy-in from the provinces and neighbors testing the fence. So your job isn't to recite dynastic trivia but rather to make choices that move bodies, cash, and influence. That is: Who do you pay first? Which fort do you hold and which do you let go? Remember that, in terms of intentions, your front room and backroom don't have to match in the slightest. Say what keeps coalitions nice and tight up front, then perhaps gun for what moves cash, wagons, headlines, and chaos in back.

While you investigate the intellectual depth that this committee has to offer, bear in mind that your purpose is to find common ground with your fellow delegates. That is, keep debate well-mannered! We are more than happy to provide necessary assistance along the way, so please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Warmly,

Allen Tousi

tousi@uchicago.edu

STRUCTURE AND MECHANICS

Frontroom Powers

This committee will operate in accordance with standard crisis directive procedure. At the start of every crisis cycle, delegates will respond to a ‘break’ acted out by committee staffers which shall describe a set of problems that committee members must solve. By hand-writing directives, committee members will create in writing their personal solution to solve the problems laid out in the crisis break. Proposed moderated caucuses will allow delegates to speak on their solutions and determine potential collaboration. Unmoderated caucuses will provide time for directive mergers. Upon the elapsed unmoderated caucus, delegates will be expected to submit a merged directive to the dais. Following submission, delegates will have the opportunity to propose for-and-against speeches and voting procedure. Finally, after voting, staffers will return to the committee room to act out the next crisis break.

Additionally, delegates can expect timed crises, where a time limit will be set on the passing of merged directives for particularly pressing matters to committee. During these timed crises, some rules of procedure may be adjusted, with all changes clearly communicated to committee members. Above all else, the dais expects teamwork, collaboration, leadership, and respect to be at the forefront of all personal actions. Additionally, the dais expects that all members work to create a lighthearted atmosphere throughout the weekend and are willing to make adjustments to ensure enjoyment and growth throughout all sessions.

Backroom Powers

In essence, the backroom is a place where delegates detail their specific, actionable, and realistic agenda in writing. Each character will have their own respective goals and intentions, and the Backroom is the place to bring those ideas to fruition. During committee sessions, delegates will write down (as their character, to another fictitious character of their own discretion such as a friend, sibling, business partner, and so on) their current feelings on the ongoing situation and proceedings. They may request any number of creative things to help bring their ultimate goals to pass, such as the establishment of buildings, organizations, or partnerships. They may also take steps to bring down the efforts of others. Once these notes are collected, our ACs will respond to them (in character of whomever the delegate has designated) and deny, grant, or partially grant said requests, while delicately guiding the storyline throughout. The notebooks are then returned, and the process repeats.

For a few outstanding notes, the contents will be acted out during “crisis breaks” which change the direction of the committee, for better or worse. Natural disasters, state of emergencies, or dramatic turns of events may also be acted out and subsequently dealt with. Topics that are off-limits are discussed in the sensitivity statement of this background guide.

Operating within the technological and material restrictions of the time, we recommend that you limit your scope and focus on nuance. Attention to detail will be inordinately rewarded in this committee. You have your respective character’s resources at your disposal as well as your own creativity to address these issues. However, larger issues will also present themselves and require resolution. The government, Church, and courts are in disrepair, and friend and foe alike are closing in. Determining the cause (and whom) the fault lies with must occur simultaneously with the rebuilding of the Habsburg empire. Saboteurs are running rampant, and

systems are deteriorating more and more each day as the public falls farther and farther into poverty. Choosing where to direct your attention is critical, and the prioritization of discussion topics will be a point of evaluation.

SENSITIVITY STATEMENT

As previously mentioned, any demonstration or expression of harmful intent will not be tolerated. This includes but is by no means limited to hate speech, obscenity, and discrimination of any sort regarding religion, race, sex, gender, disability, age, or otherwise, both in real life and in the characters' lives. We at the University of Chicago value free speech and the diverse discourse it can produce. However, that sentiment does not extend to unproductive hateful expressions of malice in any contexts.

This committee takes place in Austria in the 1740s, a time and place with very different cultural norms and acceptable traditions than today. Additionally, our subject matter involves discussions of violence, death, religion, and so on. As such, we will approach these topics with a respectful acknowledgement of history. That being said, delegates may not use historical accuracy to justify any actions that may be of discriminatory, hurtful, or inappropriate in nature under any circumstances. For instance, a member of the clergy may wish to be rid of the devil in Austria and express concrete ideas with resources for how he may try to do this. He may not, however, perpetuate hateful ideology or place curses upon anything or anyone.

There are, however, a few topics that are off-limits. In the Frontroom, the Chair will not entertain any discriminatory rhetoric or malicious violence. In the Backroom, our ACs will reject requests for death or death-inducing weaponry of any kind.

We ask that if you have any concerns about a fellow delegate violating these rules, you report it immediately to any member of our slate. If you yourself have any questions or inquiries as to the specifics of what is allowed or not allowed, feel free to ask us! It would be greatly appreciated and demonstrates maturity to simply ask.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Early Austria

For centuries, the state of Austria was dictated by an onslaught of improvised medieval claims, titles, marriages, and laws. Amongst this chaos, the foundations of the Habsburg Monarchy began to emerge. Back in the thirteenth century, Rudolf I of the House of Habsburg was elected King of the Romans in 1273. During his reign, he acquired what was known as the Duchy of Austria in 1282. Habsburg passed the responsibility of that Duchy to his sons, with the intent of establishing their House's foothold in the region.¹



Habsburg Crest.²

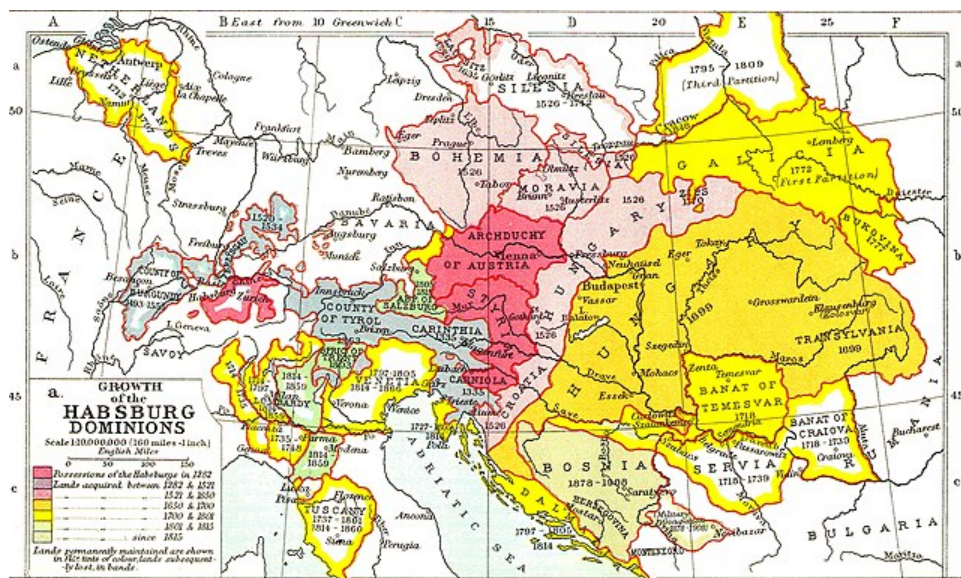
More centuries passed, during which more marriages, military alliances, and imperial titles were employed to shrewdly expand the Habsburg dominion over Central Europe. At the

¹ Royde-Smith, John Graham. "The Habsburg Succession in the 18th Century." Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Habsburg/The-Habsburg-succession-in-the-18th-century>.

² Imperial Coat of Arms of the Empire of Austria. n.d. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial_Coat_of_Arms_of_the_Empire_of_Austria.svg.

turn of the sixteenth century, their dynasty controlled the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, Spain, the Low Countries, parts of Italy, and many more colonial territories overseas.

However, there was no consistent institutional framework to hold the empire together. Instead, the adolescent Austrian government was held together by powerful individual leaders. As the empire continued to expand, the administrative shortcomings began to show themselves. After the abdication of Charles VI in 1556, the Habsburg empire split between the Spanish and Austrian factions. The former preferred to manage their resources via a centralized bureaucratic model based in Castile, while the latter were tasked with presiding over a much more fragmented, complex, and decentralized structure.³



*Growth of Habsburg dominions.*⁴

The structure the Austrian faction inherited was a result of unchecked and abrupt territorial expansion into heterogeneous lands. At this time, the empire consisted of territories known as

³ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

⁴ Growth of Habsburg dominions. n.d. Wikimedia Commons.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Growth_of_Habsburg_dominions.jpg.

“crownlands,” including Bohemia, Hungary, Styria, Carinthia, Tyrol, parts of Croatia and Transylvania, and portions of Italy and the Low Countries. Each state had their own local parliaments called estates, along with respective legal codes, fiscal systems, and aristocratic traditions. This lack of uniformity severely hindered the monarchy’s attempts at establishing a standardized government, and forced rulers to resort to hosting separate and individual negotiations with each region’s elite.⁵

At the core of this splintered system was dynastic succession—the coveted passing along of titles. Though the Habsburgs controlled the imperial crown, and, as such, were able to secure the loyalty of its principalities, the question of succession was frequent and dangerous. The lack of a clear, established, hereditary pattern in the Holy Roman Empire meant that the position of emperor was up for election—a contest the Habsburgs typically won, though with no guarantees given the varying electoral procedures of each crownland in regards to matters of inheritance, regency, and noble privilege.

As tensions over this question of succession grew, stability was bound to break. It did in 1618 with the The Bohemian Revolt, precursor to the Thirty Years’ War. Local nobles resisted the centralization attempts and Catholicizing ambitions of Emperor Ferdinand II, and the resulting conflict devastated the empire and undermined the monarchy’s authority. In response, the Austrian Habsburgs sought to reinforce their legitimacy and right to rule through Catholicism, the last remaining ideological force capable of unifying the state after the Counter-Reformation.⁶

At the time, the Church played an integral role in government, education, and the justice system. Jesuit schools were tasked with educating future bureaucrats, and bishops often held key

⁵ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

⁶ Ibid.

positions in court. Religion, however, eventually became a source of divisiveness, especially within Protestant regions like Hungary and Bohemia where forced conversions and repressive persecutions drove responsive revolts.⁷



*Siege of Vienna.*⁸

The central government in Vienna of Austria proper began to falter, failing to assert itself effectively and relying heavily upon noble and clerical intermediaries for access to its provinces. Throughout the rest of the seventeenth century, Austria underwent long wars against the Ottoman Empire, culminating in the Siege of Vienna and subsequent liberation of Hungary. This conflict drained the Kingdom's resources, and left them militarized and vulnerable to external and internal threats alike. Though attempts were made to establish standing armies and a modest fiscal bureaucracy for economic recovery, these efforts proved to be insufficient for overcoming the empire's pre-existing fragmentation. After the Ottoman retreat, Austria's acquisition of Hungary introduced a massive influx of people into the monarchy, most of whom were openly

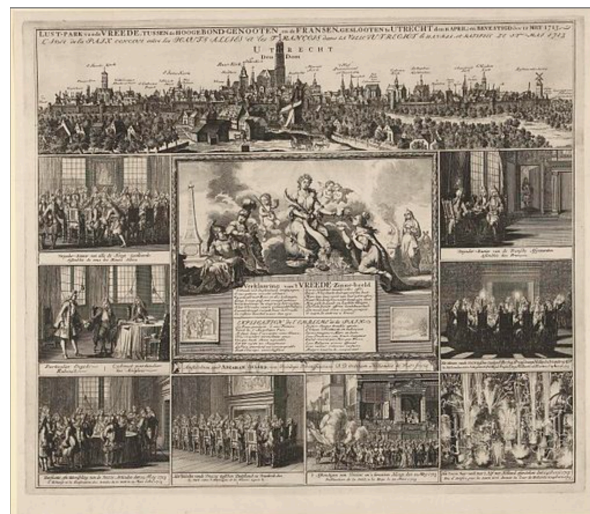
⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Siège de Vienne 1683. n.d. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Si%C3%A8ge_de_Vienne_1683.jpg.

and deeply indifferent to Viennese rule.⁹

The Reign of Charles VI

After King Leopold I died in 1705, the throne was passed to his son Joseph I and, upon Joseph's own premature death and the deaths of his male heirs, the throne was passed again to his younger brother Charles VI in 1711. He had been groomed since birth for a secondary position in the dynasty, relegated to the role of scout and conqueror. In fact, at the time of his inheritance, Charles VI was in Spain fighting in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), a battle for the inheritance of the Spanish Empire between Charles VI and Philip of Anjou, a Bourbon prince backed by France. Upon Charles' victory, he was named Carlos III for his accomplishments in battle.¹⁰



*Treaty of Utrecht.*¹¹

⁹ Bunting, Tony. "Siege of Vienna." Encyclopædia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Siege-of-Vienna-1529>.

¹⁰ "Treaty of Utrecht: Research Starters: EBSCO Research." EBSCO.

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/treaty-utrecht>.

¹¹ Treaty of Utrecht, May 12, 1713. n.d.

<https://www.lookandlearn.com/history-images/YR0476230/Treaty-of-Utrecht-May-12-1713?t=7&n=802865>

However, when Charles was recalled to Vienna to assume the imperial title, there was significant uproar on the global stage. European powers were wary to see both the Spanish and Austrian crowns united under one man. Britain and the Dutch Republic forced Charles' hand, and, as a result, he was forced to abandon his Spanish title in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), recognizing Philip V as King of Spain but ceding significant Spanish territories like Naples, Milan, Sardinia, and the Spanish Netherlands to Austria.¹²

These new territorial acquisitions added another layer of complexity to Vienna's administrative overload. The newly obtained Italian and Netherlandish territories were even more alien to Vienna's centralized ambitions, and very reluctant to recognize Austrian authority. Though nominally now unified under the House of Habsburg, the crownlands were still almost entirely autonomous. This expansion, far from strengthening the empire, exponentially increased the difficulties of governing a heterogeneous population.

Upon taking the throne, Charles faced a formidable challenge: how to govern an empire that was not a state. The Habsburg Monarchy remained a composite monarchy, a system in which different territories were bound by a single sovereign leader but still retained their own institutions, tax regimes, legal orders, and general governing practices. There was not a single Habsburg constitution, no primary military, and no central parliament. Instead, Charles had to negotiate with dozens of local estates, each viciously guarding their privileges and resisting absolutist centralization.¹³

Charles' approach to governance was therefore heavily dependent on consensus-building, particularly amongst the influential nobility that wielded the critical resources and means of production. He ruled from Vienna with the assistance of an imperial court and various advisory

¹² Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

¹³ Ibid.

councils, including a council of war called the Hofkriegsrat and a finance council called the Hofkammer. However, his reach into the crownlands was often slowed or prohibited altogether by both regional elites and the clergy. Austria proper and Bohemia were most directly under imperial rule, while Hungary, though formally a subject of the Habsburg crown, operated with the greatest autonomy, military obligations, and parliament called a Diet filled with Magyar nobility as representatives.¹⁴

The Condition of the Military

While Charles focused on centralization, the rest of his empire rotted in stagnation. His government was housed in Vienna, but underpowered in its administrative capabilities elsewhere. Attempts to implement economic or political reform were meager and limited to specific regions like Austria and Bohemia, while other crownlands like Hungary remained autonomous and refused to provide men or money except under strict conditions.¹⁵



*Leopold I.*¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kühn, August, and Robert Hall. *The Imperial Austrian Infantry 1700-1714*. Alexandria: Editions Brokaw, 1989.

¹⁶ Leopold I. n.d.

<https://picryl.com/media/portrait-of-emperor-leopold-i-as-a-young-man-wearing-the-order-of-the-golden-56ec0b>.

The military, which had been moderately professionalized under Leopold I and Joseph I, lost momentum during Charles's reign. Austria's posture in 1740 was plagued by underinvestment, inconsistent reforms, and logistical weakness. Although the Habsburg Monarchy could seemingly muster large armies on paper, some sources claiming up to 120,000 men, the cohesion and modernity of those forces measured far below those of its rivals, particularly Prussia.¹⁷

Funding was erratic, and often reliant upon voluntary donations from estates, loans from financiers, and occasionally Church taxes. Barracks, supply chains, and pensions were underdeveloped if they existed at all, and instead armies often lived off the land. This bred resentment among the rural populations, and damaged Austria's internal cohesion.¹⁸

The army consisted of a patchwork of national contingents drawn from each of the Empire's various crownlands, including German Austrians, Bohemians, Hungarians, Croats, Italians, and even Walloons. The diversity resulted in massive communication errors, with variable discipline, equipment, training, cultures, and loyalties. These regional contingents often placed greater loyalty to their commanders than the imperial high command, and recruitment was massively uneven. Desertion was rampant, and the soldiers that remained were sourced from peasant levies, press-gangs, and noble quotas.¹⁹

Austrian military doctrine was conservative and linear, meaning they were risk-averse and had a tendency to forgo contingencies. Their officer corps was composed of aristocratic leadership with no battlefield experience, many of whom would often fall back on their education, implementing outdated strategies from textbooks rather than practical know-how. While some generals, like Prince Eugene of Savoy during Leopold I's reign, had been brilliant

¹⁷ Hapsburg military 17th-18th century - War history. Accessed October 22, 2025. <https://warhistory.org/@msw/article/hapsburg-military-17th-18th-century>.

¹⁸ Kühn, August, and Robert Hall. *The Imperial Austrian Infantry 1700-1714*. Alexandria: Editions Brokaw, 1989.

¹⁹ Ibid.

reformers, no comparable figures existed during Charles VI's reign besides potentially himself two decades prior. The rapid mobilization, flexible infantry tactics, and strong logistics that defined Prussia's innovative military prowess were comparatively nonexistent in Austria's forces at the outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession.²⁰

Nonetheless, Austria still possessed significant assets, most notably their entrenched fortifications, artillery corps, acclaimed cavalry units like the Hungarian Hussars and Croatian Border Troops, and sheer manpower potential. However, despite the newly generated resources, Austria remained a rather reactive force as opposed to proactive. Its military doctrine was shaped by necessity, geography, and a desperate need to hold the line until more diplomatic ties were established. Ultimately, the Austrian army of 1740 was one of transition: not yet modernizing, but becoming increasingly and even painfully aware of its deficiencies and limitations. The war would serve as a crucible and catalyst for reform, across both the military and Habsburg monarchy at large over the next generation.²¹

²⁰ Kühn, August, and Robert Hall. *The Imperial Austrian Infantry 1700-1714*. Alexandria: Editions Brokaw, 1989.

²¹ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

The Condition of the Economy

Charles also struggled with state finances. The economy, while diverse in geography, was primitive in structure. It was overwhelmingly agrarian, as was often the case with early European and Asian communities. However, this meant that revenue was dependent on peasant labor, seasonal yields, and highly localized markets. Austria had notable control over natural resources and fertile, prosperous land. However, it lacked the financial and commercial infrastructure to produce and distribute the commodities like that of Western European powers like Britain or the Dutch Republic.²²

Austria and Bohemia were the monarchy's economic heartland, primarily producing the backbone of the empire's grain, livestock, and timber. Cities like Vienna, Prague, and Brno capitalized on these commercial economies, developing several craft guilds. However this pursuit was still secondary to agriculture. Hungary contributed large quantities of grain and livestock as well, along with wine from their immensely fertile Great Plain. However, incorporation and integration into the broader Habsburg economy was hindered due to weak transportation links and political autonomy.

Textiles and minerals were the trade of the crownlands. In Silesia, the most industrially advanced of the provinces, cities like Breslau and Troppau excelled in textile production, coal mining, ironworking, and glassmaking. The Austria Netherlands, or modern-day Belgium, had a thriving artisan and textile economy with the shipping capability to export it prosperously from port cities like Antwerp and Bruges. Northern Italy, including Milan, Mantua, and Tuscany, provided the empire with access to luxury goods like silk, along with the trade routes to export it.

²² "The Nobility as an Economic Force in the Habsburg Empire." scilog.
<https://scilog.fwf.ac.at/en/magazine/the-nobility-as-an-economic-force-in-the-habsburg-empire>.

However, the goods were expensive not only to purchase but also to defend and govern.²³

Trade between these crownlands was massively inhibited by customs barriers, poor infrastructure, and inconsistent tariffs. Rivers like the Danube and Elbe helped facilitate trade from central regions to outposts. However, many routes are only seasonal, unsafe, or non-existent entirely. The monarchy's lack of a unified monetary policy further complicated commerce, as each crownland minted its own coinage and set local duties.²⁴

In addition, the empire remained reliant on feudal dues, Church tithes, and noble contributions. There was no single tax code, and the Bohemian and Hungarian estates often resisted increases in tax burdens. The monarchy could not impose direct taxation consistently and across the provinces, which left it heavily dependent upon wealthier provinces and the Catholic Church to collect dues and generate revenue. While the new Italian and Netherlandish possessions contributed resources and a new plethora of people to extract rents from, they also required costly garrisons and heightened policing, all while generating little loyalty to the crown.²⁵

Charles' efforts to modernize the economy were modest at best. He established state monopolies on salt and tobacco, and tried to encourage domestic manufacturing through subsidies and mercantilist policies. Before dissolving the Ostend Company to appease European foreign allies, the trade corporation based in the Netherlands briefly competed in the colonial trade market. The attempts to reform and standardize taxation was met with fierce resistance from the nobility, and failed to generate consistent revenue.

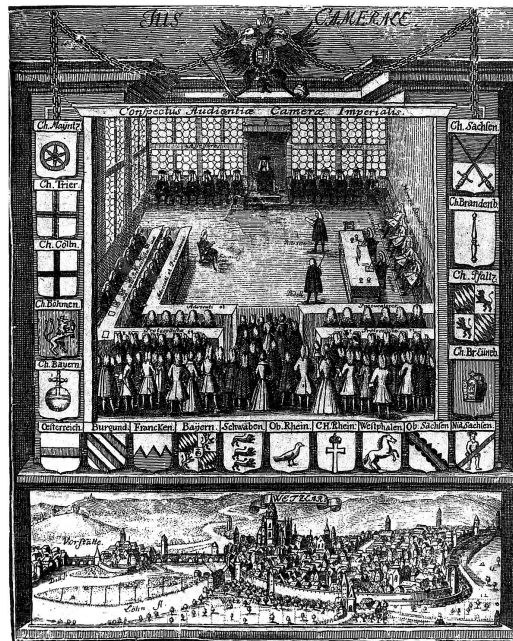
²³ "The Nobility as an Economic Force in the Habsburg Empire." scilog. Accessed October 21, 2025. <https://scilog.fwf.ac.at/en/magazine/the-nobility-as-an-economic-force-in-the-habsburg-empire>.

²⁴ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

²⁵ Ibid.

The Condition of the Institutions

The internal condition of the Habsburg monarchy, beneath the veneer of imperial grandeur, was an underdeveloped apparatus of failing institutions like the judiciary, church, and public works. The patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions, inconsistent customs, and entrenched privileges made the concept of a single codified legal code virtually impossible. For instance, the judicial system was based on a combination of Roman law, local customary law, feudal statutes, and ecclesiastical authority, all of which coexisted in perpetual contradiction.



*Reichskammergericht.*²⁶

The highest level of imperial justice was held in the Reichshofrat (Aulic Council), headquartered in Vienna and functioning as the emperor's private court, handling cases with nobility, feudal disputes, and imperial law. The Reichskammergericht (Imperial Chamber Court)

²⁶ Rikskammerretten. n.d. <https://snl.no/Rikskammerretten>.

was based in Wetzlar, and served as the legal branch of the Holy Roman Empire. However, both courts were plagued with an overwhelming backlog of cases and inefficiencies, replete with corruption and political interference. Their rulings often took years, and were all but ignored by local authorities.

Below these, each Habsburg crownland had its own hierarchy of courts at the regional and estate levels. These varied drastically across the empire. For instance, courts in Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary were typically overseen by local noble councils or ecclesiastical bodies, and hearings varied drastically depending on clientele. While a nobleman in Moravia had near-immunity from any prosecution, a peasant in Carniola would face immediate corporal punishment for a much lesser offense. In addition, the nobility could only be tried by peers or special commissions while peasants would be subjected to the arbitrary authority of manorial courts. These courts were often presided over by the peasant's landlord or an appointed bailiff, creating many conflicts of interest when the allegedly wronged party is the landlord himself. While appeals were possible in theory, they were inaccessible for most in practice.²⁷

Charles VI made little effort to reform his archaic judicial system, beyond streamlining the process in central Austria and Bohemia. Though he was interested in legal scholarship on a personal level, even sponsoring university appointments in Roman Law, he avoided any appearance of major judicial centralization. The political cost of antagonizing local nobles or clergy was too high for him, especially while seeking their approval and leniency in more pressing areas.

The Catholic Church held significant judicial authority as well, particularly in cases of marriage, inheritance, and morality. They often operated their own tribunals. Charles VI spent

²⁷ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

significant efforts investing in court culture and Catholic patronage. Vienna blossomed as a center of Baroque architecture, music, and religious expression while the Jesuits played a leading role in education and advised on policy. The emperor promoted public works and artistic commissions as a way to showcase imperial grandeur, bolstering Habsburg prestige but doing little to strengthen governance.²⁸

The social and economic backbone of the monarchy, like other European powers at the time, remained rooted in feudalism. Though some urban areas had developed semi-modern economies and self-governance, the majority of Charles VI's subjects were peasants in the countryside living under the direct control of noble landlords.

In the Habsburg core territories of Austria proper, Moravia, and Bohemia, the manorial system was still dominant. Large estates owned by nobles or ecclesiastical institutions controlled most arable land. Peasants served as indentured servants or serfs, obligated to provide unpaid labor, in-kind dues, and cash rents simultaneously in exchange for food and shelter. These peasants were legally bound to the land, unable to move, marry, or reproduce without the landowner's consent. Their lives were governed by manorial courts, and there were minimal opportunities for redress or social mobility.²⁹

In Hungary, the structure was similar but more politically volatile. The Magyar nobility, the ruling class of Hungary, had a remarkably strong sense of national identity and privilege. They maintained enormous estates and successfully resisted Vienna's attempts at centralizing power. Hungarian peasants were subject to similar conditions as their Austrian counterparts, but with far more tension between nobles and royal administrators that would frequently erupt and disrupt

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Serfdom Bonded Labor Austria." serfdom bonded labor Austria.
<https://histclo.com/act/work/slave/serf/late/cou/lsc-ost.html>.

local operations.³⁰

Despite its overtly oppressive nature, the feudal order was not a static system. Pockets of proto-commercial activity emerged in rural directions, particularly for areas with supplemental income from textile, mining, and viticulture industries. Some peasants adopted crafts or seasonal migration to enhance their status and climb the social ladder.

Ultimately, however, feudalism remained rigidly in place. It was common practice for landowners to pocket agricultural surplus for themselves, suppressing costly productivity and innovation. Additionally, they sidestepped imperial taxation efforts, plummeting efficiency by lobbying for and negotiating personal exemptions.

Charles VI made no attempt to adjust this system, relying heavily on the nobility for the meager tax collection they did provide, along with military recruitment and political support. Peasant revolts during his reign were rare, but they were quickly and brutally repressed the few times they did occur. The status quo persisted, causing Austria to quickly fall farther and farther behind the rapidly modernizing Europe.³¹

³⁰ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

³¹ Ibid.

The Pragmatic Sanction

Charles VI's system of government was inherently unstable, able to function in times of peace and prosperity but wildly unsuited for rapid response, reform, or military mobilization. Charles recognized his monarchy was overextended and ill-prepared for future conflict. No male heir had been produced by Charles in an era fixated on dynastic succession, and thus began the long process of securing the Habsburg line.



*Pragmatic Sanction, 1713.*³²

By the second decade of Charles VI's reign, it became clear that he would not produce a surviving male heir. His wife, Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, gave birth to several children over their marriage, but only one survived into adulthood. Maria Theresa, born in 1717, was the only surviving heir of the Habsburg empire. The Habsburg tradition, like much of Europe, favored male succession, but there was no explicit Salic Law prohibiting female

³² Pragmatic Sanction. n.d. https://snl.no/pragmatisk_sanksjon.

inheritance in Austria's hereditary lands. Still, Charles feared that without a clear legal precedent, Maria's succession would provoke further disputes from foreign powers and rival branches of the family than were already common practice.

In 1713, Charles issued the Pragmatic Sanction, a unilateral legal edict and decree declaring that all Habsburg hereditary lands were indivisible and could be inherited by a female heir in the absence of a male one. It was a bold attempt to impose dynastic clarity on a chaotic imperial order. Notably, however, the Sanction had no legitimacy. It needed to be recognized by both internal estates and foreign powers to have any efficacy or enforceability. So, over the next two decades, Charles VI embarked on one of the most extensive and exhaustive diplomatic campaigns in early European history.³³

In an effort to attain internal recognition, Charles first sought to win over the domains of Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, and other provincial estates. These assemblies held their own laws regarding inheritance and often resisted central imposition. In Hungary, for example, success was elective, not hereditary, and the Diet had to be convinced not only of Maria Theresa's claim, but also of the legitimacy of the Sanction and imperial authority itself.

To secure support, Charles had to offer concessions, mostly in the form of guarantees of noble privileges, religious freedoms (particularly for persecuted Protestant regions), and non-interference in local governance. While most estates did eventually accept the Sanction's legitimacy, they only did so in exchange for a reaffirmation of their autonomy. Thus, even as Charles tried to centralize succession, he simultaneously reinforced the decentralization of authority, a contradiction that would continue to haunt the monarchy for decades.

³³ Browning, Reed. *The War of the Austrian Succession*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Amongst foreign powers, Charles sought the formal diplomatic endorsement of major European powers like France, Britain, Spain, the Dutch Republic, Prussia, and Russia. However, these powers had no interest in guaranteeing the Habsburg line. In fact, many saw Charles' eventual death as the ultimate opportunity to shift the global balance of power in their favor. Nonetheless, Charles gained their provisional recognition by offering territorial and commercial incentives.



*Ostend Company.*³⁴

For instance, he conceded Austria's fledgling yet promising overseas trading enterprise called the Ostend Company to appease allies like Britain and the Dutch Republic, eventually dissolving the company and offering further economic concessions as well. He made many territorial guarantees to placate adversaries like France and Prussia. His daughter, Maria Theresa, married her lover Francis Stephen of Lorraine, forcing him to cede his duchy to Stanisław Leszczyński in exchange for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany to avoid undue political friction.

³⁴ Ostend Logo. n.d. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ostend_Logo_1.svg.

These deals were negotiated so successfully, not because the foreign powers believed in the righteousness of Maria Theresa's claim, but because it suited their short-term strategic interests.³⁵

By 1738, nearly all major powers had recognized the Pragmatic Sanction in some capacity. However, it was built on what is called a foundation of expediency. There was no enforcement mechanism or binding legality to honor the recognition, since all the signatories had no obligation to uphold the Sanction once Charles VI passed. The Sanction proved to be more performative for the short-term rather than substantive in the long-term.

By the time of his death in October of 1740, Charles VI had stood up Maria Theresa as the undisputed heir to the Habsburg hereditary lands, backed by an imperial decree with the formal recognition of the empire's crownlands, the estates, and Europe's great powers. However, this accomplishment would shatter within weeks. Within days of news reaching him, Frederick II of Prussia invaded Silesia. France, Bavaria and Saxony formed the League of Nymphenburg, and began a campaign to seize Austrian territories. In Charles' obsessive pursuit of dynastic continuity, he sacrificed reform, national preparedness, and foreign leverage, setting up the perfect pretext for a global war.

³⁵ Anderson, M. S. *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748*. London ; New York: Longman, 1995.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Political

Government

The Austrian monarchy does not rule over a single cohesive nation-state, but rather over a collection of conquered territories known as “crownlands” like Bohemia, Hungary, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, Galicia, and some holdings in Northern Italy and the Low Countries. For generations, the Habsburg throne has been passed down by hereditary birthright, with the emperor’s residence at the heart of the political and administrative capital of the empire—the city-center of Vienna. However, despite being under the authority of the empire, each territory operates autonomously, abiding by their own customs, structures, and political norms, operating autonomously. The monarch’s authority is massively offset by the noble privileges, regional law, and clerical power of each region.

In Hungary, for instance, the local nobility called Magnates retain an extraordinary level of freedom to govern, including the ability to control taxation, military levies, legal jurisdiction, and many other powers that are traditionally reserved for a state. Additionally, the Diet of Hungary—the primary legislative body of the state—routinely defies imperial reforms and referendums, serving more as a sovereign assembly than a subservient parliament of Austria. The Estates in Bohemia maintain similar privileges. Only in Austria proper do the Habsburgs exercise some form of centralized control, but even then it is limited by entrenched aristocratic interests and a deeply stratified society.³⁶

³⁶ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

This decentralized system poses significant problems for the new Archduchess, Maria Theresa. Efforts to consolidate power, raise armies, and impose taxes are consistently being frustrated by local elites, who are eager to capitalize on the death of Charles VI and renegotiate their own privileges. This in-fighting not only threatens the legitimacy of Maria Theresa's rule, but weakens the already precarious and indecisive administration at a time of national crisis.

Diplomacy

Charles VI, like many of his Habsburg predecessors, had tried to balance this instability through the classic tradition of arranging dynastic marriages for legal compromise. His efforts to secure the Pragmatic Sanction were a textbook example of eighteenth-century diplomacy: trading influence, titles, and territory in exchange for recognition of his daughter's succession. His most powerful tool was his monarchical power to bestow sovereignty upon the surrounding estates and clergies, granting them even greater operational freedoms in their day-to-day lives.



*Portrait of Maria Theresa.*³⁷

³⁷ Portrait of Maria Theresa of Austria.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_Beaubrun_-_Portrait_of_Maria_Theresa_of_Austria,_Queen_of_France.jpg.

However, though seemingly a prosperous arrangement in the short-term, the moment Maria Theresa took the throne Austria's international position became untenable. Despite the previous two decades of assurances and deals, many European states now view the Pragmatic Sanction as simply a measure that was used to appease a dying ruler than any sort of active/binding agreement. The concessions offered by Charles VI have left Austria overextended, diplomatically fragile, and territorially exposed after guarantors reneged on their promises. The compromise has collapsed into chaos, and the crown has been left with few resources, waning political capital, and almost nonexistent goodwill.

Now, state actors are moving in. Prussia was the first to act, with Frederick the Great advancing on Silesia under the pretext of a disputed inheritance claim. His true motives, however, are clear: to exploit Austria's moment of weakness and elevate Prussia's standing as a great power. France, a longtime rival of Habsburg strength, is supporting Prussia's move, and is in the process of forging a temporary coalition with Bavaria, Saxony, and Spain, all of whom have made territorial claims to the Austrian inheritance. Though these aims were once restrained by fear of Charles VI's retribution, his death—and the loss of his amassed resources—has allowed those ambitions to run unchecked.³⁸

Bavaria's Elector Charles Albert is even seeking to become the Holy Roman Emperor himself, a bold move that would fracture centuries of Habsburg dominance over the territories. Austria's traditional allies, Britain and the Dutch Republic, hesitate to intervene. While they fear French expansion far more than they fear Habsburg weakness, they remain cautious, offering tepid diplomatic support and limited military aid to Maria Theresa at a distance. Spain, though long intertwined with the Austrian empire through dynastic ties, has aggressively pivoted to

³⁸ Browning, Reed. *The War of the Austrian Succession*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

following its Bourbon King's ambitions in Italy. Beyond the obvious betrayal, this move also threatens Habsburg holdings in Lombardy and Naples. Even within the Holy Roman Empire, where the emperor had historically exerted at least symbolic leadership, Austria is isolated, its status rapidly degenerating.³⁹

Military

Austria is currently able to muster a standing army of over 120,000 troops, calling upon units from Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, Croatia, and Italy. However, due to basic logistical shortcomings, outdated doctrine, and, most crucially, a fragmented command structure, the efficacy of said army is fast dwindling. The mere bandwidth required to coordinate varying levels of weaponry, discipline, and experience is prohibitive enough, save the glaring challenges posed by cultural and linguistic barriers. What's more, the officer corps is dominated by aristocrats that, while well-versed in courtly procedures, lack any tactical knowledge on the battlefield. Victory hinges upon Austria's ability to mobilize its diverse, multi-ethnic population, and, without the support of intermediaries like local nobility, clerics, and magistrates—all of whom are quick to resist the monarchy's consolidation of power—the raising of such a force would be near-impossible to realize in actuality.⁴⁰

³⁹ Anderson, M. S. *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748*. London ; New York: Longman, 1995.

⁴⁰ Voltaire. *The History of the War of Seventeen Hundred and Forty One*. London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1756.



*Image of soldiers in the Austrian military.*⁴¹

That said, Austria is able to boast an excellent defensive posture given their storied and well-established fortifications. They also possess a competent artillery force, likely due to the static nature of such capabilities. However, the army is slow to adapt and quite ill-prepared for the aggressive and agile division of warfare Prussia, Austria's most imminent threat, tends to favor. This disparity in both mobility and modernity between the two states is catastrophic, and remedying the situation will prove to be decisively paramount in affecting the outcome of this conflict.⁴²

Maria Theresa's most immediate military challenge is to raise a loyal, efficacious, and unified fighting force from a deeply resentful and divisive conglomerate of territories. But even this effort is complicated by the resistance from the nobility, the autonomy of regional militias,

⁴¹ Military uniforms: Austria, Trompeter [und] Pauker .. 1700. n.d.
<https://picryl.com/media/trompeter-und-pauker-1700-2c87b0>.

⁴² Hapsburg military 17th-18th century - War history. Accessed October 22, 2025.
<https://warhistory.org/@msw/article/hapsburg-military-17th-18th-century>.

and the crown's fast dwindling resources. Without a major shift in strategy, Austria may be unable to defend itself, let alone retain its territories or wage a global war.

Economic

Taxation

The Habsburg empire's tax system is an ineffective labyrinth of legalities, exemptions, and corruption. Because the monarchy does not rule over a centralized state, taxation policies vary widely between crownlands. While nobles are largely removed and exempt from the direct taxation processes in Hungary, nobles in Bohemia exert enormous influence over the collection and distribution of those taxes. In many areas, peasants bear a disproportionate share of the extraction, obligated to pay both the crown and local lords, as well as church and legal officials.⁴³

This system places a majority of the tension on rural populations, the largest yet least equipped class to bear the brunt. The growing military drafts, mobilization, and wartime expenditures have only worsened the condition. As noble exemptions continue to increase and peasant resources are being squeezed harder than ever before, revenue is at an all-time low. Maria Theresa's government lacks the power or authority to impose new taxes on the personal reserves of local elites, who often resist or downright ignore the directives.

Furthermore, the rise of tax farming—a practice that allows private citizens to pay for the right to collect taxes from other citizens—has introduced a new level of corruption in these communities. These tax farmers pursue the position with the intention to exploit their neighbors for personal gain. This tanked the already minimal public trust in imperial institutions. Without a

⁴³ "The Nobility as an Economic Force in the Habsburg Empire." scilog.
<https://scilog.fwf.ac.at/en/magazine/the-nobility-as-an-economic-force-in-the-habsburg-empire>.

reliable framework for taxation, Austria's struggles to fund its army, infrastructure, or public services will only continue to deteriorate.⁴⁴

Industry

Austria's industrial pursuits are in a similarly fragile state. The Habsburg lands boast diverse and rich resources, like agricultural abundance in Hungary, mineral mining in Bohemia, and textile production in Silesia. However, with the seizure of Silesia by Prussia, Austria's economic functionality has been deprived of its most critical revenue source and primary industrial capacity for textiles, coal, and metals. Austria Proper retains their agricultural wealth, but their manufacturing has grown stagnant. Bohemia's mineral extraction is inefficient, and dominated by local elites with little incentive to contribute to the broader imperial economy.

Crownlands like Galicia and Carniola have a surplus of timber and grain, but their infrastructure for harvesting and distributing those goods remains minimal and poor due to difficulties with transport and trade. Roads are poorly maintained, and inconsistencies with internal tariffs makes cross-border commerce within the empire expensive, slow, and risky. The lack of any standardized currency or exchange rates further complicates trade and disrupts many attempts at introducing industrial policies.⁴⁵

Abroad, Austria faces many struggles to compete with the export-driven economies of allies like Britain and the Dutch Republic. Its economic model is feudal and static, dependent on land rents, feudal dues, church taxes, noble contributions, and peasant labor rather than innovation or market dynamism. War has only amplified these weaknesses, and, with the empire losing vital regions left and right, Austria's economy threatens to plummet beyond recovery.

⁴⁴ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Leverages

To compensate for the limited domestic resources, Austria has historically relied upon a series of “levers” that are now failing the empire. These levers are noble patronage, the church, and foreign loans. Wealthy landowners would traditionally supply funds and troops in exchange for certain privileges, often geared towards attaining greater autonomy. However, many are now withholding that support in anticipation of rival claimants usurping Maria Theresia and offering better deals. The monarchy also utilizes religious institutions and Church-affiliated organizations for access to their vast tracts of land that generate significant revenue, however, this loyalty is far from guaranteed. It is particularly questionable in regions where ecclesiastical authorities are intricately intertwined with the local elites.⁴⁶

What’s more, Austria’s dependence on foreign loans is proving to be an unsustainable practice. In moments of crisis, Vienna has traditionally secured sustenance from merchant bankers in Genoa, Amsterdam, and London, but now that the monarchy’s legitimacy and militaristic capabilities have been called into question those creditors are growing more and more reluctant. The gold reserves are dwindling and interest rates rising, and, without outside support the empire cannot sustain a prolonged military campaign. The resultant condition is an unreliable dependence on volatile temporary relationships with no central banking, bond issuance, or debt management to stabilize such support.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “The Nobility as an Economic Force in the Habsburg Empire.” scilog.
<https://scilog.fwf.ac.at/en/magazine/the-nobility-as-an-economic-force-in-the-habsburg-empire>.

⁴⁷ Voltaire. *The History of the War of Seventeen Hundred and Forty One*. London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1756.

Social

Feudalism

With diplomacy faltering and an all-out war on the horizon, the daily reality for Austria's subjects remains largely unchanged, though similarly unbearable. The vast majority of the Habsburg population are peasants under feudal obligation with little to no political agency. The rural majority bear the brunt of state taxation, military conscription, and famine with few protections or avenues for raising one's status. Though the backbone of agricultural production, they are treated as disposable and are only given meager plots of land in exchange for their labor.⁴⁸

In Austria and Bohemia, nobles still wield near-total control over land, labor, and law. They resist reform fiercely, with even mild attempts at reducing feudal dues being met with open hostility and threats. Hungary, on the other hand, presents a much different picture. While its peasantry suffers many of the same hardships, the Magyar nobility retain such privileges that make them both the greatest potential threat and asset. Maria Theresa's reign thus begins with a major social contradiction: she needs the loyalty of the people for the preservation of her empire, but cannot secure it without challenging the aristocracy upon which her rule depends.

Judiciary

The judicial system is fragmented and inconsistent, still rooted in feudal custom and noble privilege unlike other comparable states at the time. Legal authority is split between imperial institutions like the *Reichshofrat* and *Reichskammergericht*, ecclesiastical courts, and regional legal traditions, leading to confusion over legitimacy and authority. In these courts,

⁴⁸ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

nobles are routinely shielded from prosecution while commoners face harsh, localized justice as scapegoats. Corruption and inefficiency are obviously rampant.⁴⁹

Efforts to reform or standardize the judiciary face the strongest resistance of any matter in Austria. Legal pluralism is seen as a fundamental bulwark of noble independence, a privilege elites will not easily forego. What's more, without a functioning judicial system the crown is unable to enforce its contacts, collect much-needed taxes, or manage its economy. Austria's problem is not a lack of laws, but rather far too many applied too inconsistently to carry any weight.



*Habsburgs Church.*⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Himl, Pavel. "A Revolutionary's 'Stravaganza': Police and Morality in the Habsburg Empire (1780–1830): Austrian History Yearbook." Cambridge Core, March 20, 2023.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/austrian-history-yearbook/article/revolutionarys-stravaganza-police-and-morality-in-the-habsburg-empire-17801830/8191BBC8BAC7F4605F7462DFD8A8B1F7>.

⁵⁰ Augustinian Church Vienna. n.d.
<https://www.airial.travel/attractions/austria/wien/augustinian-church-vienna-jhG6HTwy>.

Church

The Catholic Church is one of the most powerful institutions across the Habsburg lands. It controls a vast amount of land, collects tithes, operates schools, hospitals, and charities. It also plays a crucial role in molding public opinion and popular belief, and has the potential to reinforce the divine right of kings and therefore the legitimacy of Maria Theresa's rule.⁵¹

However, it is not a monolith across the board. Bishops and abbots often operate with significant independence and prioritize their loyalty to Rome rather than Vienna, sometimes going so far as to actively obstruct imperial directives that conflict with their local interests. These interests are often conservative in nature, inhibiting attempts at reformation. They resist Enlightenment ideas, and are against social change. Maria Theresa must be wary of losing a vital source of authority, protecting her ecclesiastical support to legitimize her authority while not alienating reformers and practical administrators seeking to modernize the state.

Your Task

Maria Theresa has ascended to the throne. Delegates will serve as regional actors, allies and enemies of the empire alike, vying for your personal legacy and interests. Members must grapple with urgent matters, such as Austria's ability to protect its territories from foreign invasion and internal revolt simultaneously. How will the monarchy maintain legitimacy when its own legal foundations are being challenged? Which alliances can be salvaged—and which must be severed? Can internal reform wait, or must it be pursued alongside military mobilization? The fate of the Habsburg monarchy and the balance of power in Europe hangs in the balance!

⁵¹ Beller, Steven. *A concise history of Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.

DELEGATE POSITIONS

Maria Astranova – Close Advisor to Maria Theresa

Bold, brilliant, and now burdened with helping run an empire. Maria Astranova makes decisions with the resolve of a general and the warmth of a mother—often at the same time. She juggles war, marriage, proposals, and imperial reform, all before breakfast! She has the admiration of courtiers, the respect of rivals, and a nuisance of a baby on her hip at all times. She deeply admires Maria Theresa and believes in order, honor, and, of course, Maria Theresa's undeniable right to rule.

Count Friedrich von Haugwitz - Minister of Internal Affairs

Friedrich, or Ricky, as his friends call him, sees disorder the way others see dirt on a marble floor: something that must be scrubbed out, viciously and immediately. He wants to standardize everything, from tax records to child labor. A tireless reformer with a spreadsheet for a soul, he believes bureaucracy will save the empire. Known for his icy stare and steaming tea, he dreams of an Austria where paperwork is currency and nobles are clerks.

Cardinal Leopold Kollonitsch - Archbishop of Esztergom

A man of utmost piety, the Cardinal has a talent for politics and velvet robes that demand attention. As Hungary's religious primate, Leopold's practice is in both souls and voters. He delivers sermons that echo throughout the cavernous stone walls of parliament, whispers of policy inundated within. He prays for peace, yet prepares for the worst—namely Protestants or Ottomans.

Baroness Eva von Strattmann - Advisor on Courtly Affairs

Eva has arranged more marriages than most priests, and dissolved almost as many. She wears pearls, solves scandals, and has a cousin in every country of Europe. With a wink and a whisper, she can shift the trajectory of entire dynasties. She collects gossip like others collect coins, and has never lost a negotiation to this day. She may hate disorder, but Eva loves romance (with a dowry, that is).

Franz Ignaz von Reichenbach - Bohemian Imperial Judge

Stoic, scholarly, and suspicious of anyone too cheerful, Judge Reichenbach speaks only to quote a precedent. He is respected for his fairness, and feared for his footnotes. What he lacks in friends he more than makes up for in acquaintances. Some say he even keeps a gavel under his pillow at night. He believes Bohemia deserves justice, even if it must wait its turn.

Countess Rozália Széchenyi - Hungarian Landowner

Elegant and sharp-tongued, the Countess is known to be wildly progressive amongst her elder aristocratic peers. She owns vast estates and treats her people with respect, funding schools, reading to children, and debating the nobility day-in and day-out. She would rather host a symposium than a masquerade ball any day. Some even wonder when she finds time to sleep! She hopes to modernize Hungary, one stubborn noble at a time.

General Otto von Starhemberg – Commander of Austrian Forces in Moravia

Rugged, grim, and severely allergic to court politics (and buckwheat), General Starhemberg barks orders and commands iron discipline amongst his men. He's been wounded in battle six

times, but promoted half as many. His hatred of paperwork is offset only by his love of artillery. He thinks every problem can be solved by marching faster, much to the chagrin of the troops. Though, as some have discovered, he secretly writes poetry about cannons in his office.

Major István Károlyi - Hungarian Hussar Commander

Major Karolyi is flashy and fearless. A fan of dramatic entrances almost as much as dramatic exits. He is the empire's most handsome cavalryman, and its least reliable dinner guest. He swears his loyalty to the crown, country, and his mustache (in that order). His troops and countrymen adore him, though his generals aren't as sure. A loose cannon, many say his days in the public eye are numbered.

Magdalena Dörnstein – Economic Policy Advisor

Magdalena is cool under pressure, sharp in conversation, and fluent in five types of currency. Her calculations have saved the empire's checkbook more than once, though thanklessly. She believes economics is a superior form of warfare, and one she would be a general in—balancing budgets the way others balance blades. She despises waste, flattery, and bad wine.

Georgio II of Great Britain – Advisor to King of Great Britain

The advisor to the King of Britain, Georgio II divides his time between helping George II rule and resting in his chambers. He doesn't prefer to act in excess, having others raise his cups for him. George dislikes Parliament, barely tolerates France, and cannot stand a meeting gone long. If one requires an audience with him on important matters, they are likely to find him in his bedchambers (regardless of the time of day).

Duke William Cavendish – British Ambassador to Vienna

Polished, diplomatic, and cunning, Duke Cavendish is fascinated by Maria Theresa. Her finesse and strategy impress him, amongst other things. He ardently wishes to negotiate with her, ready to smile through treaties and dance through espionage alike. He keeps one eye on Vienna and one foot in London, always ready to run—whichever way the tide is turning.

Willem van der Meer – Dutch Republic Envoy

Willem is cautious to a fault. Surrounded by taller and grander nations, the envoy of the Dutch Republic favors neutrality, long meetings, and coffee. He speaks softly, and his temper mirrors that of a bunny rabbit. Willem finds his joy in treaties and compromise, believing every conflict to have a peaceful resolution—one where he can be far away if necessary.

Prince Eugene of Savoy – Retired Austrian Marshal

Old, wise, and still kicking, Prince Eugene of Savoy's reputation precedes him. He may be retired, but tales of his conquests are still sung far and wide in every regiment. His memoirs are half strategy, half cash grab. He advises Maria Theresa like a grandfather, and can win any argument with eye contact alone.

Wilhelm of Prussia – Assistant to the King of Prussia

A philosopher turned assistant to the king, Wilhelm stands almost as tall as his superiority complex. He writes verse with a musket and guides armies with a pen. Though charming in conversation, he is ruthless in policy, and guides state policies as a board game he is destined to win. When his name is mentioned, friend and foe alike can't help but feel their palms start to sweat.

Charles Albert of Bavaria – Elector of Bavaria

Ambitious beyond his means, Charles never really grew up. He believes the Habsburgs stole his crown, and, as his siblings know well, the Elector of Bavaria does not take kindly to people stealing his toys. Though Bavarian by birth, Charles has always felt imperial in his heart. He speaks like an orator and fights like a debtor, with strong allies and questionable contingency plans.

Maurice de Saxe – Marshal of France

A force to be reckoned with, on the battlefield or on stage. Dashing and dramatic, Maurice commands armies and hearts with equal amounts of flair. Though born illegitimate, he is now indispensable. He keeps France dangerous and his men well-dressed, always keeping an eye out for the Hungarian Hussar.

Philip V of Spain – King of Spain

Brooding, Philip V of Spain has yet to admit failure. With the help of many advisors, saints, and bureaucrats, he rules the Bourbons of Spain with lackluster energy. A professional holder of grudges, Phil keeps one eye on Italy, both eyes on France, and a hand around Austria's neck. He prefers prayers to politics, but his preaching is rarely silent.

Julian of Saxony – Assistant to the King of Poland

Heavyset in both body and bureaucracy, Julian advises Augustus III on policies that span two lands and neither are run efficiently. He inherited a sizable estate, but misplaced the deed somewhere in Warsaw. He is known more for his banquets than battles – while his assistants

(yes, he has his own assistants) vet policy, he does the toasting (and often the uncalled-for singing). He thinks indecision is a diplomatic virtue, and does a poor job pretending to enjoy horseback riding.

Stanisław Leszczyński – Exiled Polish King

A king without a kingdom, Stanislaw feels a bit out of place. He dreams of Enlightenment reforms almost as often as he dreams of revenge. He is backed by France and spilling over with charm, but his veneer is beginning to crack. He hosts elegant salons, writes essays on tolerance, and fraternizes with the public, all the while clenching his fist imaging the throne.

Francis Stephen of Lorraine – Grand Duke of Tuscany

Husband and lover of Maria Theresa, Francis gave up Lorraine for love—and the most difficult in-laws. He loves science, but has become a slave to paperwork. Constantly overshadowed by his wife, he takes advantage of the quiet to pursue coinage and chemistry. He knows more than he lets on, but smiles through the snubs for the sake of his beloved.

Anselm Dietrich – Minister of Roads and Infrastructure

Anselm's enthusiasm for cobblestones over courtiers tends to rub people the wrong way. A chronic victim of motion sickness, Anselm dreams of smooth highways and well-drained ditches. He thinks bridges are far more practical for an empire than pieces of paper, unless they are blueprints. He is notorious for once slapping a duke for blocking a toll road, an act he has repeatedly failed to deny he wouldn't commit again.

Helene von Mautner – Head of Vienna’s Mercantile Council

Perpetually overbooked and understaffed, Helene runs Vienna’s trade like a midnight siege operation. She has a knack for names and faces, as well as bribes. Though a supporter of imperial unity, everything has its price. She wears steel stays everywhere she goes, even to bed. One day she wants to retire and teach business classes to noble children.

Colonel Nicola Bánffy – Transylvanian Border Commander

Colonel Bánffy doesn’t like people. He guards the edges of the empire, and prefers it that way. He gets anxious any time a caravan approaches, and goes into cardiac arrest if a traveler tries to speak to him. He would rather close the borders entirely, and thinks everyone would be better off if they stayed home all day.

Sebastian Holzmann – Court Censor and Director of Imperial Publishing

Sebastian loves free speech—as long as he approves it. Mr. Holzmann decides what the empire reads, and what will never see the light of day. His side hustle consists of banning books, only to collect a stash for lining his pockets later. In an age of uncertainty, information is the greatest currency, making Sebastian the richest man in the empire.

Bishop Lukas Kovács – Croatian Cleric and Political Delegate

An earnest man, Bishop Kovacs is eloquent and unafraid. He bridges the gap between church and state, defending both local rights and Catholic values with equal vigor and vivacity. His robes may be plain, but his unique booming voice is anything but. He is known for his loud

sermons that double as policy speeches, advocating for the practice of chanting—in both senses of the word.

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