



Research Paper

## Choking Connections: How the Triumvirate Murdered the Republic from the Inside.

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When Virgil wrote the Aeneid from 30 to 19 BCE, he made sure to highlight the sheer struggle it took for Rome to be born. In his own Odyssey, Aeneas leads his men to endure the wrath of both gods and men, killing and leaving ruin until he establishes a model city of virtue and piety. Of course, Virgil composed this epic after enduring almost two decades of civil war and bloodshed, when warring generals stamped out the old, dying embers of the Republic and replaced it with a new Roman Empire. Virgil's poetry, where Aeneas and Turnus battle in a bloody campaign to determine the fate of Italy, only ending their conflict with the violent but unnecessary end of the latter, bears multiple parallels to the civil war between Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and Gaius Julius Caesar, calling into question just how necessary such a ruinous conflict was in establishing peace under a new political system. Were Pompey and Caesar inevitably fated to clash over their conflicting ideologies, or were there ways where they could have peacefully negotiated a compromise to their diverging views? Thankfully, there are answers from the powerful elites of the Republic, who, although outsiders to the dynamic of the triumvirs, nonetheless give a first-hand account of the fall of the Republic. Marcus Tullius Cicero provides fascinating insight into the complex power dynamics between the triumvirs, magistrates, and Senate during the twilight of the Republic. His letters to his closest friends and confidants indeed highlight how a few agitators ignominiously ended almost five centuries of democracy. Cicero's letters review that the complex web of friendships and patronage of both Pompey and Caesar, as powerful military men with a wide base of support gained from their stance on populist policies, effectively paralyzed a majority of the Roman elite into inaction by forcing their loyalty through false friendships and threats of violence, allowing them to manipulate the Republic to strengthen their power at the expense of the now corrupt, powerless Republican government. With the Senate's power and credibility gone, Pompey and Caesar could fill in the power vacuum left by it, expanding their influence into the elections and courts, and with the government irrevocably polarized between Pompey and Caesar without any room for compromise, violence between the two factions and Caesar's Civil War became inevitable.

Even before the birth of the First Triumvirate, Rome was plagued with a variety of issues, suggesting that Republican democracy was failing to maintain the state. The Republican government had been historically sequestered for solely the elite and wealthy patricians; most offices, from the humble quaestor to the consuls themselves, were largely reserved for only the upper echelons of Roman society, for those who went through the political *cursus honorum*.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the vast majority of the Roman populace, who were commoner plebeians, did have some political representation, primarily through the office of Tribune of the Plebs, a position reserved only for plebeians. However, these offices, although powerful on the surface with their ability to introduce legislation and unilaterally veto any measure they did not like, did not adequately balance the power between the upper and lower ranks of Roman society.<sup>2</sup> The suppression and murders of the Gracchi Brothers in the 2nd century BCE by the Senate, for example, for their populist policies of a grain dole and land redistribution, highlight how Roman elites typically desired to use the political system to keep power and money firmly among the wealthy few.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Frost Abbot. *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions*. (Boston, MA: Ginn & Company, 1901), 65-67.

<sup>2</sup>Frank Frost Abbot, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions*, 27, 32-33.

<sup>3</sup>Frank Frost Abbot, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions*, 94-98.

However, Cicero's letters suggest a fundamental shift in the political strategy of Roman politicians in the two decades prior to Caesar's Civil War, where some politicians began to increasingly curry favor and support among the lower echelons of society, seeing them as the future of political power in Rome. Men of all political offices and of all classes, from governors to tribunes to consuls, began to gain mass appeal among the plebeians through populist policy and rhetoric, forming a new type of official who did not need to rely on the Senate for his power.

One of the earliest examples of this political shift can be seen in Publius Clodius Pulcher, a Tribune of the Plebs. How he obtained the office in the first place reflects this change in ideology; he, born to patricians, was adopted into a plebeian family just so he could obtain the position of Tribune of the Plebs, which was reserved for only plebeians.<sup>4</sup> The fact that he was willing to give up all of the status and privilege that came with his patrician name and family suggests how importantly he viewed gaining the approval and support of the plebeians. Furthermore, Cicero's complaints about his policies further indicate how he used populist policies to gain support from his commoner supporters; his support of free grain and bread for the plebeians drummed up widespread appeal among the hungry poor of Rome, suggesting that he was very focused on appealing to the plebs by buying their loyalty with food and safety.<sup>5</sup>

However, the difference between Clodius and the Gracchi Brothers was that Clodius was able to effectively convert his allure into political prowess, making him a formidable force in the Senate and government. Indeed, Cicero's lamentations that many senators were afraid to even speak up against Clodius, who, having exiled Cicero, vehemently opposed the return of Cicero's property, highlight the degree of power Clodius wielded.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the fact that Clodius could even exile such a powerful politician, who exposed the Cataline conspiracy and was lauded as a hero of Rome, further suggests just how much power Clodius gained by utilizing the power of the plebeians.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Clodius's new power also came with the ability to command the plebeians to do his bidding; whether it be heckling his rival Titus Annius Milo during his speeches in the Senate, stalling the Senate session by causing a commotion, or vandalizing and destroying the property of his rivals, Clodius often found new, extralegal ways to exercise his power through his supporter base, suggesting that holding command of the plebeians would prove to be an important way for gaining political might and power.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, no man would obtain and utilize widespread appeal among the plebeians more than Caesar himself, whose uniting of the plebeians against the Pompey-supporting Senate created a politician who no longer needed to acquiesce to any of the Senate's demands, allowing him to pursue absolute power. Although he himself was from a patrician family, Caesar's policies towards both poor soldiers and citizens mark just how effectively he curried favor from both commoners and the poor. Towards the impoverished civilian population, he extended grace and charity, being generous in gifts to men of all classes, paying their debts, and aiding with low-interest loans.<sup>9</sup> He even hosted grand feasts and gladiatorial games for the public in the wake of the deaths of multiple of his family members.<sup>10</sup> These actions highlight just how appealing Caesar was to the plebeians; it's not hard to imagine that they would throw their support and favor to him rather than the seemingly elitist, self-serving politicians of the Senate. His actions towards his soldiers and subordinates did not differ; when given the opportunity to enrich himself, Caesar instead rewarded his army, doubling their pay and handing out free bread.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Caesar, although far more powerful than Clodius, still found it prudent to ally rather than compete with the tribune by helping him be transferred from the patrician to the plebeian class, gaining the favor of the plebeians who had thrown their support to Clodius by keeping himself as a close ally of the tribune.<sup>12</sup>

These actions ensured his popularity among his plebeian soldiers, furthering his image as a man of the people while simultaneously giving him a loyal core of commoners and soldiers with whom he could order to do his bidding, independent of the Senate. After all, why would they disobey a leader who had been so generous to them? The depth to which Caesar valued plebeian support was also exemplified after his victory over Pompey;

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<sup>4</sup> Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*. Translated by Michael Grant. (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), Divius Julius, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Letters to Atticus*. Translated by David Roy Shackleton Bailey. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 4.1.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 2.18.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Letters to his Friends*. Translated by W. Glynn Williams. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), 5.2.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 4.2-4.3.

<sup>9</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Divius Julius, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Divius Julius, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Divius Julius, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Divius Julius, 20.

the fact that Caesar made sure to reward his veteran soldiers with land, hand out free money and grain to the plebeians, and cancel the debts of poor Romans after defeating Pompey suggests that Caesar, even after eliminating his greatest rival, found it prudent to continue to curry the support of the plebs, indicating that he viewed them as the new source of political power.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, these policies were the logical conclusion of his decades-long legacy of aiding and appealing to the lower ranks of society, suggesting that Caesar's end goal was always to gain the favor of the plebs and the power they held. This favor gave Caesar the power to shape Rome as he saw fit, ignoring the measures and pushes of the Senate for peace as he marched into civil war. Pompey also gained authority and power by appealing to the opposite demographic; by distinguishing himself as a politician who detested the populist policies that Caesar pursued, Pompey gained wide support among wealthy elites and politicians who held similar views, giving him a far stronger hold in the Senate by making the senators themselves his supporters.<sup>14</sup> This highlights that both triumvirs gained power and authority through their different stances on the plebeians, which gave them widespread appeal and support among specific demographics that they knew that they could rely on for support, knowing that the wealthy patrician would likely never support the plebeian and that the poor plebeian would often never join the side of the patrician.

Of course, plebeian power alone did not foment the rise of Caesar's Civil War. After all, Pompey, who largely carried the favor of Roman elites, proved to be a strong challenger to the dominance of Caesar. Both of these men had to have some common factor that gave them strength. This factor was their military leadership and provincial governorships, which changed during the years prior to 49 BCE to give generals and governors increasingly more power and influence over the lands and armies they administered. Cicero's letters to his brother Quintus provide fascinating insight into the evolving role of the military governor during the buildup to Caesar's Civil War. These generals, who were assigned to rule the far-off provinces of the Roman Empire from Gaul to Asia, progressively turned towards the interests of their subjects and soldiers, building loyalty directly to the military governor himself rather than to Rome.

Cicero's guidance to his brother Quintus Tullius Cicero, who governed the province of Asia from 61–59 BCE, about how to rule a province also provides fascinating insight into the new role of the governor in these changing times. For example, the older Cicero exhorts his younger brother to be a model leader in virtue and character, never giving into the corruption that plagued older administrations.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that governors had to now pay special attention to how they acted in public, specifically to please their subjects. Although previous, more corrupt governors were fine with enriching themselves and Rome on the backs of the native population, Cicero's advice here particularly highlights maintaining the favor of the provincial people as something critical. Indeed, the elder Cicero even highlights that serving the people, no matter how "barbarous" they may be, should be the first priority of the governor, further hammering in the importance of treating the provincials well.<sup>16</sup> Although Cicero was a person who was very obsessed with acting virtuously, his advice here nonetheless heralds a new type of governor that men like Caesar acted like when they were administrators. By treating their subjects well, these men were able to effectively gather a strong support base in the outer provinces, giving themselves power and strength.

These new military governors also centralized authority in the province around themselves, necessitating that both subjects and soldiers be loyal to themselves rather than to Rome. The fact that Marcus Tullius Cicero argues that his younger brother, as the model governor, should have every act and impact of his government be an extension of his power, with sergeants and officers essentially being nothing but auxiliaries for extending the rule and jurisdiction of himself, highlights that military governors increasingly coalesced power and command under themselves in place of Rome or the Senate.<sup>17</sup> Because of this centralization, anything that the provincial government did, positive or negative, would be from the direct will and control of the governor himself, both incentivizing governors like Caesar or Pompey to treat their subjects well with good policy while simultaneously building loyalty and trust from their subjects, having been taken care of with beneficial policies. Furthermore, the fact that he argues that the soldiers themselves should be viewed as an extension of the leader's power highlights how military men increasingly sought to gain more control over their soldiers. By making soldiers answer directly to their general or governor, these men were able to effectively curry the loyalty of their soldiers to themselves instead of Rome. After all, why would a soldier or officer choose faraway Rome over the commander who had guided them and treated them well for years? The direct influence generals had over their armies also incentivized these governors to treat their soldiers with virtue and respect, building admiration and camaraderie between the soldier and general.

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<sup>13</sup>Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Divius Julius, 38.

<sup>14</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Letters to his Friends*, 8.4.

<sup>15</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*. Translated by David Roy Shackleton Bailey. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 1.1.

<sup>16</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 1.1.

<sup>17</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 1.1.

Indeed, Marcus Tullius Cicero's actions almost a decade later, directly prior to Caesar's Civil War, as governor of Cilicia further emphasize this shift in the mentality and philosophy of the military governor. In his letters to Atticus, Cicero details one of his journeys in his province. He notes the resentment of the locals against Rome and the Senate in every town they visit, given that they complain about their inability to pay taxes and how harsh their lives are. However, Cicero, despite these lamentations, refuses any of their already scarce resources, accepting neither firewood nor hay and often sleeping under tents rather than a roof.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Cicero himself, instead of taking more from the impoverished native residents, instead lets them keep what they have, pitying their situation, suggests that he highly values the happiness of his subjects. Although they are suffering under the plight of Rome, Cicero does whatever he can, as their ruler, to make their lives easier and make himself less of a burden, making them view him more favorably.

Nor did Cicero attempt to only please his foreign subjects; he was equally generous towards his soldiers in terms of rewards and payments. After waging war in Asia Minor and defeating the Pindenissetae, Cicero, upon receiving the spoils of war, took only the captives, giving the rest of the treasure to his soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Cicero could have, as the governor and leader of the campaign, taken a majority of the riches, leaving only scraps for his subordinates. The fact that he instead rewarded his veterans with money highlights how keen he was to keep them in his favor. This distribution of wealth directly mirrors how Caesar rewarded his veterans with money and land after defeating Pompey, suggesting that military men, above all else, found it prudent to keep their soldiers loyal to themselves rather than to the central government of Rome. After all, soldiers would be more likely to support a leader acting against the will of the Republic if they had personally enriched and treated their subordinates well, making it all the more important for these power-hungry men to curry the loyalty of their soldiers.

These measures of building loyalty proved to be invaluable for men like Pompey and Caesar; with the loyalty of the provinces and soldiers guaranteed, they could afford to flex their power in the Senate, knowing that they had a strong military and resources to back themselves up. It's no surprise that the most important of the first triumvirs, Pompey and Caesar, were both men with illustrious military careers and governorships. Even Marcus Licinius Crassus, understanding the value of having a support base of soldiers, likely campaigned in Parthia for military glory and to gain a loyal core of veterans, although the results of this war were far more disastrous, ending in his death.<sup>20</sup> The effects of this power centralization can also be seen in Cicero's lamentations over the death of the Republic; that he concludes that the wills of powerful military men controlled the destiny of Rome, not the will of the Republic, indicates the sheer power disparity between the Senate and the triumvirs.<sup>21</sup> Cicero also highlights that these men alone held the power over whether civil war occurred or not, given that the war started due to Caesar refusing to dissolve his armies, who were his supporter base and loyal subjects.<sup>22</sup> Both of these conclusions underscore that instead of the Senate, powerful military men, with their core of faithful soldiers and provinces, held true power over Rome. Indeed, the fact that Pompey and Caesar rather than Caesar and the Senate led the opposing factions in the civil war further highlights that generals, not politicians, held the power to start and wage war.

Of course, military men like Pompey and Caesar could not have gained so much authority in the government without the simultaneous decay of authority in the Senate and the traditional Republican governmental system. For these men to have been able to seize so much power, the government must have also been too weak to keep hold of that same power, relinquishing it to the triumvirs. Pompey and Caesar played a direct role in fomenting the downfall of the Senate, using their connections and influence to force magistrates and senators to stay loyal to the Triumvirate, paralyzing the government from meaningfully resisting their goals.

The precursors to the decay of the Republic can be seen years before the outbreak of war, when almost all magistrates became too afraid to speak out against other politicians, fearing violence and retribution. The beginnings of this fear can be seen in the relationship between Cicero and the Triumvirate. Cicero wrote to Atticus that he was afraid of the rise in power of the First Triumvirate, fearing either death and exile if he spoke out against them or slavery if he continued to work under their control.<sup>23</sup> If Cicero himself was frightened to speak out against the triumvirs for fear of violence, then other, less powerful politicians would surely be even more afraid to voice their discontent. Indeed, that Cicero only names one young official, Gaius Scribonius Curio, who dared to criticize the Triumvirate merely illuminates just how many older, more experienced statesmen with more influence were scared to do the same. Indeed, criticizing the wrong person could empirically have dangerous consequences; Cicero himself was exiled from Rome for angering Clodius due to

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<sup>18</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 5.16.

<sup>19</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 5.20.

<sup>20</sup>Frank Frost Abbot, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions*, 114.

<sup>21</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 9.7.

<sup>22</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.14.

<sup>23</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 2.18.



his lengthy testimony against Clodius in the Bona Dea scandal, where Clodius was caught infiltrating and intruding on the sacred rites of priestesses.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, many senators and officials were rendered powerless and voiceless in opposing the rise of the triumvirs, strengthening the First Triumvirate while weakening the Republic.

Cicero also provides fascinating insight into other aspects of the power dynamics between the triumvirs and the Republican government. In the years prior to the civil war, he found it prudent to curry the favor of both Pompey and Caesar.<sup>25</sup> Nor was this aim for friendship unilateral; the triumvirs, according to Cicero, always found it important to keep themselves in his good graces. That Crassus began to publicly and lengthily praise Cicero directly after Pompey extolled Cicero in one of his speeches highlights how important the triumvirs found it to keep powerful political leaders like Cicero as allies.<sup>26</sup> This aim of friendship remains a common thread throughout all of Cicero's letters and all of his years; even when Cicero was powerless, exiled by Clodius to Greece for daring to oppose him, Pompey still vehemently advocated for Cicero and fought for his return, continuing to argue for the return of Cicero's property after his return from exile.<sup>27</sup> This further indicates how the triumvirs found it prudent to ally themselves with potentially powerful men, keeping those men in debt and favorable to themselves. Interestingly, Cicero himself felt that there was little trust remaining between himself and Pompey prior to his exile, whom he saw as immoral and power-hungry.<sup>28</sup> However, that Pompey nonetheless offered his assistance to Cicero, who actually accepted the aid, highlights that personal feelings and desires were put aside in favor of more pragmatic goals, making these relationships not true friendships but more like business dealings or trade agreements.

Indeed, the theme of viewing friendships and alliances as business-like investments was a common thread throughout the complex Republican political web during the twilight of the Republic. Even Cicero himself was a victim of this mentality; that he considered a friendship with Caesar as an investment that would pay even greater political dividends with time highlights how transactional and fake these relationships were.<sup>29</sup> Given that Cicero viewed Caesar in this manner, it's not hard to imagine that Caesar and Pompey viewed their political friendships in a similar manner, where they invested in an alliance in exchange for political favors. Another example of the business-like nature of Republican political alliances can be seen in Cicero's relationship with Tiberius Claudius Nero. Cicero, after helping Nero, viewed him not as a friend but essentially as a client, where he invested aid in him in exchange for gratitude and future political favors.<sup>30</sup> This system of clientelism indicates that many alliances were formed out of neither friendship nor personal connection; rather, they were formed out of political necessity, where any alliance was expected to further the goals of both parties. Because of this, these partnerships inevitably became weak and superficial, given that there was no emotional attachment behind them.

The fundamental problem with these fragile relations became clear when they always ended with betrayal and backstabbing once the triumvirs began to aggressively pursue their goals to the direct harm of their client-like allies. For example, Titus Annius Milo, the virtuous rival of the tribune Clodius, found it prudent to ally himself and curry the favor of Pompey as a counterbalance to the alliance between Clodius and Caesar. Pompey did indeed respond to this friendship positively, choosing to support and defend Milo during his often violent conflict with Clodius.<sup>31</sup> However, this relationship did not last; Cicero later mentions that Pompey had completely abandoned his alliance with Milo, giving him nothing while throwing all of his support to Gutta in order to strengthen his Triumvirate relationship with Caesar.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Pompey treated Milo as a mere political pawn to further his own goals highlights the superficiality of the relationships between the triumvirs and other magistrates; no one was the true friend of Pompey and Caesar, as they treated magistrates and officials as comrades when useful and as waste when they were not.

Despite these treacheries, what drove the final nail in the Republic's coffin was that the officials and senators, knowing of the triumvirs' treachery, refused to act against them, fearing their wrath and blindly continuing to invest in their "friendships", hoping for an alliance that would never be maintained. Just as these politicians were afraid of criticizing the Triumvirate with words, they were even more afraid of criticizing and opposing the Triumvirate with actions. Even after Pompey's betrayal, Milo still refused to oppose the

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<sup>24</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 1.16.

<sup>25</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 2.15.

<sup>26</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 1.14.

<sup>27</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 3.14.

<sup>28</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 2.21.

<sup>29</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 3.8.

<sup>30</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 13.64.

<sup>31</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 2.3.

<sup>32</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 3.8.

Triumvirate, fearing retribution from the powerful general, reflecting an attitude of fear among officials about ever meaningfully resisting the increasing power of the Triumvirate.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Marcus Tullius Cicero, despite knowing about Caesar's multiple failures to keep his promises, still exhorted his younger brother to continue to curry the triumvir's favor, arguing that Caesar's goodwill was more important than any fulfillment of his promises.<sup>34</sup> These two responses to the failures and betrayals of the triumvirs show how they were able to gain so much power and influence over the Republic; fear of the triumvirs' wrath, combined with an innate desire to stay in their good graces, effectively paralyzed a majority of senators and officials from concretely opposing the goals of the triumvirs. Indeed, it's no coincidence that the Senate began to oppose Caesar only after rallying around Pompey; they, weak and powerless, needed the backing of one of the triumvirs to oppose the other, further highlighting the power disparity between the triumvirs and the Republic.

With the Republican government rendered weak and powerless, powerful politicians were able to effectively expand their influence beyond the Senate floor. After all, the decline in Republican power left multiple weaknesses in the political system that power-hungry men could exploit. Specifically, they targeted the elections and the courts, using their power to weaken these essential parts of the Republican government to further their own authoritarian rule.

The roots of the corruption of the courts can be seen during Clodius's trial due to the Bona Dea scandal. In this trial, Cicero notes that Clodius brought a multitude of his supporters to the trial to disrupt the proceedings and heckle the prosecution. When this did not work, he then bribed the jury with money, connections, and promises, which proved invaluable in securing his acquittal and freedom.<sup>35</sup> Clodius's actions highlight how powerful men used their influence and authority to erode the authority of the Republican courts; indeed, Cicero himself bemoaned about how judicial jurisdiction was greatly eroded by this one decision, which essentially said that the courts could be bought and rigged with impunity.<sup>36</sup> The influence and strong sense of loyalty Clodius had over his followers was also extremely important during the proceedings; that Clodius had supporters loyal enough to loudly and boldly support him during the trial served as a chilling warning to how Roman politicians could use their influence and power to influence court decisions, something that the triumvirs would note and use later on in their careers.

The First Triumvirate then furthered Clodius's debasing of the Republican judicial system while simultaneously corrupting the elections with bribes and backroom deals. Cicero suggests that the elections for the consulship in 54 BCE were extremely indicative of the downfall and corruption of the Republic. In this election, multiple candidates, including Caesar-backed Gaius Memmius and Pompey-backed Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, were found to have taken hefty bribes in exchange for political favors.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Memmius and his ally and fellow candidate Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus were further found to have made a deal with the previous consuls, Crassus and Pompey, to give money to them and to falsify an order for the division and allocation of provincial land for them in exchange for their victory.<sup>38</sup> That all three of the triumvirs played such an active role in dirtying the election with money and backroom deals highlights how they no longer had any respect for the Republican system of governance; rather, they viewed Republican processes like elections as opportunities to expand their personal power while simultaneously weakening the credibility of the Republican government. Indeed, the corruption of this election further highlights how the triumvirs sought to expand their influence beyond current politicians, seeking new alliances and feelings of indebtedness that they could then use to keep the consuls under their control, investing money and influence during the elections to reap the economic and political awards once their favored candidates were elected.

The tarnishing of the Republican government did not just stop at the elections; rather, the triumvirs also played an active role in seeking acquittals for their corrupt candidates, using their power and influence to rig the trials and further delegitimize the courts. Cicero, as a lawyer who defended multiple of the accused candidates, provides a unique perspective on Triumvirate influence during the trial proceedings. That he defends dirty candidates such as Scaurus and Domitius, even getting Scaurus acquitted with an excellent defense, despite his knowledge of their corruption, highlights how powerful the triumvirs were in the extension of their influence in the courts, getting known criminals away from punishment with their connections and dealings.<sup>39</sup> Even though Cicero personally lamented the immortality and treachery of Roman politicians, he still defended these high-profile, triumvir-backed candidates, likely out of obligation to the triumvirs themselves, further indicating how

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<sup>33</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 3.8.

<sup>34</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 3.6.

<sup>35</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 1.9.

<sup>36</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 1.9.

<sup>37</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 4.15.

<sup>38</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 4.17.

<sup>39</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 4.17.

effective the triumvirs were in exercising their connections and power to achieve their goals and bend the law to fit their needs.

Another trial also reveals how Pompey himself used his authority to get what he wanted out of the judicial system. Aulus Gabinius was a governor accused of both taking bribes and of treachery. However, he was an ally of Pompey, who completely rigged the trial; the prosecution gave incredibly weak arguments to the point that collusion was suspected, and the jury was corrupt and easily bought.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Cicero himself was dissuaded from prosecuting Gabinius, despite his personal hatred of the man, due to a fear of angering Pompey.<sup>41</sup> That Pompey was easily able to engineer and rig every part of the trial, from crippling the prosecution to paying off the jurors, highlights the degree of power that triumvirs like him held over the Roman legal system. The courts, rather than serving justice, served the needs of the Triumvirate, easily bending to the might of the Triumvirate and obeying whatever goal they had through the triumvirs' use of money and power. Although many people were angered over the constant acquittals, no one even bothered to publicly challenge the results of the trials, further highlighting how the Triumvirate held both political and legal authority, given that the courts and elections were firmly under the influence of Pompey and Caesar and did not care about the dissenting opinions of the public.<sup>42</sup>

With the power of the Senate evaporated and the Republican government crumbling under the influence and corruption of the Triumvirate, it was only natural that, in the two years prior to the outbreak of war, the Senate was reduced to a mere shell of its former self, unable to perform its basic duties and powerless to pass any resolution.

The fallout from the disastrous election of 54 BCE proved to be the deathblow of the Senate's authority. Although the Republic had narrowly escaped a dictatorship or interregnum, the Senate was irreparably damaged by such a corrupt election. Cicero enumerates how the Senate failed on multiple levels. Most importantly, he emphasizes how slow the Senate became in passing policy or even reaching agreement. For example, the Senate took two years to just choose which man to give a proconsulship to, too hamstrung by continuous debating.<sup>43</sup> The consuls and tribunes did not pass any meaningful legislation, as they never reached consensus on any issues.<sup>44</sup> One of the most telling examples of this discord and deadlock in the government was with respect to Caesar. Even though the Republic was on the verge of civil war due to Caesar's refusal to give up his armies upon returning to Rome, the tribunes and consuls could not compromise on a resolution, instead vetoing each other's resolutions multiple times.<sup>45</sup> This continuous inaction made the Republican government truly powerless. After all, what power did they have if they could not even pass a single piece of legislation, if they could not compromise and agree to act on issues that were critical to the safety and survival of the Republic? Caesar and Pompey would have rejoiced that the government was so weak, given that they would be allowed to freely expand their power without the Republic checking them through legislation. Indeed, while the triumvirs were making moves to strengthen themselves, gathering and fortifying their armies, the Republic was paralyzed, unable to act due to endless disagreement.

Furthermore, the poison that the consulship elections brought to the courts in 54 BCE lingered and corrupted them, making them lose whatever credibility they had left. Indeed, Cicero highlights that almost all of those accused of political crimes got acquitted and that laws were broken left and right, even within the courtroom itself.<sup>46</sup> This further indicates just how dysfunctional the Republican government became after such a large corruption scandal; after Pompey had defiled and debased the courts to such a degree in the defense of his allies, the courts never again regained their credibility as just and fair, instead continuing to allow corrupt practices to run rampant within their halls. This shut off legal means as a viable way to stop the power of the Triumvirate; with the courts untrustworthy, their rulings would mean nothing to the triumvirs, the Senate, and the general population.

Despite this policy paralysis, one issue managed to continuously pervade throughout the Senate's debate: whether to support Caesar or Pompey. The networks and connections that Caesar and Pompey had been building up for decades paid their dividends as the Senate became fiercely divided among pro-Caesar and pro-Pompey lines.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, this likely was a major factor in the ineffectiveness of the Senate; the Senate had become so polarized along pro-Caesar and pro-Pompey lines that pro-Caesar tribunes and consuls likely vetoed anti-Caesar legislation and vice versa for anti-Pompey legislation. Cicero further highlights that many senators

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<sup>40</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 4.18.

<sup>41</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Quintus and Brutus*, 3.2.

<sup>42</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.2.

<sup>43</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.5.

<sup>44</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.6.

<sup>45</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.8.

<sup>46</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.6.

<sup>47</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.6.

were fearful of war, hating the role that both Caesar and Pompey had in fomenting conflict, but were nonetheless bound to their patron-like triumvir out of obligation, unable to break from their contractual relationship.<sup>48</sup> This indicates that the triumvirs were able to effectively lock senators to their sides, creating polarized blocks that would never agree or compromise with each other. Indeed, even when Caesar, who deeply despised the Senate, threatened the Republic with violence, demanding that he be allowed to keep his armies in Rome, pro-Caesar politicians never once turned against their leader, highlighting how powerful the ties and loyalty were between politicians and their favored triumvir.<sup>49</sup>

This degree of polarization made reconciliation impossible, forcing officials to choose between Pompey and Caesar, creating opposing factions that could not coexist, necessitating war with each other. Cicero himself provides insight as someone who was neither fully pro-Caesar nor pro-Pompey. In his letters, he often criticizes and praises aspects of both leaders. However, with the polarized political climate of 50 and 49 BCE, Cicero himself was forced to choose a side for his own safety. In the end, he threw his lot in with Pompey, who aligned himself more with the upper echelons of Roman society compared to Caesar's more popular appeal.<sup>50</sup> This move of supporting Pompey out of necessity and hate for Caesar echoed the thought process of many politicians and senators; despite their deep distrust of an army-leading Pompey, they nonetheless aligned themselves with him for protection and safety from the other triumvir.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, what likely drove them to Pompey's side was less of love for Pompey and more of Caesar's hate for the Senate and thirst for absolute power; they thought that Pompey, as a friend of patricians, would be less likely to betray and harm them. The rise of tribalism between supporters of Pompey and Caesar nonetheless highlights how radical Roman politics had become at that point; given that compromise and negotiation with the other faction were impossible, it was only natural that the Senate meekly followed into the war that erupted between Pompey and Caesar. They, too powerless to stay neutral and too polarized to stay cohesive and unified, were forced to either support Pompey or Caesar. Those who attempted to stay neutral and unbiased failed miserably; Cicero himself, although siding with Pompey, sought peace above all else, even arranging peace talks between the triumvirs. However, he never created a lasting agreement, failing to understand that compromise and agreement were impossible when the competing ideologies of the triumvirs were fundamentally irreconcilable and when society was so divided among pro-Caesar and pro-Pompey lines. Without any meditative force of peace between the triumvirs, they of course had to wage war with each other to determine which style of government would be the future of Rome: rule for the plebeian or the patrician.

Cicero's letters reveal that Caesar's Civil War became inevitable due to the rise in power of the men in the First Triumvirate, who used their military backgrounds and stances on populist policies to appeal to wide but differing demographics of Roman society. This strategy for support fundamentally split the Republic along polarized ideologies and irreconcilable factions, making compromise impossible. These men then used their multiple connections and transactional friendships with Republican politicians to crush governmental resistance and gain wide support amongst dissimilar groups for their policies. These alliances were then used to extend Triumvirate power in all branches of the government, leaving the Republic weak, corrupt, and divided. With all power in Rome divided between pro-Caesar and pro-Pompey factions, war and conflict became inevitable as peace through compromise became impossible among the antagonized blocs. Although Cicero's letters provide a unique view into the political intrigue and changing dynamics of the Roman political system, he spends an equal, if not greater, amount of time lamenting about the death of virtue in the Republic. He loses hope in saving the Republic, believing that all the men in power were too power-hungry and corrupt.<sup>52</sup> Despite criticizing the triumvirs with words, Cicero never once seriously challenged the triumvirs with acts, even keeping up the charade of friendliness and respect with both Pompey and Caesar when the civil war was imminent.<sup>53</sup> If Caesar himself had personally requested Cicero's aid and friendship before the outbreak of war, then Cicero had surely not done anything to seriously oppose or criticize the general.<sup>54</sup> Much of the Senate likely followed this trend, secretly opposing the triumvirs and hating their desire for war while doing nothing to ever oppose their political goals with policy or legislation. If Cicero, along with other old-guard politicians, collectively acted to stop the rise of the triumvirs, then perhaps the civil war could have been avoided. However, their collective inaction and inability to resist the dominance of the Triumvirate sealed the shameful and violent fate of the Republic. Indeed, Cicero's letters serve as a haunting reminder to always fight for a just cause, as inaction and silence merely serve the goals of the corrupt and tyrannical.

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<sup>48</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.14.

<sup>49</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 16.11.

<sup>50</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 7.3.

<sup>51</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to his Friends*, 8.13.

<sup>52</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 7.3.

<sup>53</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 7.4.

<sup>54</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 9.6a.



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