theoretical existence of the Holy Roman Empire, Germany was in reality the most politically and religiously divided area in seventeenth-century Europe. It is thus not surprising that historians find it difficult to determine the political and religious factors causing this war and the responsibility for its long continuation. Some of the demographic effects are indicated through a comparison of the main areas of battle and changes in population. Indeed, the continued political and religious division of Germany after this war, along with such massive destruction of the area and the population, helps explain Germany's weakness and inability to unify for the following two centuries. 

CONSIDER: In what ways the geopolitical and religious divisions of Germany explain the duration and extent of damages of the Thirty Years' War; how historians might use these maps to support their interpretations of the causes and significance of the Thirty Years' War.

### Secondary Sources

**A Political Interpretation of the Thirty Years' War**

*Hajo Holborn*

Historians have long disagreed about the essential causes of the Thirty Years' War. Some focus on a particular area, such as Germany or Spain; others emphasize a particular set of causes, such as religion or politics; and still others argue that it was only part of a general seventeenth-century crisis affecting all aspects of society. In the following selection Hajo Holborn, a historian known for his work on German history, argues that the war was primarily a political struggle in the German states of the Habsburgs. He accepts the religious issue as at least a contributing cause.

CONSIDER: The role religion played in the conflict even though it may not have been primary in causing the war; other factors that might have caused the war.

It was not a conflict among European powers, not even an acute controversy between the emperor and the princes of the Empire or among these princes themselves that led to the outbreak of the long war that lived on in the memory of the German people as the "Great War"

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**Consider: In what ways the geopolitical and religious divisions of Germany explain the duration and extent of damages of the Thirty Years’ War; how historians might use these maps to support their interpretations of the cause and significance of the Thirty Years’ War.**

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**A Political Interpretation of the Thirty Years’ War**

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**A. The political interpretation of the Thirty Years’ War**

Holborn emphasizes the role of religion in the Thirty Years’ War. He argues that, while religion was a significant factor, it was not the sole cause of the war. Instead, Holborn focuses on the political motivations and strategies of the various parties involved.

Holborn notes that the war was not a straightforward religious conflict. Instead, it was a series of alliances and counter-alliances, with each side trying to gain the upper hand politically. He also highlights the role of foreign powers, such as France and England, in supporting different sides in the war. Holborn argues that, while religion was a factor, it was not the sole determinant of the war's outcome.

**B. The role of religion in the Thirty Years’ War**

Holborn also discusses the role of religion in the Thirty Years’ War. He notes that the war was characterized by a struggle over religious control and territories. Holborn argues that the war was a struggle for power, with each side trying to control as much territory as possible and to force their religious beliefs on the people within their control.

Holborn emphasizes that the war was not a straightforward battle between Catholics and Protestants. Instead, it was a complex struggle over political power and control, with religion serving as a tool to advance political goals.

Holborn concludes that the Thirty Years’ War was a result of the political ambitions and strategies of the various parties involved. While religion was a factor, it was not the sole determinant of the war's outcome. The war was a struggle for power, with each side trying to control as much territory as possible and to force their religious beliefs on the people within their control.
precisely this capacity to regard the statesman as the champion of religion, to live and act the drama of man’s dual dependence upon faith and power that constituted the quintessence of the baroque.

War and Peace in the Old Regime

M. S. Anderson

Western societies rarely went for long periods of time without becoming involved in wars. However, war was particularly prevalent and destructive in the period between 1618 and 1660. Historians have long debated the causes for these wars. In the following selection, M. S. Anderson, who has written extensively on the Early Modern period, analyzes what war meant to Europeans and the broader significance of war during the seventeenth century.

Consider: How Europeans perceived the causes, nature, and consequences of war; the distinctions between war and peace; the connections between war and politics.

In early modern Europe almost everyone regarded war as a normal, perhaps even a necessary, part of human life. Events seemed to bear out this view; in the period 1618–60 every year saw serious armed conflict between states somewhere in Europe, and during a large proportion of it destructive struggles were being waged simultaneously in several parts of the continent. The ubiquity and apparent inevitability of war meant that serious discussion of its causes was rare. As an integral and unavoidable aspect of existence it was received like bad weather or epidemics, as something clearly beyond the power of the ordinary man to avert, something demanding acceptance rather than analysis. Luther’s dictum that ‘war is as necessary as eating, drinking, or any other business’ reflects in typically blunt terms this matter-of-fact and fatalistic attitude. Nor was there much grasp of the deeper and more lasting effects it might sometimes have. It was only too obvious that in the short term it meant for many death, destruction and loss. But against this was put the venerable and well-established argument that prolonged peace weakened the moral fibre of a society, making it lax, slothful, even corrupt, whereas war focused and mobilized energies, called forth many of the better qualities of man, and had a generally tonic and purifying effect. It was clear also that a successful war could heighten the personal prestige of a ruler; the vindication of claims put forward by monarchs to disputed territories, to alleged hereditary rights, even merely to precedence over rivals or to specific symbols of such precedence, were by far the most common ostensible causes of conflict. Occasionally it was realized that war might have important long-term economic results, that it might foster the trade of a victorious state against that of its defeated enemies and that economic rivalry might be one of its causes. Struggles inspired simply or even mainly by this kind of material rivalry were not frequent in this period but they did take place. . . . However the idea that war might, through the demands it made on societies and the impetus it gave to the growth of powerful central governments, help fundamentally to change these societies, was still a strange one. . . .

Finally, a clear-cut distinction between war and peace, a dividing line whose crossing was instantly recognizable, was something which was only beginning to emerge. The position of neutrals was still ambiguous, their status poorly guaranteed by embryonic international law and liable to frequent infringements. There was a general belief that a belligerent had some right to march its forces across neutral territory if it made good any damage they caused in the process (the right of transitus immovium). Frontiers were still poorly defined, zones of contact between neighbouring powers rather than lines clearly demarcated. The hold of central governments over officials and commanders in border areas was often still incomplete, so that in these areas locally inspired acts of oppression and outright violence could frequently occur, though usually without involving the states concerned in formal conflict. In this violent age incidents of this kind formed a sort of grumbling undertone to international relations, seldom actively menacing peace between states but always a potential threat. . . .

Armed conflict in early seventeenth-century Europe, therefore, ramified into every aspect of life and was able to do this because it was still in many ways badly defined, because the boundary between peace and war was still fuzzy. But lack of clear definition did nothing to reduce its importance. Most of the governments of Europe were first and foremost, as they had been for generations, machines for waging war. Both the scale on which they fought and the effective control they could exert over their fighting forces were to increase markedly during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The Causes of the English Civil War

Conrad Russell

The civil war in England, which broke out in the middle of the seventeenth century, is even more controversial among historians than the Thirty Years’ War. At the heart of the controversy are two related issues: first, what the balance of religious, political, economic, and social forces was in causing the civil war; second, what groups or classes can be said to have supported each side. In the following selection Conrad