

Who Started World War I

- In class, I cited four main reasons (**M.A.I.N**) World War I occurred. I believe each of these reasons factored and caused World War I to begin.
- **10 Historians** – The experts on the causes of World War I give their take for who was to blame. They blame a specific country or countries and cite evidence to support their claim.
- Your job is to record on p. 16 who they blame for WWI and summarize the evidence they use to support their thesis. This is homework.



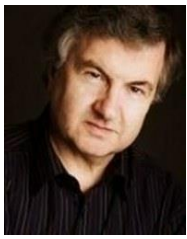
Germany

Max Hastings, historian (England)

No one nation deserves all responsibility for the outbreak of war, but Germany seems to me to deserve most.

It alone had power to halt the descent to disaster at any time in July 1914 by withdrawing its “blank cheque” which offered support to Austria for its invasion of Serbia.

I do not believe Russia wanted a European war in 1914 - its leaders knew that it would have been in a far stronger position to fight two years later, having completed its rearmament.



Serbia

Richard Evans, University of Cambridge (England)

Serbia bore the greatest responsibility for the outbreak of WW1. Serbian nationalism and expansionism were profoundly disruptive forces and Serbian backing for the terrorists was extraordinarily irresponsible.

Austria-Hungary bore only slightly less responsibility for its panic over-reaction to the assassination of the heir to the Habsburg throne.

France encouraged Russia's aggressiveness towards Austria-Hungary and Germany encouraged Austrian intransigence.



Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia

Heather Jones, London School of Economics (England)

A handful of bellicose decision-makers in Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia caused WW1.

Relatively common before 1914, assassinations of royal figures did not normally result in war. But Austria-Hungary's military hawks - principal culprits for the conflict - saw the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Bosnian Serb as an excuse to conquer and destroy Serbia, an unstable neighbour which sought to expand beyond its borders into Austro-Hungarian territories.

Serbia, exhausted by the two Balkan wars of 1912-13 in which it had played a major role, did not want war in 1914.



Austria-Hungary and Germany

John Rohl, University of Sussex (England)

WW1 did not break out by accident or because diplomacy failed. It broke out as the result of a conspiracy between the governments of imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary to bring about war, albeit in the hope that Britain would stay out.

After 25 years of domination by Kaiser Wilhelm II with his angry, autocratic and militaristic personality, his belief in the clairvoyance of all crowned heads, his disdain for diplomats and his conviction that his Germanic God had predestined him to lead his country to greatness, the Reich opted for war in 1914 in what they deemed to be favourable circumstances.



Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France, Britain and Serbia

Gerhard Hirschfeld, University of Stuttgart (Germany)

Long before the outbreak of hostilities, Prussian-German conservative elites were convinced that a European war would help to fulfil Germany's ambitions for colonies and for military as well as political prestige in the world.

The actual decision to go to war over a relatively minor international crisis like the Sarajevo murder, however, resulted from a fatal mixture of political misjudgement, fear of loss of prestige and stubborn commitments on all sides of a very complicated system of military and political alliances of European states.



Austria-Hungary and Germany

Annika Mombauer, The Open University (England)

The war was no accident and it could have been avoided in July 1914. Austrian leaders wanted a war against Serbia. The immediate reaction to the murder of Franz Ferdinand was to seek redress from Serbia, which was thought to have been behind the assassination plot and which had been threatening Austria-Hungary's standing in the Balkans for some time. Crucially, a diplomatic victory was considered worthless and “odious”. At the beginning of July, Austria's decision-makers chose war.

But in order to implement their war against Serbia they needed support from their main ally Germany. Without Germany, their decision to fight against Serbia could not have been implemented. The German government issued a “blank cheque” to its ally, promising unconditional support and putting pressure on Austria to seize this golden opportunity. Both governments knew it was almost certain that Russia would come to Serbia's aid and this would turn a local war into a European one, but they were willing to take this risk.



Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France, Britain and Serbia

Sean McMeekin, Koc University (Istanbul, Turkey)

It is human nature to seek simple, satisfying answers, which is why the German war guilt thesis endures today.

Without Berlin's encouragement of a strong Austro-Hungarian line against Serbia after Sarajevo - the "blank cheque" - WW1 would clearly not have broken out. So Germany does bear responsibility.

But it is equally true that absent a terrorist plot launched in Belgrade the Germans and Austrians would not have faced this terrible choice. Civilian leaders in both Berlin and Vienna tried to "localise" conflict in the Balkans. It was Russia's decision - after Petersburg received its own "blank cheque" from Paris - to Europeanise the Austro-Serbian showdown which produced first a European and then - following Britain's entry - world conflagration. Russia, not Germany, mobilised first.



Austria-Hungary and Germany

Gary Sheffield, University of Wolverhampton (England)

The war was started by the leaders of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Austria seized the opportunity presented by the assassination of the archduke to attempt to destroy its Balkan rival Serbia. This was done in the full knowledge that Serbia's protector Russia was unlikely to stand by and this might lead to a general European war.

Germany gave Austria unconditional support in its actions, again fully aware of the likely consequences. Germany sought to break up the French-Russian alliance and was fully prepared to take the risk that this would bring about a major war. Some in the German elite welcomed the prospect of beginning an expansionist war of conquest.



Austria-Hungary and Germany

Catriona Pennell, University of Exeter (England)

It is the political and diplomatic decision-makers in Germany and Austria-Hungary who must carry the burden of responsibility for expanding a localised Balkan conflict into a European and, eventually, global war. Germany, suffering from something of a “younger child” complex in the family of European empires, saw an opportunity to reconfigure the balance of power in their favour via an aggressive war of conquest.

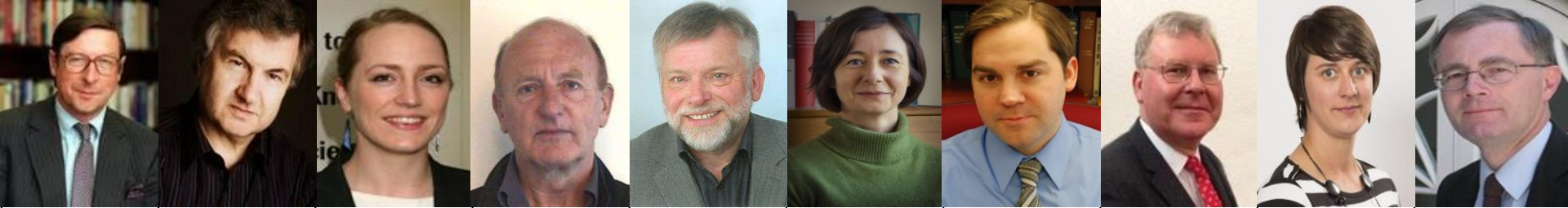


Germany

David Stevenson, London School of Economics (England)

The largest share of responsibility lies with the German government. Germany's rulers made possible a Balkan war by urging Austria-Hungary to invade Serbia, well understanding that such a conflict might escalate. Without German backing it is unlikely that Austria-Hungary would have acted so drastically.

Serbia subjected Austria-Hungary to extraordinary provocation and two sides were needed for armed conflict. Although the Central Powers took the initiative, the Russian government, with French encouragement, was willing to respond.



<i>Hastings</i>	<i>Evans</i>	<i>Jones</i>	<i>Rohl</i>	<i>Hirschfeld</i>	<i>Mombauer</i>	<i>McMeekin</i>	<i>Sheffield</i>	<i>Pennell</i>	<i>Stevenson</i>

For each historian, record who they blame for WWI and summarize the evidence they use to support their thesis. (Turn this page vertically to take notes)