**To what extent did the Restoration provide stable government in the period 1660-88?**

**Factors to consider :** It is decided that the essay will be organised into the main phases of Restoration rule and the reasons for stability/instability examined within each. The essay could have been organised into factors, but this would have involved visiting each of the main phases of Stuart rule within each factor and thus be more complex in its organisation. The fundamental problems that prevented stable government continued to be the ones that had provided the basis for the civil war, namely the difficulties of finding a political, religious and tax policy together with the complexities of managing multiple kingdoms whilst securing the twin pillows of the Protestant Church and the rule of law.

**Introduction**.

The nation that emerged during the Restoration of the Stuarts still contained the legacy of political and religious divisions, the difficulties of managing multiple Kingdoms and the ongoing economic and social problems born as a consequence of civil war and the Interregnum. Whilst the Restored Stuarts could rely on a desperate desire for stability and fear of resuming conflict, throughout the period neither Charles II or James II in spite of their limited achievements were able to overcome such divisions and difficulties in order to provide a lasting settlement and thus ultimately for stable government. Once more the opposition knew that it was possible to overthrow a king and that Parliaments were capable of governing. Ultimately the Stuarts were undone by alienating large sections of the political nation and because they appeared to be a threat to the Protestant religion and the rule of law and this led to the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

**Part 1**

The Restoration Settlement of 1660-64 was largely drawn up by a Cavalier Parliament concerned with revenge rather than reconciliation. As a result it settled little and certainly not the problems that had led to war and revolution beforehand with Clarendon and Sheldon both significant at the King’s Court. In April 1660 the Convention Parliament was presented with the Declaration of Breda issued by Charles Stuart and promising co-operation, harmony and the settlement of outstanding issues in partnership with Parliament. Government was now to consist of King Charles II, Lords and Commons. However sincere the Declaration, King Charles II saw himself as monarch by the will of God, not by parliament and the details of the settlement had still to be worked out.The new elections of 1661 produced a massive royalist majority known as the Cavalier Parliament seeking revenge, and they immediately undermined the work of the Convention Parliament by instrumentalizing what became known as the Clarendon Code. The Militia Act 1661 confirmed Charles II as supreme command of the armed forces, the Act of Uniformity 1662 restored the High Church Laudian Church resulting in the expulsion of 1,800 ministers, the Conventicle Act 1664 ensured harsh restrictions on dissenters but in doing so resulted in the separatists developing links with each other and the gentry and merchant classes. Charles introduced a Declaration of Indulgence in 1662 to introduce toleration but Parliament forced its withdrawal. Furthermore the repeal of the Triennial Act 1664 provided no machinery for Parliament to reassemble if the King failed to call one. Finally the abolition of Feudal Tenures resulted in Charles income being made up of Customs duties and Excise Tax and the Hearth Tax which retained Parliamentary financial control over the King. The King was unable to rule by divine right since his income was controlled and his desire for religious toleration rejected by a Cavalier Parliament. The effect of the Cavalier parliament as a whole had been to weaken restrictions on the Kings power and undermine the clarity that had been sought by the Convention Parliament. This introduced confusions and contradictions into the system of governance and alienated parts of the political nation from which conflict re-emerged in an atmosphere of increasing suspicion about the kings “secret agenda”.

**Part 2**

The period 1665-78 witnessed a growing suspicion within the political nation that Charles II had a secret agenda and that the agenda was one that favoured Catholicism. This had largely been confirmed by 1678 and resulted in the coalescence of those concerned about the future of the Protestant religion and the rule of law. Anti-catholic sentiment became suspicious and was antagonised by the Kings sympathy for religious toleration even though this may have had the good intent of easing religious tensions in Scotland and Ireland. Charles II pro French foreign policy and declaration of war against the Dutch in 1665 which was a disaster also aroused suspicions, the political impact of which was increased by suspicions over the causes of Plague and Fire in 1665-66. Charles attempted to deflect criticism by replacing Clarendon in 1667 with a group of advisors known as the Cabal which included two Catholics, and in 1668 Charles brother James announced his conversion to Catholicism. When Charles signed a Treaty of Dover with the French in 1670 committing England to a further Dutch war his Catholic leanings were confirmed in the eyes and minds of the political nation. It was as well that they were unaware of secret clauses committing Charles to announce his own conversion at an appropriate time and providing a subsidy aimed to free the Monarchy from the financial control of Parliament. In this atmosphere Charles Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 of religious toleration to include Catholics and redefining his prerogative powers including the suspension of the operation of law aroused much opposition. In 1673 financial problems forced Charles to recall parliament including an obligation under the Treaty of Dover to begin a third Anglo Dutch War. The price demanded by Parliament for supporting Charles was the withdrawal of the Indulgence and furthermore the Test Act 1673 forced holders of public office to deny Catholic doctrines resulting in the resignations of Lord Treasurer Clifford and James as Lord Admiral. Charles was conciliatory in appointing impeccably Anglican Lord Danby as Treasurer and he pursued a foreign policy that favoured the Dutch secured in the marriage of Mary (James eldest daughter) to the Protestant William of Orange. However Charles actions had served to offend a number of parliamentary groups and individuals opposed to Anglican control including Shaftesbury who had served in the Cabal. Shaftesbury's disillusionment with the King born from a tolerationist attitude towards dissent led him to gather like minded allies and form an organised opposition to become known as the Whigs. Charles had thus aroused both anti-catholicism and dissenters by 1678, increasing political opposition amongst the political nation and raising deep reservations over his protection of the Protestant Church and the rule of law.

**Part 3**

During the period 1678-85 the emergence of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion crisis served to further antagonise the opponents of the Charles II. In August 1678 an Anglican Priest Titus Oates educated at a Jesuit school in France approached London Magistrate Godfrey with a story of a plot organised by the Jesuits and French to murder Charles II and replace him on the throne with the Catholic James. The story lacked credibility but Godfreys subsequent murder gave it more credibility when subsequent investigations revealed correspondence between James former employee Coleman and French agents. Broadsheet publications confirmed parliamentary and public acceptance of the plot and a year long intensification of parliamentary anti catholicism sparked a political crises when the opposition in parliament attempted to pass a law to exclude James from the succession. This was a golden opportunity for Shaftesbury and his Whig associates to challenge Danbys power and influence parliament to move in the direction they desired. Charles attempt to save danby by dissolving the Cavalier Parliament in 1679 failed because new elections produced an anti Danby majority called Whigs who favoured reform at the expense of the Crown and their High Church allies who they labelled Tories. The new Parliament forced Charles to appoint a new Privy Council chosen by Parliament and the introduction of a new bill to exclude James from the succession in favour of the Duke of Monmouth (Charles illegitimate but Protestant son). Their fears James Catholicism and absolute monarchy that had helped to sour relations between parliament and Charles I had reached new heights for both Anglicans and dissenters given the persecution of protestants by the French king Louis XIV. Charles II was determined to oppose Parliament's attempt at the exclusion of James since he regarded it as an attack on his hereditary divine right. The ensuing Exclusion crisis played out in three distinct stages with Charles dissolving Parliament in 1679 after passing the first Exclusion bill, the defeat of a second bill in the Lords in 1680. Finally now that Charles was financially independent of Parliament as a result of French subsidies and after parliament passed another Exclusion Bill in 1681, he dissolved parliament again and ordered the arrest of Shaftesbury for treason. Although he was acquitted he was forced into exile by 1682 and a group of old Cromwellian soldiers concocted a plot to kill Charles at Rye House in 1683 and to replace him with Monmouth. The Plot failed and resulted in a backlash against the Whigs who were destroyed. Charles did not recall Parliament again for the rest of his reign in contravention of the Triennial Act which he had revised in 1664. Furthermore he began a process of revising borough charters that controlled elections to the corporations and the selection of parliamentary candidates designed to secure more compliant parliaments in future further antagonising those who wanted restrictions on the Monarchy and the religious dissenters. He died as these progressed in 1685.

**Part 4**

The succession of James II accelerated the pace of alienating the political nation and exacerbating the political and religious division which had led to civil war and revolution in the 1640’s, and this resulted in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. James continued the process of revising borough charters begun by Charles. At first the parliament called on his accession proved remarkably cooperative in the repression of the Monmouth rebellion of 1685. Charles had left his brother in a strong position with a more compliant parliament, the overcoming of the Exclusion crisis and the Monmouth rebellion. Furthermore the fear of impending civil war was enough to caution the actions of the political nation who were opposed to the king. James aim on accession was to establish religious freedom and legal equality for Catholics and his reaction when parliament refused would be to establish these by royal prerogative and issuing personal dispensations to support Catholics in public offices. In 1687 he issued a new Declaration of Indulgence granting freedom of worship to both Catholic and Protestant dissenters, but whilst his desire may have been sincere it was suspected that he had designs on Catholic superiority like his cousin Louis XIV and that he represented a threat to the Protestant Church and the rule of law. To this effect James further revised borough charters, established an Ecclesiastical Commission to act as a Court for Church Affairs (with powers similar to those exercised by the Prerogative Court of High Commission that had been abolished in 1641), Expelling the Fellows of Magdalen College Oxford and replacing them with Catholics and in 1688 he renewed the Declaration of Indulgence and ordered that it be read from the pulpit in every parish, forcing the Church of England to rubber stamp the reduction of its own power. When seven bishops refused they were arrested, charged with sedition, tried and acquitted amid public celebration. By now James had threatened the existence of free parliaments, the supremacy of the law, the rights of property holders and the security of the Church. The birth of a son resulted in the widespread perception of the baby in the warming pan scandal and those who feared a civil war and were prepared to wait until James died and was succeeded by his two Protestant daughters were now prompted into action for fears of a Catholic succession. In the summer of 1688 a letter was carried to Holland bearing the signature of seven leading political figures representing virtually all sections of the political nation (Whigs and Tories) in England inviting William of Orange to intervene in England with an armed force in order to defend the Protestant faith, the rule of law and to secure English support in resisting the French threat against the Dutch. When William landed in November 1688 James hesitated, panicked and then fled. There would be no civil war, no high court, trial or execution to create a second Stuart martyr in the public imagination. By leaving the throne vacant James had allowed his opponents to claim he had abdicated and invited William and Mary his Protestant heir to take his place. It would seem in this respect that both the Monarchy and their opponents had learnt lessons from the past to avoid civil war.

**Conclusion**

The Restoration had thus failed to bring stability and a long term security in the aftermath of war and revolution. The nation that emerged in 1660 from that process carried the legacy of divisions that had brought it into being in the first place. The Stuarts had singularly failed to reassure the political nation that they were capable of ruling in a manner appropriate to reconcile these divisions and secure the Protestant religion and the rule of law, fears that were accelerated on the succession of James II. However whilst it was apparent that they had learnt little from the mistakes made by their father Charles I, what both the Monarchy and their opponents had learnt was to avoid the abyss of another civil war in England. Although the Glorious Revolution was far from the bloodless compromise that the Whig interpretation of it secured as the Nation’s historical narrative for nearly 300 years, it did result in a settlement in which the Crown and Parliament were able to reach an understanding to secure the future of the Protestant Religion, the rule of law and a modus operandi in the evolution of a more consensual national governance into the 18th Century.