



**In War's Wake: International
Conflict and the Fate of Liberal
Democracy**

*Edited by Elizabeth Kier and
Ronald R. Krebs*

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Reviewed by

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In War's Wake is a collection of works by some of the most prominent academics in the fields of international relations, political science, and history. Noting that there are countless volumes addressing the transformative powers of war, the purpose of this volume is to fill a gap in the literature on the effect that war has on democratic institutions and politics. The book attempts to draw relationships between war and democratic outcomes—in other words, the consequences of war on/for democracy. As their assessment source, the authors use many of the most significant international conflicts that have taken place over the past 2 centuries, with the focus on “democratizing countries and consolidated liberal democracies.” Conflicts analyzed range from conventional all-out wars, such as World Wars I and II, to irregular wars, such as the war on terror.

The book consists of 12 individually authored chapters. Editors Kier and Krebs introduce the work by providing a clear, comparative perspective of war

and democracy, while at the same time framing the book's contents and introducing/linking individual author contributions. Subsequent chapters are divided into three thematic parts: “War and Democratic Transitions: New and Durable Democracies?” “War and Democratic Publics: Reshaping Political Participation?” and “War and Democratic States: Government by the People or Over the People?”

Some of the many notable findings by the authors are as follows. In part one, Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder determine there is no evidence that war obstructs democratization; in some cases, it advances it. Their results further suggest that economic development, the political character of neighboring states, and the state's political legacy influence democratization more than war does. Like Mansfield and Snyder, Nancy Bermeo discovers no substantive evidence that wars result in the creation of democracy. However, in contrast to Mansfield, Snyder, and Bermeo, Paul Starr's research indicates that democracies have been winning modern wars—leading to the spread of democracy and enhancing individual liberties. He further notes that no democracy with a per capita income greater than \$6,000 has ever reverted to an authoritarian form of government.

In part two, Rieko Kage examines the impact that citizen mobilization for war has on postconflict civil societies. He determines that war creates opportunities for individual social learning, leading to individual postconflict civil engagement far greater than what would otherwise occur during periods of prolonged peace. Jay Winter finds that the increasing role of human rights and the shrinking role of the military in European politics are shaping European democracy, and that veterans

played a fundamental role in this democratic institutional evolution following the two World Wars. Elizabeth Kier finds that wartime experiences gained by mobilized labor can lead to shifts in labor's power and preferences, resulting in labor reforms during peacetime. Mark Wilson sheds light on the misunderstanding scholars have of the role that the British and U.S. governments played in mobilizing their respective economies for World War II. He cautions about thinking that there was a direct relationship between the level of mobilization and the degree of social-democratic reform that followed the war (for example, by 1949, 20 percent of the British economy was publicly owned, whereas in the United States, it was a mere fraction of that percent). He believes this divergence was a result of postwar political posturing and the differences in leadership over each nation's war economies. Britain employed new civilian-led ministries, while the United States gave similar control/authority to its military, which was not to be maintained after the war.

In part three, Ronald Krebs notes that measures taken to expand executive powers in support of large-scale wars and restorative engagements tend to normalize after war, while missions identified as “transformative” tend to result in political backlashes that modify/amend constitutional balances. Scholars have generally believed that wars lead to government institution-building, including policing agencies. Daniel Kryder discovers that domestic reforms driven by factors other than war determine the growth of federal institutional policing capacities. Finally, Deborah Avant posits that the U.S. desire to maintain a smaller, all-volunteer force, while the Nation is yet compelled to meet emerging global challenges, has

necessitated reliance on market mobilization to support military ventures.

Although none of the book's findings can be considered absolutely conclusive, the authors certainly accomplish their objective: to draw meaningful relationships between war and democracy. Every author does a superb job articulating and defending his/her thesis. Several of the authors draw upon the contributive works and critiques of their coauthors in solidifying their own contribution. Many of the interpretive implications of their individual findings are thought-provoking and, in many cases, provocative. Besides the noteworthy contributions that this book makes to our understanding of the complex relationship between war and democracy, it also brings to light differences in scholarly opinion, even among the contributing authors of this book, leaving plenty of room for future research.

Even though each chapter of this superbly crafted and exceptionally well-researched book can be read independently of the others, it is best read as a collective body. I must also caution the reader: the book is somewhat difficult to read and understand at times due to the academic nature of its design. Because of its subject matter focus, this book is best read by social science academics and students, as well as senior military leaders and government officials. **JFQ**

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