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Governments, Parliaments and Parties

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One sees a wide range of political regimes from a democratic republic with universal male suffrage (France) to parliamentary, constitutional, or even oligarchical monarchies in the countries that entered the First World War. This article explores the question of whether these different political regimes dealt with the challenges of preserving national unity and social cohesion during the war in different ways, or put more precisely: did a democratic political system make a difference? In some areas – for instance the problem of parliamentary control of government – the political regime did not make a great difference. But, on the whole, democratic systems proved better equipped to adapt to the challenges of war and to appoint capable political leaders to guide the country in wartime.

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Notes

Introduction

At the onset of the First World War, states with differing political regimes came into conflict with one another. Yet, despite these differences, the belligerent countries and their governments were dealing with similar problems and challenges. For instance, internal conflicts (or, at least, rivalries on the issue of who was to have the final say in strategic questions of how the [war was going to be run](#), the military experts or rather the [civilian government](#)); regulation of the economies; providing [nutrition](#) for the people; and, perhaps most important, financing the war which lasted much longer than had been expected. In all of these political questions, national parliaments and the political parties representing industrial, agricultural, or [labour interests](#) played an important role.

However, since most problems related to war finance, [war economy](#), and [war propaganda](#) are treated in great detail in other articles in this encyclopedia, this article will concentrate on another question. Most governments at war feared that domestic conflicts over policy would be considered a sign of weakness. Therefore, it was their aim to construct and preserve a consensus or, at least, a strong majority of parliamentary factions and political parties that supported government policies even when the war was going badly. One way of winning and securing the support, especially of parties representing the lower classes, and to keep the political and [social cohesion](#) of the country was the promise – or the actual implementation – of political or constitutional reforms. The latter often pertained to expanding the franchise as very few European belligerent states had introduced universal (male) suffrage before the war.^[1] This article compares the ways in which different political regimes, particularly democratic and non-democratic regimes, were able to effectively deal with these challenges that arose at the outbreak of war.

Political Regimes

Most states that entered the war in 1914 – with the notable exception of the French Third Republic – were monarchies. This, however, does not mean that these political regimes were similar. Three different types of monarchies can be distinguished: parliamentary, constitutional, and oligarchical or even semi-autocratic monarchies. These subtypes of monarchical regimes differ in three aspects: who governs; to whom the government is responsible; and the role of parliaments and political parties.

Parliamentary monarchy differs in just one respect from a republican political system, i.e. that the monarch as the head of state is not elected but comes into office as the hereditary successor of the previous monarch. The monarch is part of the “dignified parts”^[2] of the political system and political affairs are run by a civilian government based on a parliamentary majority. In such a parliamentary monarchy, the political parties’ factions in parliament were not important in the day-to-day business

of running the government; even in legislative matters a clear dominance of the cabinet had developed in the nineteenth century. But in times of crisis they were central actors who had to decide whether to continue supporting the current government or whether to replace it with a new leadership.^[3] *The English Constitution* Walter Bagehot (1826-1877) explores the parliamentary monarchy of the United Kingdom, which was the model not only for the British dominions but, for instance, also the Belgian constitution. Italy, which entered the war in 1915, was a constitutional monarchy by the letter of the constitution, though in practice it was a parliamentary monarchy as the king was not able to hold any government in office without the support of the majority in the Chamber of Deputies.^[4]

In constitutional monarchies, the government is responsible only to the monarch, not to parliament. It is self-evident that the government needs a majority in parliament to have the budget and its legislative projects passed. Hence, in this system of strict separation of powers, parliament and the political parties' factions are quite important in budgetary and legislative matters, but they do not have any influence on the composition of the government. If the government does not find the support of a parliamentary majority, it does not have the consequence of the government being dismissed by the monarch who always remains free to appoint – or keep in office – the government of his or her preference and who has the power to dissolve the parliament. Usually, the government is composed of people with administrative or military experience. Party politicians in a constitutional monarchy have no direct influence on governmental actions.^[5] The Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, are the most important examples of this type of political system.

Formally, by the letter of their respective constitutions, Meiji Japan, the Ottoman and the Russian Empire were constitutional monarchies as well – but not in practice. In Japan an extra-constitutional oligarchy, the Genrō, dominated the process of selecting and nominating a prime minister.^[6] In the Ottoman Empire the ruling oligarchy was even smaller. The Young Turk political party, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), who very much wanted to emulate the Japanese model of modernization without westernization, led a *coup d'état* in 1913 and its three leaders subsequently dominated parliamentary and government politics. The sultan's role as well as that of political parties other than the CUP were extremely limited, particularly since the CUP government identified political opposition with ethnic separatism and, once the Ottoman Empire had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, with treacherous cooperation with the Russian enemy.^[7] Since the revolution of 1905, the Russian Empire formally was a constitutional monarchy as well. But several dissolutions of the State Duma (the Russian parliament), and electoral reforms favouring large landowners and, thus, conservative parties, prevented a clear break with autocratic traditions. Neither the State Duma nor political parties had any substantial influence on government, which was led by bureaucrats and courtiers.^[8]

Except for Portugal, a republic since 1910 and belligerent only from 1916 onwards, France was the only democratic republic until the United States entered the war in 1917. The French Third Republic was characterized by a strong National Assembly with a multi-party system and, as a result, weak

[governments](#) – fourteen between 1900 and the start of the war.^[9] Therefore, the scepticism of whether such a political system would be able to deal with the challenges of war was widespread before the war had even begun.^[10]

In his seminal study on democratization in the twentieth century, the American scholar [Samuel Huntington \(1927-2008\)](#) discusses

“two reasonable major criteria for when nineteenth-century political systems achieved minimal democratic qualifications in the context of that century: (1) 50 percent of adult males are eligible to vote and (2) a responsible executive who either must maintain majority support in an elected parliament or is chosen in periodic popular elections”.

^[11] Applying these criteria, only the republican regimes and the parliamentary monarchies can be described as democracies. Oligarchical and constitutional monarchies – even if the first criterion was met and a majority of male adults was eligible to vote – did not qualify as democracies since the second criterion had not been fulfilled. Because parliaments in these regimes, even if they had been elected through universal male suffrage, such as in Imperial Germany, had little influence on the executives who were by definition not responsible to them.

The following sections will compare examples of the major belligerent countries with different political regimes. They will focus on how they sought to solve the problems of constructing and preserving national unity in the face of conflicting party interests and of keeping parliamentary support for the government or putting a more effective government into place. Did the political strategies in countries, which according to Huntington, qualify as democratic differ from those who do not? Did democratic constitutions affect the governments' chances of preserving national unity?

Creating National Unity (1914-1915)

Union Sacrée

The political parties' first reaction to the outbreak of war was remarkably similar in most countries irrespective of political regime. The classical pattern of “rallying to the flag” was reproduced practically everywhere as national sentiment and solidarity prevailed over conflicts of interests or ideologies between national parties. The place where national unity and solidarity was expressed in most cases was the national parliament as the body representing the people. Whether it was called [Union sacrée](#)^[12] or [Burgfrieden](#),^[13] it meant the same: in times when the nation was attacked from outside (all countries, even Germany, which had declared war on France and Russia, maintained the idea of entering a defensive war against uncalled-for aggression) the entire people united behind the [government](#) of the day. Even countries that entered later, such as Italy or Portugal, tended to reproduce the same pattern. In most cases, this also meant that national party competition was suspended, i.e. general elections were postponed till after the war and by-elections were non-

competitive in such a way that parties usually did not post candidates against the incumbent party.^[14] Of course, every single case deviated more or less from the general pattern. In [Britain](#), for example, not even the entire Liberal Party, not even all cabinet members, supported the decision to go to war against Germany, although after the German invasion of [Belgium](#) intra-party opposition weakened significantly. And, more importantly, the major opposition party, the Conservative Unionists, supported the [government](#) from the beginning of the war.^[15] Austria, on the other hand, completely lacked the “parliamentary moment” that in most other countries came to symbolize national unity in war.^[16] In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, it was the old emperor, [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#) himself, who became the symbol around which the nationalities of the [empire](#) rallied.^[17] Italy was the only country where there was no *Union sacrée* since the socialist party remained in opposition to the war even after the end of Italian [neutrality](#).^[18] However, these deviances do not reflect the different nature of the political systems.

Socialist Parties and the War

A [modern industrial war](#) cannot be waged for any period of time without the support of the working classes. Hence, the governments in those belligerent states where a socialist party representing the working class existed sought to secure these parties’ support for the war – either by consensus or by repression or, at least, the threat of repression. And the socialist parties, on the other hand, were faced with the choice either to oppose the national war effort or to support it. In the end, most socialist parties – with the exception of Italian and Russian socialists – decided to support their countries’ war effort. At the beginning of the war this support was usually expressed by voting for war credits. The socialist parties united in the Second International, particularly the socialist parties of France and Germany, had worked hard and had staged mass demonstrations to the last minute to avert war, but in the end in spite of the “common ties among socialists” forged by the Second International and in spite of all “extraparliamentary political mobilization”, loyalty to the nation proved stronger than internationalist class loyalty.^[19] Each socialist leadership could justify its decision by referring to the aggression against its own country.^[20] In Germany, where the [Social Democratic Party \(SPD\)](#) had represented the strongest faction in parliament since the election of 1912, the government took great pains to convince SPD leaders that Germany was not fighting for conquest of territories but purely to defend itself against the attack by tsarist, autocratic Russia – a political regime which the SPD had long despised.^[21] French socialists did not need to be persuaded that their country was being attacked since Germany had declared war on France and, moreover, because the German army soon after invading neutral Belgium reached French territory where the war was fought until 1918. The political system of the respective enemy – German [militarism](#) or Russian autocracy – served as an ideological justification for supporting one’s own country.^[22]

Some of the socialist parties paid a high price for their decision to support the nation’s war effort. Particularly in Britain and in Germany the leadership’s course was never undisputed, which

ultimately led to a split of both parties. In Britain, the Independent Labour Party formally remained affiliated to the Labour Party.^[23] Nevertheless, it stayed true to its [pacifist](#) tradition and formed an isolated opposition on the fringes of Labour.^[24] In the SPD *Reichstag* faction, the relatively small minority opposing the war initially accepted the tradition of party discipline and voted for the war credits in 1914. But in 1915, the growing opposition no longer followed the majority and, consequently, split in 1917, when the minority was excluded from the SPD and founded their own party, the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). For the German government it was of great importance to keep the SPD majority in the folds of the *Reichstag* majority that supported the war in order to keep the façade of national unity intact.^[25] As the party split had occurred over the issue of war and not over ideology, both parties, the British ILP and German USPD, consisted not only of the radical revolutionary wing of their mother parties, but of moderate pacifists as well. This distinguished them from both the Russian and the Italian socialists. In both these countries the split between reformists and revolutionaries had occurred in 1912. The separation of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had been caused by differences over purely ideological and strategical questions.^[26] In Italy, however, a reformist minority in the socialist party had been expelled as it supported the government during the [Italo-Turkish War](#).^[27] The majority Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which had supported neutrality after the outbreak of the First World War, kept opposing – though not sabotaging – the Italian entry into the war in 1915. This caused some prominent defections, most notably that of [Benito Mussolini \(1883-1945\)](#), but did not damage party unity. Only in 1917, after the defeat at the [Battle of Caporetto](#), did the majority of the parliamentary PSI rally to the defence of the Italian fatherland.^[28] Thus, in fact, Russian socialists remained the great exception to the rule of European socialists supporting the war. Both, Bolsheviks and the majority of Mensheviks, opposed the war; but they had so few deputies in the State Duma that the Russian government seemed to think this opposition could be dealt with by the traditional instruments of repression.^[29]

While the internal development of socialist parties can hardly be attributed to the different political regimes of their respective countries, their different positions to the national governments had to do with the character of the regimes. In Germany, for instance, where the SPD had been banned and persecuted under the Socialist Law in the 1880s, the party majority remained convinced that it was impossible for socialists to cooperate with the national or state governments and that, eventually, universal suffrage – even in Prussia – would lead the way to socialist majorities and a socialist society. The moderates who wanted to reform the existing political system step by step were a relatively small minority in the party although their influence on the actual political practice was much greater than the official revolutionary rhetoric suggested. For such a fundamentalist opposition party, the assent to the war credits was a great step towards integration into a bourgeois political system. But since Germany was a constitutional monarchy, there was no question of SPD politicians entering government. However, when in 1916 [August Müller \(1873-1946\)](#), a member of the most moderate SPD wing, was appointed to the executive board of the War Office for Nutrition this was meant and received as an official recognition of the SPD's change of course. In contrast, for French socialists to cooperate with and even participate in government was not such a big step. Until 1905,

when the SFIO was founded, French socialists had been organized in several moderate and revolutionary parties and for some of them cooperation with the bourgeois left went back to the beginning of the 20th century.^[30] Thus, there was little hesitation when the socialists were invited to join the government of national union. With Jules Guesde (1845-1922) and Marcel Sembat (1862-1922), two leading socialists entered the French government in 1914.^[31] When Arthur Henderson (1863-1935), Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, was appointed as president of the Board of Education and cabinet minister in 1915,^[32] this showed that Britain's parliamentary monarchy as well as the French parliamentary republic found it much easier than Germany to integrate socialists into governments of national unity. In semi-autocratic Russia, on the other hand, a similar integration of the socialist opposition was neither desired nor possible.

Parliamentary Control in Wartime

In any political system with a separation of powers, parliament is not only concerned with legislation but it also supervises and controls the executive in order to check its power. In a parliamentary system, this function is mostly fulfilled by the opposition while the government is supported by the majority in parliament. In a constitutional monarchy, it is the parliament as a whole which exercises the control function vis-à-vis the government. In a semi-autocratic monarchy, however, parliamentary control is limited and ineffective.

During the war it was difficult for some national parliaments to fulfil their function. Periods of adjournment were in some cases much longer than usual in peacetime. Whereas in Britain the House of Commons was in session almost as much as in peacetime,^[33] the German *Reichstag* was adjourned immediately after the historical session of 4 August 1914 and only called back into session in December 1914 to vote for the second war credit bill and again in March 1915.^[34] After it had approved a number of laws granting extraordinary powers to the government, on the same day (4 August 1914), the French *Assemblée nationale's* session was suspended even without any limit (*sine die*) – in the expectation, of course, that the war would not last long.^[35] When the “short-war-illusion” had been shattered, parliaments felt increasingly uneasy about the unchecked power of the executives. As a result, in 1915 the *Assemblée nationale* won the government's concession not to be adjourned at all unless it decided for vacation. Obviously, in wartime the matters of military strategy or difficulties of arms procurements could not be discussed in open sessions of parliament; therefore, all issues requiring secrecy were discussed only in the main committees of the *Assemblée*.^[36] In Germany the *Reichstag's* request for more information on and control over government decision-making produced a similar result. Since spring 1915 the budget committee was called the Main Committee and from 1916 it sat permanently even when the *Reichstag* was not in session.^[37] Although some politicians sitting in this committee won considerable influence, it was never able to really influence military strategy or political decisions pertaining to strategy. A deviant case with respect to parliamentary control was Austria where the parliament, the *Reichsrat*, had

been adjourned even before the war and was not called back into session until May 1917.^[38] In fact, this long parliamentary recess not only weakened the political parties' control over government, it also weakened the civilian government vis-à-vis military authorities.^[39] In Italy, parliament practically relinquished all powers to the political and military branches of government. Only after the defeat at Caporetto did parliament try to retrieve some control over government.^[40]

Clearly, the different solutions to the problem of parliamentary control did not depend on the political system given that Germany and Austria, both constitutional monarchies, adopted quite different strategies, the German one being more similar to that of the French Republic than to the Austrian model.

Party Conflicts underneath the Surface of National Unity

Some traditional conflicts may have been put aside by the outbreak of war and subdued by national unity; others, such as ethnic conflicts, were not – or at least not for long. This is as true for the Irish question in Britain as for the question of political representation of the Slavic peoples in the Habsburg Empire. In addition to such older divisions, new ones were generated by the war and were expressed by political parties – which, after all, did not disappear with the different national truces.

These new conflicts usually related to the issue of whether the war was being led in the most effective manner. German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg (1856-1921) was criticized by the nationalist right in the summer of 1915 because he had persuaded the emperor to abandon unrestricted submarine warfare, a counter measure against the British blockade of the North Sea. Bethmann Hollweg feared that this kind of submarine warfare would lead to war with the USA, which in turn could tip the balance in favour of the Entente powers. In his strategic decision he was supported by the *Reichstag's* members on the left, the SPD and some liberals, whereas conservatives, national liberals and the Catholic Centre Party criticized his proposed course.^[41] In Britain, the liberal government had to face backbench conservative criticism of the military strategy of limited engagement in France and of apparent shortages of ammunition on the Western Front. Whereas in Austria dissatisfaction with the government's performance even led to an informal vote of no confidence in the Upper House.

It is thus fair to say that in virtually every belligerent country, quite irrespective of the nature of the political system, the political reality below the great umbrella of national unity in war was characterized by conflicts between the parties on the one hand and between parties and governments on the other.

Maintaining Popular Support and Legitimacy in Times of Crisis (1916-1917)

In Germany, it was a commonly held belief that the country would prevail in a long-lasting war against democracies like France and Britain simply because it was better governed. The underlying

assumption was that authoritarian states, such as the constitutional monarchies of Germany and Austria-Hungary, would be governed more efficiently than democracies where party strife would lead to internal conflicts, which would in turn undermine the war effort. In one respect, this idea was correct: In all countries, the duration of the war inevitably led to military setbacks and crises that affected the national [morale](#) and the government's ability to keep up popular support for the war. However, the assumption that authoritarian governments would be better suited for this task proved false. Even a brief comparison of how the paradigmatic cases, i.e. France and Germany, dealt with the problems of appointing new governments in times of crisis reveals huge differences.

The parliamentary system of the French Third Republic had always been marked by frequent changes of government and thus of cabinets. This continued even during the war: Prime Minister [René Viviani \(1863-1925\)](#) was replaced in October 1915 by [Aristide Briand \(1862-1932\)](#), who led the government for a year and a half and was followed by [Alexandre Ribot \(1842-1923\)](#) in March 1917. All of these changes were more or less directly related to military setbacks and their effect on popular support for the war. But real crisis struck in spring and summer of 1917 when the Nivelle Offensive failed and mutinies within the French army not only spread widely but also sparked [strikes](#) in many factories central to the war effort.^[42] Under the pressure of these problems, the Ribot cabinet only survived for half a year and Ribot was replaced in September 1917 by [Paul Painlevé \(1863-1933\)](#). But, in fact, this new cabinet had even less support in the Assembly than the previous one. The socialists had withdrawn their support after they were prohibited from sending a delegation to the peace conference organized by the Socialist International in neutral [Sweden](#), which in the end was cancelled.^[43] The cabinet was also weakened by accusations against several cabinet ministers that they were in favor of Austria's offer of a separate peace treaty. Consequently, in November Painlevé lost a vote of confidence in the Assembly.^[44] Government instability during the first years of the war shows two things: First, it is evident that below the veneer of *Union sacrée* party conflicts continued and that the government was suspected by nationalists both within and outside of Parliament to be weak and not willing to pursue the war "*jusqu'au bout*". Second, it seems to corroborate the German prejudice that democracies like France were able to produce only weak governments unable to lead the country to victory.

However, this is not the whole story. In November 1917, President [Raymond Poincaré \(1860-1934\)](#) finally agreed to appoint an experienced politician and extremely outspoken critic of the strategic policies of former governments, [Georges Clemenceau \(1841-1929\)](#), as prime minister. The "tiger", as the former minister of interior and prime minister from 1906 to 1909 was called, stood for a policy of [total war](#) and of subordinating everything to the goal of complete victory. All aspirations for a negotiated separate peace ended with Clemenceau's appointment. As in most belligerent states, the French executive dominated politics during the war and, more than any of his predecessors, Clemenceau dominated decision-making within the executive. This was helped by the fact that his cabinet was mainly composed of loyal political allies. Parliament, however, did not lose its prerogative for which Clemenceau himself had fought as a senator. Not only was he supported by

more than a two-third majority of the National Assembly and the Senate,^[45] he also respected Parliament's right to be informed, and loyally answered questions in the military commissions of both houses.^[46] Thus, contrary to the expectations in Germany, the French Republic succeeded at the end of 1917, in establishing a strong and stable government, which at the same time was constitutional and democratically legitimate. By an extremely repressive domestic policy against all kinds of "defeatism" on the one hand and rhetoric recognition of the role of the simple soldier, whose respect Clemenceau won on his frequent visits to the front line, the government successfully restored national morale. As minister of war – like his predecessor Clemenceau held both offices, prime minister and minister of war – he reformed the ministry and re-established civilian authority over the army command.^[47] After the armistice Clemenceau was regarded as "*Père la Victoire*" (father of victory) in France in recognition of his central role as war leader since November 1917.

In his autobiography written after his father's abdication in 1918, William, Crown Prince of Germany (1882-1951) attributed the [German defeat](#) to one major cause: Clemenceau, so he claimed, had been a "civilian dictator" whose will to win the war had been decisive – and Germany had lacked such a war leader.^[48] This statement was a mixture of truth and fiction.

The former Crown Prince ignored the fact that the other major democracies at war with Germany had achieved similar governmental changes to those in France. In Britain, David Lloyd George (1863-1945) had succeeded Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928) in December 1916. At the time of the American President Woodrow Wilson's (1856-1924) efforts at mediation, this change in leadership had been a signal that Britain would concentrate its energy on victory in war and not opt for a negotiated peace. Lloyd George relied on Conservative, Labour and Liberal support in parliament, but accepted that national unity had been somewhat tainted by his alienation of large parts of his own Liberal Party. Most Liberal supporters of Asquith withdrew to the backbenches and their support of the new government remained equivocal. However, the Lloyd George cabinet succeeded in centralizing decision-making by establishing the "War Cabinet". As Lloyd George remained in office past the end of the war, Britain, just like France a year later, had effectively installed a stable and efficient government.^[49] Since Lloyd George did not control the military leadership quite as successfully as Clemenceau, he did not achieve the same kind of image as the father of victory as did the French prime minister.

Even in Italy, where, like in France, there was a tradition of short-lived governments and frequent changes in leadership, a new government under Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (1860-1952) was installed in October 1917 at the time of the country's highest military crisis – after the defeat at Caporetto.^[50] With policies quite similar to those of Clemenceau – repression of defeatism on the one hand and pro-war [propaganda](#) on the other – as well as by augmenting pay of the troops and aid for veterans and soldiers' families, the Orlando government remained in office until June 1919 and restored national morale.^[51] And like the French and the British cabinets it received strong support in parliament which even included reformist socialists.

The contrast to the German case could hardly be bigger. As Germany was a constitutional monarchy, the government led by Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg since 1909 did not formally depend on the support of parliament. Yet during the war the situation had changed. The *Reichstag* as the representative of the people was an essential symbol of national unity and any chancellor who could not rely on the support of, at least, a majority in parliament would be untenable. Underneath the surface of *Burgfrieden*, the German *Reichstag* was deeply divided. On the one hand, there was the nationalist right, Conservatives and National Liberals, who fiercely demanded a peace of victory and conquest and opposed constitutional reform. On the other hand, there was the left, Social Democrats and at least a majority of Left Liberals, who favoured constitutional reform and a peace of reconciliation, consequently objecting to annexations and conquests. The Catholic Centre Party stood between these two political camps, leaning at times more to one or the other direction. The right had long suspected Bethmann Hollweg of not only relying on the support of the left in order to maintain national unity, but also sharing the left's political views. This was due to his opposition and abandonment of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1915 and 1916. In the summer of 1917, two developments came together, which severely weakened the chancellor's position.^[52] Initially, his support from the parliamentary left weakened because he proved unable to deliver any meaningful constitutional reforms, particularly with regard to the Prussian three-class suffrage system. And additionally, the promises of the Naval High Command that unrestricted submarine warfare (which had re-started in January), would force Britain to seek peace within six months had been proven false. As a result, a new parliamentary majority consisting of Social Democrats, Left Liberals, and the Centre Party drafted a resolution stating that the German people were prepared to end unrestricted submarine warfare and to accept a negotiated peace without annexations or reparations. The implication of this resolution was quite clearly to establish a *de facto* government responsibility to the *Reichstag's* majority. Of course, both the content and the implication of the Peace Resolution^[53] were fiercely opposed by the parties on the right. In this situation the *Kaiser, Wilhelm II, German Emperor (1859-1941)* did not appoint a new chancellor who would unite the country behind the parliamentary majority but one chosen and favoured by the *Military High Command*, which had for quite some time advocated the dismissal of Bethmann Hollweg. The new chancellor, *Georg Michaelis (1857-1936)*, never intended to follow the Peace Resolution although he paid some lip service to the majority parties. He lasted only three months in office. But his successor, Count *Georg von Hertling (1843-1919)*, a former *Reichstag* deputy who declared he would govern with the *Reichstag* majority, proved too old and weak to seriously counter the influence of the army's High Command, the latter having no intention of pursuing a peace of reconciliation.^[54] Thus, the country's policies were, at least in important strategic matters, led by the military and not the civilian branch of government. The main symbol of national unity in war was the Chief of the High Command, *Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934)*, and not any civilian leader.^[55]

Similarly, the prime ministers in the other major non-democratic belligerent states, Austria and Russia, were a succession of bureaucrats or courtiers, none of whom could win a role as a national leader comparable to Clemenceau or Lloyd George.^[56] Contrary to German prejudices it was not the

authoritarian mode of government but parliamentary democratic political systems which proved able to produce such leaders. Which, in turn, suggests that, although in all belligerent states the executive branch of government was vastly extended in scope and competences, the importance of parliaments and parties in the political process made an important difference on how the political system was able to cope with the new challenges of war.^[57]

Constitutional and Political Changes precipitated by War

Franchise Reforms

It seems evident today that governments who send their (male) citizens to fight in war could not refuse them the right to vote. Indeed, the record seems to support this logic of granting voting rights in exchange for military service. In many belligerent states franchise reforms were introduced either during the war or in the immediate aftermath, reducing age restrictions in such a way that all male legal adults were eligible to vote. And, in fact, the same logic could be applied to [women's right to vote](#) since women contributed to the war effort by both labour and sacrifice.^[58] But the logic of justification for enfranchisement did not work in all belligerent countries in the same way.

In the non-democratic belligerent states, electoral reform proved impossible. In Germany,^[59] Austria, and Russia universal suffrage for legal adults including women was only introduced *after* the respective revolutions in 1917 or 1919. On the contrary, in the English-speaking democracies of the United States and Canada, electoral reforms enfranchising women were enacted in 1920 and 1918, before the end of the war or soon after.^[60] Britain did not go quite as far: In the 1918 Representation of the People Act only women over thirty years of age were included whereas the act essentially included equal voting rights for all male legal adults.^[61] Electoral reforms in Belgium and Italy extended suffrage only to males of twenty-one years of age, not to women (except for soldiers' widows in Belgium). And in France, where there had been universal male suffrage since 1875, a bill enfranchising women was passed in National Assembly in 1920 but failed to win a majority in the Senate. On the other hand, in neutral states such as [Denmark](#) and Sweden universal suffrage was extended to male and female citizens more or less at the same time (1915/18 and 1921).^[62]

This – quite incomplete – list shows three things: First, there is a tendency inherent in democracies to include all citizens in the process of political participation. There may be resistance of those privileged by voting restrictions, but in the long run it is impossible to ignore the egalitarian logic of democracy. Second, in quite a few belligerent states the war helped to overcome this kind of resistance against equality of suffrage and to supply new justifications for equality. It accelerated change, but did not cause it. Third, in this respect the authoritarian governments proved quite unable to adapt to the necessities of modern mass politics.

Changes of Party Systems

To some extent the national party systems of European countries differed, of course, as a result of the varying social problems in these countries. Hence all generalizations are to be treated with caution. However, the major ideological party families were represented in most European countries: conservative, liberal, and socialist labour parties existed practically everywhere, even though the ideological position and strength of parties of the same family varied enormously. Some developments in the evolution of party systems were peculiar to specific countries. For instance, that the traditional two-party system in Britain was sustained after the war (aided by the British first-past-the-post electoral system), but that the liberal party was supplanted by the labour party as the main antagonist to the Tories had been precipitated by the split over the issue of how to wage the war between Asquithian and Lloyd Georgian liberals.^[63] But, apart from such national developments, across the board one saw the emergence of two new party families: communist and fascist, which obviously did not come to power everywhere but which played a significant role in most post-war states. This raises the question as to what extent the war engendered rise of these anti-democratic ideological political movements.

As has been described above,^[64] the conflict between reformist and revolutionary socialism was not new. The split of socialist parties along these lines had occurred in Russia as well as Italy even before the war. Consequently, it can safely be assumed that the war did not *cause* the split in the socialist movement and the rise of communist parties throughout Europe. But without the Russian [October Revolution](#) which in itself was caused to a large extent by the liberal February Revolution government's refusal to negotiate a separate peace and its decision to remain in the war, European and even international communism would have assumed a very different shape: Neither the Bolshevik revolutionary activism in many European countries in the immediate post-war era nor the dominant influence of Stalinist communism in the inter-war years would have been possible.^[65]

Likewise, radical [nationalism](#), social Darwinism and other elements of fascist ideology had existed long before the beginning of the war.^[66] Thus it cannot credibly be claimed that [Adolf Hitler's \(1889-1945\)](#) National Socialist ideology was born in the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War.^[67] But without the experience of the war, the domestic conflicts over war aims and war policies, the brutalization of political cultures, and other preconditions, the formation of fascist movements even in countries that had been victorious can hardly be explained. Obviously, fascist movements were not successful in their bid for power everywhere, but even in countries like Britain and France they existed and had their origins in the radical nationalist milieus and organizations of the First World War.^[68]

Conclusion: “To Make the World Safe for Democracy”

In his speech before Congress asking for a Declaration of War against Germany the American President Woodrow Wilson claimed that the purpose of war would be “to make the world safe for democracy”.^[69] Wilsonian idealism as shown in the first part of the quote became highly unpopular in

later years when Wilson had failed to win the American senate's ratification for the Versailles Treaty and it became clear how *unsafe* the interwar years were for democracies. Much later, in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, the old Kantian and Wilsonian tradition of the democratic-peace-thesis that democracies do not wage wars against each other gained greater popularity.^[70] But only recently has there been an appreciation of the second part of the quote,^[71] that is, what had already been noticed by Huntington: that the First World War in fact engendered a broad expansion of democracies.^[72] Particularly the successor states of the European Empires, of course with the great exception of Russia, adopted forms of democracy. This comes as no surprise since the victorious democratic powers had proven their superior capacity to adapt to the needs of a modern industrial war of mass armies.

But, unfortunately, the beginning of Huntington's "first reverse wave" originated in Europe as well.^[73] With Mussolini's "March on Rome" in 1922, a series of reversals of democracies – mostly in places where democracy did not have deep roots – to forms of authoritarian government began. Many of the problems causing this reversal had their origin in the war as well. Thus, the legacy of the First World War with regard to the role of democratic parliaments, parties, and governments remains deeply ambiguous.

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Notes

1. ↑ Even in Germany, where the national parliament, the *Reichstag*, was elected by universal, equal male suffrage, there was bitter dispute over the three-class-suffrage in Prussia, which was by far the biggest federal state; cf. Oppelland, Torsten: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2016-06-02. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10916>.
2. ↑ Bagehot, Walter: The English Constitution, London 1993, p. 63.
3. ↑ Cf. Freedman, Leonard: Parliamentary Democracy, in: Kurian, George Thomas (ed.): The Encyclopedia of Political Science, Washington 2011, pp. 1176-1177.; for further literature on the British Constitution at the very time, see: Bagehot, English Constitution 1993 as well as Lowell, Abbott Lawrence: The Government of England (2 volumes), New York 1920.
4. ↑ Cf. Mack Smith, Denis: Modern Italy. A Political History, Ann Arbor 1997, pp. 27, 29-30.
5. ↑ Cf. Řířhová, Blanka: Constitutional Monarchy, in: Kurian, George Thomas (ed.): The Encyclopedia of Political Science, Washington 2011, pp. 315-316.

6. † Cf. Dickinson, Frederick R.: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Japan), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10434>.
7. † This perception was one of the reasons for the [genocide](#) of the Armenian minority which began in 1916; cf. Suny, Ronald Grigor: Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, in: Bartov, Omer; Mack, Phyllis (eds.): In God's Name. Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century, New York 2001, pp. 23-56, esp. 23-24, 49-56.
8. † Cf. Gaida, Fedor Aleksandrovich: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Russian Empire), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10189>. Translated by Goronwy, Trevor.
9. † For further literature on this subject, see: Fortescue, William: The Third Republic in France 1870-1940. Conflicts and Continuities, London 2000.
10. † Cf. Bock, Fabienne: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-06-15. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10655>. Translated by: Serveau, Jocelyne.
11. † Huntington, Samuel P.: The Third Wave. Democratization in the late Twentieth Century, Norman 1993, p. 16.
12. † A phrase coined by Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic, first presented to Parliament on 4 August 1914; cf. Bock, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France).
13. † An all-party arrangement for a truce of all domestic political competition analogue to *Union sacrée* even respective its date of origin: the 4 August; prompted by the *Kaiser's* speech in front of parliament: "*Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, ich kenne nur noch Deutsche!*" ("I do not know parties anymore, I only know Germans!"); cf. Oppelland, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany).
14. † In Britain, the decision to postpone general elections could only be taken in 1915 with the consent of a Tory-dominated House of Lords; Cf. Johnson, Matthew: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Great Britain and Ireland), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10324>.
15. † Cf. *ibid.*
16. † Cf. Leonhard, Jörn: Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs, München 2014, pp. 208-209.
17. † The great weight Franz Joseph carried in preserving the Austro-Hungarian monarchy despite all internal conflicts became apparent in regard to the developments after his death; cf. Vocolka, Michaela und Karl: Franz Joseph I. Kaiser von Österreich und König von Ungarn 1830-1916. Eine Biographie, München 2015, pp. 364, 368.

18. † Cf. Papadia, Elena: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Italy), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2016-04-27. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10896>. Translated by: Thom, Martin.
19. † Callaghan, Kevin J.: Demonstration Culture. European Socialism & The Second International, 1889-1914, Leicester 2010, pp. 293-294.
20. † Cf. Leonhard, Pandora 2014, pp. 110-115.
21. † A detailed elaboration of the motives and development of the German Social Democrats during the First World War is given by Miller, Susanne: Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im Ersten Weltkrieg, Düsseldorf 1974.
22. † Cf. Sassoon, Donald: One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century, London 1996, pp. 37-38, 43-49; Smith, Leonard V.: France, in: Horne, John (ed.): A Companion to World War I, 2nd edition, Chichester 2011, pp. 418-419.
23. † The British Labour Party had been founded in 1900 as a kind of federation of formerly independent socialist parties and the ILP was one of the founding members. An informative summary of the Labour Party's long road to its eventual foundation is given by: Sassoon, Hundred Years 1996, pp. 15-16.
24. † Cf. Johnson, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Great Britain and Ireland).
25. † Cf. Oppelland, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany).
26. † For further reading on that very separation, see Dan, Theodore: The Origins of Bolshevism, New York 1994, pp. 237-407.
27. † A comprehensive overview of Italy's political evolution from the turn of the century to its entry into war including a depiction of the foundation and eventual splits within the PSI is given by Woller, Hans: Geschichte Italiens im 20. Jahrhundert, München 2010, pp. 17-62.
28. † Cf. Papadia, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Italy).
29. † Cf. Gaida, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Russian Empire).
30. † Regarding the foundation and background of the French socialists, see Sassoon, Hundred Years 1996, pp. 12-13.
31. † Cf. Bock, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France).
32. † Cf. Johnson, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Great Britain and Ireland).
33. † Cf. Hansard 1803-2005, Commons in Sitting 1914 ([/http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1914](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1914)).
34. † Cf. Oppelland, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany).
35. † Cf. Bock, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France).
36. † Cf. *ibid.*
37. † An extensive overview of the Main Committee's work is given by Schiffers, Reinhard (ed.): Der Hauptausschuss des Deutschen Reichstags 1915-1918 (Volumes I-IV), Düsseldorf 1981-83.
38. † The Stürgkh government ruled by emergency decree since March 1914, cf. Höbelt, Lothar: Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Austria), not yet online so no detailed citation available.
39. † Cf. Leonhard, Pandora 2014, p. 209.

40. † Cf. Papadia, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Italy).
41. † Cf. Oppelland: Government, Parliaments and Parties (Germany).
42. † Cf. Bourlet, Michaël: Civilian and Military Power (France), in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10182>.
43. † Cf. Grossheim, Heinrich: Sozialisten in der Verantwortung. Die französischen Sozialisten und Gewerkschafter im ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1917, Bonn 1978, pp. 154-171.
44. † Cf. Bock, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France).
45. † The socialists did not support him but even with the illusion of *Union sacrée* shattered Clemenceau's authority was undiminished; cf. Winock, Michel: Clemenceau, Paris 2007, pp. 426-428.
46. † Cf. Bock, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (France).
47. † Cf. Bourlet, Civilian and Military Power (France).
48. † Erinnerungen des Kronprinzen Wilhelm. Aus den Aufzeichnungen, Dokumenten, Tagebüchern und Gesprächen herausgegeben von Karl Rosner, Stuttgart et al. Berlin 1922, p. 174.
49. † Cf. Johnson, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Great Britain and Ireland).
50. † Cf. Papadia, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Italy).
51. † Cf. Strachan, Hew: The War Experienced. Command, Strategy, and Tactics, 1914-18, in: Horne, Companion 2011, p. 38; Rochat, Giorgio: The Italian Front, 1915-18, in: Horne, Companion 2011, pp. 89-90.
52. † The memoirs of Crown Prince William echo the contemporary criticism of Bethmann Hollweg, that he had been a weak leader who had bowed to the left, Kronprinz Wilhelm, Erinnerungen, p. 175.
53. † The final version of that very resolution is to be found in Matthias, Erich (ed.): Der Interfraktionelle Ausschuss 1917/18, Volume II, Düsseldorf 1959, pp. 114-115. Cf. also Seils, Ernst-Albert, Weltmachtstreben und Kampf für den Frieden. Der deutsche Reichstag im Ersten Weltkrieg, Frankfurt am Main 2011, pp. 303-363.
54. † Cf. Oppelland, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany).
55. † The public's worship of Hindenburg as that very symbol of national unity even went so far as to place him on the same level with the much-loved Otto von Bismarck – an honor no living German had previously been accorded; cf. Pyta, Wolfram: Hindenburg. Herrschaft zwischen Hohenzollern und Hitler, München 2007, p. 295.
56. † Cf. Höbelt, Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Austria); Gaida, Governments, Parliaments, and Parties (Russian Empire).
57. † Cf. with a similar conclusion Schramm, Gottfried: Militarisierung und Demokratisierung. Typen der Massenintegration im Ersten Weltkrieg, in: Francia 3 (1975), pp. 476-497.
58. † Cf. Kuchler, Barbara: Kriege. Eine Gesellschaftstheorie gewaltsamer Konflikte, Frankfurt am Main 2013, pp. 65-67.

59. ↑ In Germany the national parliament, the Reichstag, had been elected by universal male suffrage since 1867; the aim of reform was the Prussian three-class-suffrage. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg came to see the necessity of reform but was able to overcome conservative resistance to his reform plans; cf. Oppelland, *Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Germany)*.
60. ↑ In Canada the first step to broaden suffrage had been enacted in a very manipulative way in 1917 in order to ensure victory for the incumbent Conservative government; cf. MacKenzie, David: *Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Canada)*, in: 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-02-24. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10562>.
61. ↑ Cf. Setzer, Hans: *Wahlsystem und Parteienentwicklung in England. Wege zur Demokratisierung der Institutionen 1832-1948*, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 244.
62. ↑ For a comparative summary, see Nohlen, Dieter: *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem. Zur Theorie und Empirie der Wahlsysteme*, 7. Aufl. Opladen 2014, pp. 47-49.
63. ↑ Cf. Dutton, David: *A History of the Liberal Party*, Basingstoke et al. 2004, pp. 68-79.
64. ↑ Cf. Section 2.2.
65. ↑ For the significance as well as the historical embedding of the Russian Revolution, see, for example, Sassoon, *Hundred Years 1996*, pp. 31-59; Doernberg, Stefan: *Oktoberrevolution – Epochenwechsel oder Weg in die Sackgasse*, in: Marx-Engels-Stiftung e.V. (ed.): *Die Oktoberrevolution 1917 und ihr Platz in der Geschichte (Schriftenreihe der Marx-Engels-Stiftung 29)*, Bonn 1997, pp. 9-25.
66. ↑ Cf. Passmore, Kevin: *The Ideological Origins of Fascism Before 1914*, in: Bosworth, R.J.B. (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, Oxford 2010, pp. 11-31.
67. ↑ For this rather simplified thesis, cf. Weber, Thomas: *Hitler's First War. Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War*, Oxford 2011. In the Italian case of Mussolini and his fascist movement, however, the connection between the events of the war and the rise of fascism is much more concrete and direct; cf. Corni, Gustavo: *Fascism and the Radical Right*, in: 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-08-26. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10715>. (Enc. 14-18).
68. ↑ Cf. Johnson, *Governments, Parliaments and Parties (Great Britain and Ireland)*.
69. ↑ Link, Arthur S.: *Wilson (Volume V). Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace 1916-1917*, Princeton 1965, p. 425.
70. ↑ To get an explanation of the thesis itself as well as to gain an extensive insight into the debates at that very time, see Brown, Michael E. / Lynn-Jones, Sean M. / Miller, Steven E. (eds.): *Debating the Democratic Peace (International Security Readers)*, Cambridge 1996.
71. ↑ For example Müller, Tim B.: *Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Lebensversuche moderner Demokratien*, Hamburg 2014, pp. 74-113.
72. ↑ Cf. Huntington, *Third Wave 1993*, pp. 16-17.
73. ↑ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

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