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**War and Democratization – A Case Study:**

**The Bulgarian experience of World War I**

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## Introduction

As isolated phenomena, interstate conflict – war - and democracy are perhaps two of the most thoroughly studied subjects in political science. And, as one might expect, the various linkages between the two have been subject to equally involved scrutiny. Note, for example, the veritable cacophony of literature surrounding the ‘democratic peace’, exploring the connection between regime type and interstate conflict, which proliferated following the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, scholars have also made frequent study of the notion that the democratization process itself may trigger conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, despite ample scholarly attention to the impact of regime type on the likelihood of conflict and the link between the democratization process itself and the outbreak of war, substantive research studying the reverse effect – the impact of war on the process or likelihood of democratization - has been largely neglected.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say, however, that theoretical linkages between the experience of war and its impact on the state and domestic political regimes have not been formulated. Indeed, large-scale war has been posited to provide the impetus for large-scale state building – in Charles Tilly’s famous phrase, “war made the state, and the state made war.”<sup>4</sup> The administrative and economic capacity that war can bolster, as well as the national consolidation and patriotism that it can engender can provide an environment conducive to democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Russett 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Mansfield and Snyder 1995.

<sup>3</sup> In one of the only comprehensive studies examining this linkage, Mansfield and Snyder 2010 find the connection between war and democratization to be unsystematic and spurious. Rather, they find economic development, the democratic character of surrounding regimes, and prior history of democratic rule to be far more predictive of whether and when a state will democratize.

<sup>4</sup> Tilly 1975, 42.

rule.<sup>5</sup> The mobilization of the immense societal resources – both material as well as human – required to sustain a large-scale war effort can lead to increased bargaining between the state and societal actors,<sup>6</sup> which in turn can endanger elite rule, expand participation,<sup>7</sup> and facilitate the granting by elites of domestic concessions: political reforms, expansion of the franchise, social welfare legislation, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Further, a military *defeat* can discredit undemocratic elites, leading to their eviction and replacement by forces more congenial to democratic rule.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the threats and domestic stresses associated with war are theorized to provide the justification for the curtailment, rather than the expansion of democracy.<sup>10</sup>

This paper seeks to examine the central question with which these theoretical formulations broadly engage: that is, what is the effect, if any, of participation in interstate conflict on a state's level of democracy? Specifically, I explore this question through a detailed case study of the impact of participation in the First World War on the Balkan state of Bulgaria. In brief, I find that no significant democratization occurred as a result of Bulgarian involvement in World War I.

I argue that, in accounting for this lack of significant political reform, the central explanation lies in the presence within the autocratic Bulgarian political system of an *effective electoral mechanism*. That is, I contend that, although the Bulgarian political regime fell far short, both before and after the war, of the criteria for *liberal* democracy,

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<sup>5</sup> Mansfield and Snyder 2010, 25; Tilly 1990, chap. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kier and Krebs 2010, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Tilly 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Kier and Krebs 2010, 8; Tilly 1990, chap. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Kier and Krebs 2010, 12.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Hintze 1975, cited in Mansfield and Snyder 2010. However, this is only a minor point made in Hintze's essay. Of perhaps more relevance is that Hintze also articulates the linkage between the universal service required by the military state and political rights when he notes that, "[w]hoever puts himself in the service of the state must logically and fairly be granted the regular rights of citizenship," although he concedes that this need not entail the actual right of suffrage (211).

any post-war impetus for democratization was likely ameliorated by the presence of an electoral mechanism which both encouraged those parties who stood to gain from the war's discrediting of the previous ruling elite to 'work within the system', as well as provided Bulgarian voters disaffected by the experience of the war a means by which to evict those political actors perceived as responsible. Parliamentary elections immediately following the Bulgarian defeat saw a decisive repudiation of the incumbent parties and the installation of a radical agrarian regime which pursued both a policy of land and fiscal reform as well as the prosecution of those who had been responsible for Bulgarian involvement in the war. In other words, I find that several of the theoretical explanations elucidated above – principally those positing that war can both sweep anti-democratic elites from power and spur post-war concessions to “reward” or mollify a disillusioned and disenchanting citizenry – broadly fit the Bulgarian case, but served to impede democratization rather than facilitate it.

I first present a brief overview of the methodology of the paper. Then, to provide a modicum of context, I briefly examine the impact of the First World War on two western democracies, France and England. Finally, I examine in detail: the nature of the pre-war Bulgarian social and political regime; the Bulgarian experience of the First World War; and the political developments of the war's immediate aftermath. Throughout this examination, I provide supporting evidence for the central hypothesis of the paper: that the presence of effective electoral controls, coupled with various contextual factors – the highly agrarian nature of Bulgarian society, the low levels of Bulgarian industrialization and unionization, and so on – effectively mitigated any post-war impulse for democratization.

## The Methodology of the Paper

The first matter to dispose of is definitional – that is, what is meant by the term “democratization.” This paper will, broadly following Robert Dahl’s classic formulation of democracy as ‘contestation and participation’,<sup>11</sup> understand democratization to mean both the extension of formal political rights – for example, the right of suffrage – as well as the implementation of social policies and reform such as welfare legislation, land redistribution, and so on. That is, where appropriate,<sup>12</sup> I will treat not only the extension of purely political rights but also the implementation of social policies and reforms as evidence in support of democratization. The justification for such an approach is, as Dahl and others have recognized, that effective democracy requires far more than simple electoral participation; it also requires the informal institutions, practices, and opportunities that “render contestation and participation more or less ‘effective’.”<sup>13</sup>

Second, in investigating the impact of the First World War on the nature of the Bulgarian political regime, I have confined my analysis of the war’s effects to the roughly 5-year period following the armistice which officially ended Bulgarian participation in the war in late September 1918. While this 5-year cutoff is admittedly arbitrary,<sup>14</sup> it represents a reasonable period of time after which any attribution of causality between involvement in a past war and contemporary developments becomes increasingly dubious. That is, any link between a state’s participation in war and, say, a

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<sup>11</sup> Dahl 1971.

<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, the social policy dimension has more relevance to the cases of France and Great Britain. In Bulgaria – a lightly industrialized agrarian society - the ‘substantive’ component of post-war democratization was more appropriately embodied in policies of land redistribution, and fiscal reform aimed at alleviating the tax burden of the Bulgarian peasant.

<sup>13</sup> Kier and Krebs 2010, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Mansfield and Snyder 2010 also use a 5-year cutoff in measuring the effects of war on democratization, although for primarily methodological reasons.

broad extension of the franchise six years following the war's conclusion seems much too spurious to be meaningful.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, I will rely primarily on qualitative evidence in presenting my argument, augmented with a modest amount of quantitative evidence. The standard quantitative measure of democracy, the Polity IV dataset compiled by the Center for Systemic Peace<sup>16</sup> will be used as a basic indicator of the democratic nature of the regimes under scrutiny, but the vast majority of this paper will consist of the qualitative Bulgarian case study.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Impact of the First World War on France and Britain**

### **France**

France paid heavily in both blood and treasure for its involvement in the First World War. Total French casualties amounted to roughly 4.5 million men, or 11.88 percent of the total population.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, French reluctance to finance the war effort through direct taxation – a system of income tax, though approved by the legislature in 1914 was not implemented until 1917 – relying instead on foreign loans, led to the

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<sup>15</sup> The use of a 5-year time horizon means that this paper will not treat the events of 1923, in which the agrarian regime which had held power in Bulgaria more or less since 1919 was brutally deposed by a group of disgruntled Bulgarian military officers and Macedonian extremists, as a curtailment of democracy brought on by the war. While this unconstitutional overthrow of the (elected) agrarian government was issued primarily as a reaction to the radical domestic reforms implemented by the agrarian leader Alexander Stamboliski; and while, as we shall see, Stamboliski and the agrarians ascended to power largely as a result of Bulgarian participation and defeat in World War I, to somehow attribute the 1923 coup directly to Bulgarian involvement in the war stretches the bounds of common sense – as well as responsible scholarship.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall and Jagers 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Owing to the relatively esoteric focus of this study, much of the primary-source data presented will in fact be derived from secondary sources. Unfortunately, nearly all the primary source materials of value - government archives, statistical annuals, and so on - as well as much of the secondary literature, are available, if at all, only in Bulgarian, a language with which the author is unfamiliar.

<sup>18</sup> Lauterbach 1943, 238.

assumption of huge amounts of debt, which in turn placed significant constraints on the post-war implementation of social policy.<sup>19</sup>

The impact of the war on formal political structures and rights in France was largely negligible.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, some have argued that the war in fact directed attention away from the need for substantive political reform.<sup>21</sup> All men in France already possessed the vote, and it seemed certain that French women would be granted the franchise as a reward for their participation in the war effort: the oldest member of the Chamber of Deputies proposed to give women the vote in thanks for ‘their admirable attitude during the war; others declared that women should cast their ballots as a means of honoring French war dead. And indeed, in May 1919 the Chamber of Deputies voted, 329 to 95, to enfranchise women on the same terms as men.<sup>22</sup> However, the bill languished in parliamentary limbo until it was finally rejected by the French Senate in 1922; French women were not to be granted suffrage until after World War II. Indeed, far from advancing the political equality of women in France, some argue that World War I actually impeded the progress of the suffrage movement: “[i]t cut short a campaign which had been building up promisingly on the eve of the war and dispersed its leading figures and organisations.”<sup>23</sup>

If the impact of the war on formal political rights in France was marginal, its effect on substantive policies was only slightly more positive. During the war, workers in industries deemed crucial to the war effort were rewarded with remuneration based not on their production, but on their family responsibilities. The French government also

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<sup>19</sup> Lynch 2006; Lauterbach 1943.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix B for select Polity IV data on the French political system, 1901-23. Marwick 1974, 71, contends that, incidentally, the legislative inefficiency that the war exposed led to the widespread development and subsequent use of parliamentary committees in the Chamber of Deputies.

<sup>21</sup> Marwick 1974, 72.

<sup>22</sup> McMillan 1988, 7.

<sup>23</sup> McMillan 1988, 12.



mandated that employers in certain industries provide, among other things, housing and nurseries for the use of their workers.<sup>24</sup> In 1919, French labor achieved the 8-hour day; and in 1922 the Housing Act was passed, “which provided cheap government loans and, in special cases, subsidies, for working-class, pensioners’ and...war victims housing.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, unlike in Great Britain, relations in France between the government and organized labor were conflictual, leading to reluctance on the part of the state to consider union proposals for comprehensive post-war reform.<sup>26</sup>

## **Great Britain**

Great Britain after World War I is often pointed to as the classic case of war’s democratizing influence through the expansion of political rights and participation. Prior to the war, not only did British women not have the right to vote; neither did 40% of British men.<sup>27</sup> However, universal conscription, introduced for the first time in Britain in 1916, represented a far more widespread mobilization of the British population than had been seen in previous wars. In 1918, the Representation of the Peoples Act granted the vote to all adult males over age 21 and, with property qualifications, all British women over age 30.<sup>28</sup> Although this was ostensibly intended in part to remove the residency requirements for men still serving abroad, the Act also allowed those on poor relief to remain on the voting rolls, effectively severing “the link between poverty and disenfranchisement.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lynch 2006, 628-629.

<sup>25</sup> Marwick 1974, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Lauterbach 1943, 266.

<sup>27</sup> Marwick 1974, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Marwick 1974, 76.

<sup>29</sup> Kier 2010, 158.

Far more impactful in the British case, however, was the way in which the requirements of the wartime economy facilitated the inclusion of organized labor - the membership of which doubled over the course of the war<sup>30</sup> - in the governing process. This unprecedented inclusion<sup>31</sup> provided the basis both for the eventual post-war emergence of the Labour party as a viable political entity<sup>32</sup> as well as for the perception of social reform as a bargaining chip to be played in enlisting labor's continued support. Indeed:

In order to prevent disruption and encourage high output, governments became more and more involved in the resolution of industrial disputes, in consultation with labour over war-time changes in production methods and in guarantees to the unions of a return to pre-war practices. This consultation...led to the creation in 1916 of a special Ministry of Labour with ambitious goals for long-term social reform as well as a brief to keep an eye on the immediate position of labour in the war effort. This process of consultation by the state with the representative bodies of the working classes amounted, in effect, to a new kind of bargaining in which British governments offered large measures of social reform in order to win the co-operation of their working people.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, this same compensatory impulse arguably led to the extension of unemployment insurance to all those in trades which directly impacted the war effort;<sup>34</sup> the passage of education reform through the 'Fisher' Education Act of 1918;<sup>35</sup> and enactment of a Maternity and Child Welfare Act just prior to the end of the war in 1918. Both the broadening of the franchise as well as the widespread inclusion that the war engendered are reflected in Britain's increase on the Polity IV dimensions of

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<sup>30</sup> Kolko 1994, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Kier 2010, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Kier 2010 155-156.

<sup>33</sup> Reid 1988, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Cowper et al. 1990, 96.

<sup>35</sup> Marwick 1974, 91.

“institutionalized democracy” - and in particular its “competitiveness of participation” score – in 1922.<sup>36</sup>

## **The Impact of the First World War on Bulgaria**

### **Bulgaria before the war – social, demographic, and economic characteristics**

The Bulgarian state that saw the turn of the 20th century was rural, agrarian, relatively unindustrialized and unusually egalitarian.<sup>37</sup> 80% of its roughly 4.3 million inhabitants were rural peasants; in 1910, the proportion of urban dwellers to total population stood at 19.1%, a number which had remained relatively unchanged since Bulgaria had achieved independence from Ottoman rule nearly 30 years earlier.<sup>38</sup> Literacy rates were low: in 1900, they stood at 58% for the capital, Sofia, 40% within all other towns, and 15% for rural areas.<sup>39</sup>

The agrarian character of Bulgarian society was reflected in the nature of Bulgarian industry, which was wholly dominated by textile, food, and drink production: in 1911 these areas accounted for nearly 90% of all Bulgarian factory production.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Bulgarian industry was extremely inefficient: production per capita measured only 28.3 gold leva (the Bulgarian unit of currency) in comparison with 1,128 per head in the U.S.A.; even Russian industry proved more efficient, at 150 gold leva per head.<sup>41</sup> Nor were trade unions a significant force within Bulgarian society: in 1907 union membership

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>37</sup> Mouzelis 1976.

<sup>38</sup> Crampton 1983, 349.

<sup>39</sup> Lampe 1978, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Crampton 1983, 370.

<sup>41</sup> Crampton 1983, 389.

stood at only 4,750, a figure which represented no more than 65% of those employed in encouraged industries;<sup>42</sup> and just prior to the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, unionized industrial workers numbered fewer than 1,000.<sup>43</sup>

Although, as we shall see, the agrarian government that came to power immediately following the end of the First World War implemented a program of land expropriation and redistribution, the allocation of holdings in pre-war Bulgaria was already highly egalitarian. This stemmed largely from major land transfers in the 1870s, following Bulgarian independence from Ottoman rule, in which the large estates of Turkish former landholders were broken up and distributed to freeholders.<sup>44</sup> Table 1 shows the distribution of land holdings in Bulgaria in 1908.

**Table 1 – Distribution of Land Holdings in Bulgaria, 1908<sup>45</sup>**

<i>Size of holding</i>	<i>No. of holdings</i>	<i>%age of total holdings</i>	<i>Area of land in hectares</i>	<i>%age of total area</i>
Very small	424,898	45.52	321,568	6.95
Small	386,725	41.43	1,954,854	42.26
Medium	111,632	11.96	1,689,371	36.52
Large	10,119	1.09	659,994	14.27
Total	933,374	100.00	4,625,787	100.00

### **The pre-war political regime**

<sup>42</sup> Crampton 1983, 342.

<sup>43</sup> Tchitchovsky 1929, 281.

<sup>44</sup> Jorgensen 2006, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Adapted from Crampton 1983, 349: “Table 2. Distribution of land holdings, by size of holding, 1908.”

The political structure of pre-war Bulgaria was governed by the Turnovo constitution of 1879,<sup>46</sup> which provided for a parliamentary system of government, and in which were enshrined such liberal ideals as equality before the law; freedom of the press and of worship; freedom of assembly; and so on.<sup>47</sup> Though on paper the Bulgarian system was a constitutional monarchy, the powers of the Bulgarian prince were unusually expansive, in particular his ability to appoint and dismiss members of the ministerial cabinet without consulting the legislature, as well as his unilateral power to dissolve the unicameral National Assembly (the *subranie*) at will and order new elections.<sup>48</sup> Constitutional amendments in 1911 expanded the powers of the monarch even further – both nominally, in changing the official monarchical title from “prince” to “tsar”, as well as substantively, by granting him the power to conclude secret treaties without any consultation of the National Assembly.<sup>49</sup> Suffrage in Bulgaria was granted to all those males over age 21 who possessed civil and political rights, as provided for in the constitution;<sup>50</sup> in 1920 voting was made compulsory which, as we shall see, served to bolster support for the Agrarian National Union.<sup>51</sup> In 1912 a system of proportional, rather than single-member district representation was implemented, which had the practical effect of increasing the power of the monarch relative to the legislature through greater party fragmentation.<sup>52</sup>

However, despite the overwhelmingly democratic cast of the liberal Turnovo constitution, Bulgarian political development since the implementation of that constitution in 1879 was a decidedly un-democratic history of massive electoral

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<sup>46</sup> For one of the only available English translations of the Turnovo constitution, see Black 1943, 291-309.

<sup>47</sup> Grogan 1923, 562.

<sup>48</sup> Chapter XXI, Article 152; Chapter XIX, Article 136.

<sup>49</sup> Bell 1977, 95.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter XIV, Article 86.

<sup>51</sup> Rothschild 1974, 335.

<sup>52</sup> Crampton 1983, 401-402.

malpractice, the consolidation of power in the hands of the monarch, and the emergence of an autocratic “personal regime” under Prince (later Tsar) Ferdinand (r. 1887-1918).<sup>53</sup> Contemporary analyses point to the period of the highly authoritarian rule of S. Stambolov, a strongman who suspended the constitution during his 6-year regime (1887-1894) and who was later assassinated at the behest of Prince Ferdinand, as a time during which a vast number of undemocratic practices became entrenched in the Bulgarian political system.<sup>54</sup> Electoral malfeasance – bribery, the use or threat of violence and intimidation, the arbitrary annulment of election returns to produce the desired composition of the National Assembly – was widespread. Indeed, “from 1886 until the 1990s only two national elections were relatively free and open.”<sup>55</sup>

Instructive in this regard are the parliamentary elections of 1913. Following Bulgaria’s defeat in the second Balkan war, popular disillusionment with those viewed as responsible was made explicit when the government was heavily outpolled and left 12 seats short of a parliamentary majority. In response, minister-president Radoslavov, at the behest of Tsar Ferdinand, immediately dissolved the National Assembly and held fresh elections. Despite including in the subsequent polling, in violation of the constitution, newly-acquired territories, and despite tampering with incoming census returns, the government was still left short of an absolute majority; that majority was then secured through the annulment of 16 opposition seats during the verification process, all of which accrued to the government coalition.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix 1. The Polity IV dataset gives Bulgaria an institutionalized democracy score of 0, and a combined Polity score of -9 for the years 1901-17.

<sup>54</sup> Kostadinova 1995, 16; Karasimeonov 1999, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Crampton 2007, 146-47.

<sup>56</sup> Crampton 2007, 205; Crampton 1983, 430-31.

In addition to electoral malpractice, the pre-war Bulgarian political system was marked by the ‘soft autocracy’ of Tsar Ferdinand’s “personal regime,” gradually established in the wake of Stambolovian authoritarianism:

King Ferdinand did not mount a direct attack against the foundations of parliamentary democracy; he abolished neither the Parliament nor the Constitution and, in comparison with other monarchs [in] the Balkans, he leaned to a much lesser extent on special constitutional prescriptions to restrict parliamentary democracy. The one-man regime in Bulgaria...was personal control over the key sectors of power.<sup>57</sup>

A key feature of this regime was the selection by the monarch of the parliamentary ministers – that is, the government cabinet – prior to national elections, rather than after, as was the case in most western parliamentary democracies. Elections thus largely became not a “device to test popular opinion and secure legitimate government, but a means to provide a pre-chosen ministry with a dependable majority in parliament.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, the practice of *partisanstvo* – a system of clientelism and patronage which, in essence, tied the composition of the civil bureaucracy to the national election returns – only served to augment Ferdinand’s influence over the legislature.<sup>59</sup> This combination of superficial adherence to the constitution – thus profiting from the constitutional supremacy of the monarch - in conjunction with a shrewd manipulation of that same constitutional framework resulted in what was, in essence, a paper democracy. As one opposition newspaper aptly remarked in 1908, the Bulgarian pre-war political regime was, in practice, one of “constitutional absolutism.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Bulgarian Experience of the First World War**

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<sup>57</sup> Karasimeonov 1999, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Crampton 2007, 148.

<sup>59</sup> Crampton 1983, 159-60.

<sup>60</sup> Crampton 2007, 173.

When hostilities broke out in the fall of 1914, Bulgaria officially declared neutrality; the unofficial policy would be to remain on the sidelines until it became clearer which alignment – the Entente or the Central Powers - would afford Bulgaria the best chance for obtaining a share in the post-war spoils, in particular territory lost to neighboring Balkan states several years earlier as a result of the treaty of Bucharest. When the then-minister-president, Radoslavov, defined the Bulgarian war aims during a 1917 session of the National Assembly, he declared:

Our war aims are fixed: we want the unification of the Bulgarian nation...in boundaries which are exactly fixed; we want the annulment [sic] of the treaty of Bucharest; a correction of our frontier with Serbia, including in the territory of Bulgaria all of those lands which are populated by Bulgarians, all along the Morava River to the Danube; we want Macedonia with that part which by the treaty of Bucharest was cut off from Bulgaria...We have historic rights over the whole of Dobrudja, which by the treaty of Berlin was given to Roumania by the Russians as a compensation for Bessarabia. Now, Bulgaria wants all of it returned...We are not worried by the formula “without annexation and without indemnity.” Our formula is, the unification of the Bulgarian nation.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, when Bulgaria signaled its alignment with the Central Powers by attacking Serbia on 11 October 1915, eliciting declarations of war from, in turn, Britain, France, and Russia, the decision was influenced not only by recent German military victories on the Eastern front, but also by the more generous territorial inducement offered by the Central Powers – largely at the expense of Turkey.<sup>62</sup> The official decision to mobilize – made without the constitutionally mandated consultation of the National Assembly - was not met with popular approval. Incidents of mutiny broke out among the Bulgarian army, and

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Mamatey 1953, 244-45.

<sup>62</sup> Crampton 1983, 441-42; Robbins 1971, 580-81; for an economic interpretation of Bulgaria’s decision to ally with Germany and the Central Powers, see Flaningam 1961.



calls by opposition parties for a convocation of the National Assembly to debate the question of mobilization were met with governmental repression.<sup>63</sup>

In both human and material terms, the impact of the First World War on Bulgaria was decidedly deleterious. By 1918 nearly 40% of the male population had been conscripted; and total casualty figures of 300,000, including 100,000 killed, represented the highest per capita casualty rates of any belligerent.<sup>64</sup> Constant food shortages were exacerbated by widespread graft and corruption.<sup>65</sup> Persistent shortages among Bulgarian troops of food, clothing, and footwear, coupled with concern at news of terrible conditions on the homefront led to widespread disaffection within the Bulgarian army.<sup>66</sup> By the end of the war in 1918, the cost of living in Bulgaria had risen twelve-fold since 1914,<sup>67</sup> and inflation had reached catastrophic levels: at the end of 1918, the price index in Bulgaria stood at 1,132 (1910=100), compared with 217 for Germany, 392 for France, 272 for England, and 220 for the United States.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, while the demands of the war did lead to a modest expansion of the Bulgarian state apparatus,<sup>69</sup> the most significant instance of this - the creation in 1917 of the Directorate for Economic and Social Welfare - not only proved wholly ineffective at its primary task of requisitioning grain and supplies from the countryside, but also served to foment public opposition to both the incumbent government and the war through its efforts.<sup>70</sup> Rumors of speculation and war profiteering led to the so-called “women’s riots”

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<sup>63</sup> Crampton 1983, 448-49; Crampton 2007, 208.

<sup>64</sup> Bell 1977, 1922.

<sup>65</sup> Crampton 1983, 455.

<sup>66</sup> Crampton 1983, 467; 458.

<sup>67</sup> Crampton 2007, 223.

<sup>68</sup> Bell 1977, 122-23.

<sup>69</sup> Crampton 1983, 490-500.

<sup>70</sup> Crampton 1983, 505; 467.

of 1917-18,<sup>71</sup> and mass protests and demonstrations grew more and more numerous throughout 1918 as increasing shortages of food and commodities rapidly heightened public discontent and disillusionment.<sup>72</sup> On 14 September 1918, in response to a decisive defeat on the Macedonian front at the hands of d'Esperey's Allied Expeditionary Force which left the heart of Bulgaria defenseless against invasion, discipline among the Bulgarian army finally crumbled, and disorder and desertion broke out on a massive scale; in effect, the army "ceased to exist as an organized military force."<sup>73</sup> Although it would be two weeks until the armistice which put an official end to hostilities was signed at Salonika, for Bulgaria, the war had ended – and, just like the Balkan Wars of five years earlier, it had ended in defeat.

## **Bulgaria After The War**

### **The electoral explanation**

Despite the massive popular discontent brought on by the experience of the war, however, no substantial alteration of the pre-war political system took place. That is, the impact of the First World War on Bulgarian democracy – or lack thereof – was minimal. The central explanation offered by this paper is that the presence of an effective electoral mechanism both encouraged the parties – particularly the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) - that stood to gain from the discrediting of the incumbent leaders, to work within the constitutional system rather than overthrow it, as well as allowed the effective expression of popular discontent, and thus served to ameliorate any impulse

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<sup>71</sup> Bell 1977, 123-24.

<sup>72</sup> Crampton 1983, 464.

<sup>73</sup> Bell 1977, 130.

towards significant democratization in the aftermath of the war.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the implementation by the agrarian regime which held power from 1919 until its violent overthrow in 1923 of a program of comprehensive land and fiscal reform arguably represented an attempt to compensate the Bulgarian peasantry for carrying the social burden of the war,<sup>75</sup> potentially mitigating any popular inclination towards radical political reform.

Particularly suggestive of this explanation is the failure of the so-called “Radomir Rebellion” just prior to the signing of the armistice on 29 September. On 27 September, Raiko Daskalov, a high-ranking member of the BANU, addressed 15,000 rebellious troops in the village of Radomir, and proposed a march on Sofia to overthrow the monarchy and declare a republic, exhorting:

Today...the Bulgarian people break the chains of slavery, throw down the despotic regime of Ferdinand and his henchmen, proclaim them enemies of the people, proclaim themselves a free people with a republican form of government, and hold out the hand of peace and understanding to the peoples of Europe. From this day Tsar Ferdinand and his dynasty and the former government are fallen. All provincial administrators, district officials, police commandants, mayors, and military officers will carry out the orders of the provisional government of the republic.<sup>76</sup>

Of critical significance is the response to this proposal by the charismatic leader of the BANU, Alexander Stamboliski. Stamboliski, imprisoned at the outbreak of the war for publishing a pamphlet calling for non-compliance with the government’s mobilization

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<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Crampton 1983 (515-16) argues that the highly personal nature of Ferdinand’s rule meant that the experience of the war was viewed as a failure of the regime and not of the political system itself; thus, popular discontent was aimed not at the Turnovo system, but rather at those who had led Bulgaria into the war. Ferdinand himself was in fact forced to abdicate as a condition of the armistice, and was replaced by his son, Boris.

<sup>75</sup> Jorgensen 2006, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Bell 1977, 135.

order,<sup>77</sup> had been released on 25 September on the promise that he would use his influence to calm the insurrectionary troops.<sup>78</sup> Rather than encourage Daskalov's republican declaration – and his naming of Stamboliski as its president – Stamboliski's response was decidedly unenthusiastic. After Daskalov's attack was repulsed, Stamboliski met with Daskalov and “berated him for his hastiness. In a later letter describing this meeting Daskalov wrote that instead of support he received ‘reproaches and complaints’.”<sup>79</sup> Moreover, in addressing meetings of rebellious troops, Stamboliski dissociated himself from the coup attempt, presenting himself as nothing more than the leader of BANU, and denying any affiliation with the Radomir republic.<sup>80</sup> While the precise nature of Stamboliski's attitude towards the Radomir Rebellion is disputed<sup>81</sup>, his actions nevertheless represented a practical decision to remain within the pre-war political framework rather than participate in its overthrow.

And indeed, the wisdom of this decision was born out by the rapid electoral ascendance of BANU in the immediate aftermath of the war. The two fundamental principles of the BANU platform – “rule by the people” and the “labor property principle” - were already well suited to agrarian Bulgaria.<sup>82</sup> And as Table 2 indicates, the immediate post-war parliamentary elections saw a complete collapse in the fortunes of the government parties who had led Bulgaria into the war– a collapse of which BANU, along with the Bulgarian Communist Party, was the main beneficiary.

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<sup>77</sup> Bell 1977, 120-21.

<sup>78</sup> Bell 1977, 131.

<sup>79</sup> Bell 1977, 137.

<sup>80</sup> Crampton 1983, 469-70.

<sup>81</sup> Bell 1977, 131-32.

<sup>82</sup> Kostadinova 1995, 43.

**Table 2 – The Electoral Fortunes of BANU, 1913-1923<sup>83</sup>**

<b>1913</b>			
<i>Party</i>	<i>Deputies Elected</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>% of Votes</i>
Liberal Coalition	95	207,763	38.2
BANU	48	113,761	20.9
Broad Socialist	17	55,171	10.2
Narrow Socialist	18	54,217	10.0

  

<b>1919</b>			
<i>Party</i>	<i>Deputies Elected</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>% of Votes</i>
BANU	85	180,648	28
BCP (formerly the Narrow Socialist)	47	118,671	18
Broad Socialist	36	82,826	13
Democrats	28	65,267	10

  

<b>1920</b>			
<i>Party</i>	<i>Deputies Elected</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>% of Votes</i>
BANU	110	349,212	38.2
BCP (formerly the Narrow Socialist)	51	184,616	20.2
Democrats	23	91,177	10.0
Nationals	15	61,647	6.7

  

<b>1923<sup>84</sup></b>			
<i>Party</i>	<i>Deputies Elected</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>% of Votes</i>
BANU	212	569,008	53.7
BCP	16	203,972	19.2
Constitutional Bloc	15	166,909	15.7%
Broad Socialist	2	27,816	N/A

Furthermore, once in power, the Stamboliski regime zealously pursued the prosecution of those who had been responsible for Bulgarian entry into, and conduct of the war. In 1919, the coalition government of which Stamboliski was the head proceeded

<sup>83</sup> Adapted from data given in Bell 1977, 110; 143; 152; 228; and Kostadinova 1995, 54-55. Totals are not provided, and percentages do not sum to 1 due to incomplete data.

<sup>84</sup> The huge disparity between vote percentage and seat percentage, relative to previous elections, is the result of a change in the electoral law which shifted the units of representation from the districts to the counties.

to arrest not only those members of the war cabinet who had remained in the country, but also several parliamentary deputies and journalists who had supported Bulgaria's participation in the war, as well as "officers and officials charged with crimes in occupied territories."<sup>85</sup> Further, in 1922, the Stamboliski government held a national war-guilt referendum - the first referendum in Bulgarian history - to determine whether members of the war cabinet would be tried by special 'peoples' courts' for their actions. The results of the referendum were unequivocal: 74% of those voting were in favor of holding responsible those who were implicated in what was widely viewed as a national catastrophe.<sup>86</sup>

Both the occurrence as well as the results of this referendum – particularly in conjunction with the rapid post-war electoral gains of the BANU at the expense of the incumbent parties – seem suggestive of the hypothesis both that the experience of the war had completely discredited the former ruling elites, and also that the Bulgarian citizenry had substantial access to effective means of voicing their discontent. That is, though post-war Bulgaria was not much more democratic than it had been prior to the war,<sup>87</sup> it was nevertheless sufficiently democratic to quell any calls for widespread political reform that the experience of the war may have provoked.

### **BANU's post-war reforms**

Moreover, in addition to following the popular impulse for prosecution of those responsible for Bulgarian involvement in the war, Stamboliski's Agrarian regime also pursued and implemented a radical program of land and fiscal reform. In 1920, a State

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<sup>85</sup> Bell 1977, 146.

<sup>86</sup> Kostadinova 1995, 51-52.

<sup>87</sup> The semi-authoritarian nature of the Stamboliski agrarian regime will be discussed shortly.

Land Fund was established, the purpose of which was the expropriation of what was deemed “excess property,” and its redistribution to landless peasants and dwarf-holders.<sup>88</sup>

Table 3 gives a brief overview of the particularities of the reform program; Table 4 indicates the primary sources from which the redistributed land was appropriated.

**Table 3 – Basic Overview of Bulgarian Land Reform 1921-26<sup>89</sup>**

<i>Total land under reform</i>	330,000 ha of arable land; or 4 percent of the total land area
<i>Strategy</i>	Expropriation and confiscation of land exceeding maximum limits; a state fund for distribution
<i>Maximum or minimum limits</i>	30 ha of land per family plus an extra 5 ha for each additional member of families of above four people; in mountainous areas, 50 ha per family
<i>Official precedence or major land receivers</i>	Resettled refugees from Thrace and Macedonia; landless agricultural laborers and dwarf-holders
<i>Redemption payments</i>	Law in 1924 allowing for progressive compensation to a value of 50% of the land price in 1923
<i>Restitution</i>	Exemptions for owners of up to 30 ha promising to grow vegetables or fruit
<i>Inheritance</i>	Full inheritance of land leading to subdivision of plots into strips
<i>Major political lines of division</i>	Repressed political parties and urban groups versus BANU
<i>Major groups involved (victims)</i>	The church, the state and local authorities

<sup>88</sup> Jorgensen 2006, 85.

<sup>89</sup> Adapted from Jorgensen 2006, 90: “Table 6: Basic overview of the interwar land reforms in Estonia, Finland and Bulgaria.” As the dates given suggest, the program was left in place even after the Agrarian regime was deposed in 1923.

**Table 4: Sources of the State Land Fund<sup>90</sup>**

Land expropriated from private landowners	48,982.4 ha
Land expropriated from village governments	20,252.7 ha
Land expropriated from monasteries	2,397.6 ha
State-owned lands	8,286.8 ha
Lands in litigation between village governments	1,020.3 ha
Forest land owned by the state or village governments	106.4 ha
Total	81,046.2 ha

As has been mentioned, the pre-war distribution of land holdings in Bulgaria was fairly egalitarian to begin with,<sup>91</sup> thus rendering the practical impact of Stamboliski's land reform program relatively insignificant. Moreover, the amount of land actually redistributed by the program was much less than expected: it was anticipated that the State Land Fund would acquire 230,000 ha; by 1923, when the Stamboliski regime was overthrown, it contained less than 82,000 ha.<sup>92</sup> If nothing else, this suggests that the aims of the land reform program were ideological, rather than practical – that is, the realization of the Agrarian “labor property principle.”<sup>93</sup>

Of a more practical and immediate nature was the fiscal reform implemented by the Stamboliski regime. The Agrarian Union itself had been formed around the turn of the century partially in response to peasant frustrations over government tax policy, particularly the abandonment of a fixed land tax in favor of a tithe in kind.<sup>94</sup> Consonant with its principle of “labor property,” the fiscal reform enacted by BANU following the

<sup>90</sup> Bell 1977, 167.

<sup>91</sup> See Table 1. Bell 1977, 13 points out that, in neighboring Romania, 0.56% of the population held 48.6% of the land in units of over 100 ha each.

<sup>92</sup> Bell 1977, 166.

<sup>93</sup> Jorgensen 2006, 88.

<sup>94</sup> Crampton 1983, 260-65.



war sought to shift the tax burden from land to other types of property – income in particular. A progressive income tax was implemented, with a maximum rate of 35%, and 25% for corporations. For the average peasant, this policy meant a halving of his pre-war tax obligation.<sup>95</sup>

This study does not claim that these programs of reform in themselves represented any sort of substantive democratization, as post-war social welfare legislation in Britain and France has largely been portrayed. Rather, it seems more suggestive of this paper's central hypothesis to view the effect of these reforms as the compensation and mollification of the Bulgarian peasantry, who comprised 80% of the total population, and were similarly represented in the ranks of the Bulgarian army. Indeed, the overthrow of the Agrarian regime in 1923 was, as we shall see, not the work of disgruntled peasant foot soldiers demanding greater political inclusion, but rather of a displaced Bulgarian elite who felt threatened by the radical egalitarian cast of the Agrarian program.<sup>96</sup>

### **BANU authoritarianism**

However, despite the undeniably egalitarian cast of the post-war BANU regime, and a moderate shift in the balance of power between the legislature and the monarch that resulted from the departure of Tsar Ferdinand, and with him his personal regime, post-war Bulgaria was only marginally more democratic than it had been before the war.<sup>97</sup>

Although the Bulgarian citizenry was clearly disillusioned with the pre-war “bourgeois” parties – and thus BANU had little to fear by way of sizable competition, save from

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<sup>95</sup> Bell 1977, 168.

<sup>96</sup> Rothschild 1974, 341; Mouzelis 1976, 89; Bell 1977, 208-209.

<sup>97</sup> See Appendix A. The forced abdication of Ferdinand had a not-insignificant impact on the Bulgarian political system – his departure is clearly reflected in positive changes on the “executive recruitment” and “executive constraints” dimensions – but the substantial limitations of the Polity dataset should caution us against concluding solely on that basis that post-war Bulgaria was, in practical terms, significantly more democratic as a result of the war.

perhaps the BCP – Stamboliski readily continued the Bulgarian political tradition of electoral malpractice. In addition to mildly repressive measures taken during the election itself, when BANU failed to achieve more than a plurality of deputies to the National Assembly in 1920, Stamboliski quashed the mandates of 13 opposition deputies, producing a BANU majority of two.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, BANU possessed its own paramilitary peasant force, the Orange Guards, which Stamboliski used to persistently - and sometimes violently - harass his political opposition.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, once in power, BANU sought, as Ferdinand had almost thirty years earlier, to augment and consolidate its power by operating increasingly within the interstices of the constitutional order:

First, the BANU began to substitute its own machinery for parliament and the government bureaucracy. Second, the Agrarians moved against the restraints that existed on executive authority, diminishing the role of Bulgaria's traditional 'checks and balances' in favor of the principle of 'the unity of state power'.

In 1921, the Agrarians formed a Supreme Union Council – in essence, a substitute parliament – within which to debate and pass their legislative program outside of the National Assembly.<sup>100</sup> Despite the egalitarian principles of the BANU platform, the political practices of the post-war Stamboliski regime were far from democratic. Indeed, one historian goes so far as to argue that Stamboliski's heavy-handed tactics, "Instead of establishing a model peasant democracy in Bulgaria...discredited the vision of government for the rural masses throughout East Central Europe."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Crampton 2007, 224; Bell 1977, 152.

<sup>99</sup> Tchitchovsky 1929, 286; Rothschild 1974, 340.

<sup>100</sup> Bell 1977, 181-82.

<sup>101</sup> Rothschild 1974, 341.

Beyond the authoritarian practices of the Stamboliski regime, any hint that the experience of the war had led to any significant democratization of the Bulgarian political order is dispelled by the events of June 1923, in which the Stamboliski government was overthrown by a group of military officers disturbed by the radical program of the Agrarians and Macedonian separatists who were outraged by Stamboliski's collaboration with Yugoslavia.<sup>102</sup> Stamboliski himself was captured and tortured, mutilated, and decapitated post-mortem.<sup>103</sup> Although the junta which overthrew Stamboliski promised to restore constitutional order, "the governments which came immediately after that of Stamboliski saw constitutional abnormalities and infringements of personal liberties greater than anything yet experienced in modern Bulgarian history."<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to explore the putative relationship between war and democratization – that is, to examine the question of whether participation in interstate conflict has any significant impact on a state's level of political democracy - through a detailed case study of Bulgarian involvement in the First World War. I have shown that participation in the First World War had a negligible impact on Bulgarian democracy; and the hypothesis I have presented as a central explanation for this result contends that, despite the autocratic nature of the Bulgarian political regime, the presence of an effective electoral mechanism by which those viewed as responsible for the war were evicted from power plausibly served to ameliorate any popular desire for radical alteration of the political order. Moreover, I have shown that the agrarian regime with

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<sup>102</sup> Bell 1977, 208; 203.

<sup>103</sup> Bell 1977, 237-38.

<sup>104</sup> Crampton 2007, 237.

which the incumbent parties were replaced both implemented a program of land and fiscal reform as well as sought to publicly prosecute those responsible for entry into and conduct of the war, suggesting a further mollification of popular demand for political reform.

The largely qualitative nature of this study renders its central hypothesis, at best, conjectural. That is, while I have presented both a result and a theorized explanation, as well as elucidated to a limited degree the causal mechanisms at work, this analysis is by no means wholly conclusive. And yet, the hypothesis passes the test of common sense. For if the bare essence of democracy lies in the removal of leaders who no longer command popular support – and indeed, a strong impetus for post-war democratization lies in the desire for the removal of anti-democratic elites discredited by the war – then the ability by the Bulgarian citizenry in the aftermath of the First World War to effect that removal through electoral means is significant. That is, the Bulgarian political regime might only have been nominally democratic - but that may have been democratic enough.

## Appendix A – The Bulgarian Political Regime, 1901-1923: selected POLITY IV

### Variables<sup>105</sup>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Institutionalized Democracy</i>	<i>Revised Combined Polity Score</i>	<i>Openness of Executive Recruitment</i>	<i>Executive Constraints</i>	<i>The Competitiveness of Participation</i>
1901	0	-9	1	1	2
1902	0	-9	1	1	2
1903	0	-9	1	1	2
1904	0	-9	1	1	2
1905	0	-9	1	1	2
1906	0	-9	1	1	2
1907	0	-9	1	1	2
1908	0	-9	1	1	2
1909	0	-9	1	1	2
1910	0	-9	1	1	2
1911	0	-9	1	1	2
1912	0	-9	1	1	2
1913	-66 (no data)	N/A	-66 (no data)	-66 (no data)	--66 (no data)
1914	0	-9	1	1	2
1915	0	-9	1	1	2
1916	0	-9	1	1	2
1917	0	-9	1	1	2
1918	4	2	4	3	3
1919	1	-3	4	3	3
1920	1	-3	4	3	3
1921	1	-3	4	3	3
1922	1	-3	4	3	3
1923	1	-3	4	3	3

<sup>105</sup> Marshall and Jaggers 2009.

**Appendix B – The French Political Regime, 1901-1923: selected POLITY IV**

**Variables<sup>106</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Institutionalized Democracy</i>	<i>Revised Combined Polity Score</i>	<i>Openness of Executive Recruitment</i>	<i>Executive Constraints</i>	<i>The Competitiveness of Participation</i>
1901	8	8	4	7	3
1902	8	8	4	7	3
1903	8	8	4	7	3
1904	8	8	4	7	3
1905	8	8	4	7	3
1906	8	8	4	7	3
1907	8	8	4	7	3
1908	8	8	4	7	3
1909	8	8	4	7	3
1910	8	8	4	7	3
1911	8	8	4	7	3
1912	8	8	4	7	3
1913	8	8	4	7	3
1914	8	8	4	7	3
1915	8	8	4	7	3
1916	8	8	4	7	3
1917	8	8	4	7	3
1918	8	8	4	7	3
1919	9	9	4	7	4
1920	9	9	4	7	4
1921	9	9	4	7	4
1922	9	9	4	7	4
1923	9	9	4	7	4

<sup>106</sup> Marshall and Jagers 2009.

**Appendix C – The British Political Regime, 1901-1923: selected POLITY IV**

**Variables<sup>107</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Institutionalized Democracy</i>	<i>Revised Combined Polity Score</i>	<i>Openness of Executive Recruitment</i>	<i>Executive Constraints</i>	<i>The Competitiveness of Participation</i>
1901	8	8	4	7	3
1902	8	8	4	7	3
1903	8	8	4	7	3
1904	8	8	4	7	3
1905	8	8	4	7	3
1906	8	8	4	7	3
1907	8	8	4	7	3
1908	8	8	4	7	3
1909	8	8	4	7	3
1910	8	8	4	7	3
1911	8	8	4	7	3
1912	8	8	4	7	3
1913	8	8	4	7	3
1914	8	8	4	7	3
1915	8	8	4	7	3
1916	8	8	4	7	3
1917	8	8	4	7	3
1918	8	8	4	7	3
1919	8	8	4	7	3
1920	8	8	4	7	3
1921	8	8	4	7	3
1922	10	10	4	7	5
1923	10	10	4	7	5

<sup>107</sup> Marshall and Jagers 2009.

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