

Political Regimes and Institutional Design as Factors in War: World, Regional and National Contexts

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Abstract: *The article investigates the political and institutional factors that shape the initiation, participation and outcomes of interstate wars. It highlights the importance of political regimes and systems of government, or institutional design. While democratic peace theory has long argued that democracies are less likely to fight and more likely to prevail, this study broadens the perspective by examining the impact of parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential systems as forms of institutional design. The analysis relies on a dataset of 59 wars involving 153 states between 1919 and 2020, defined according to a threshold of 50 military deaths or 600 personnel per side, which distinguishes substantive conflicts from minor incidents, and assesses the correlations between political regimes, institutional designs and warfare through comparative and statistical methods. The findings indicate that the system of government has no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of initiating war. Yet, parliamentary and parliamentarised systems emerge as the most frequent participants and as the most frequent victors, particularly within democratic settings. The study therefore enhances both the empirical and theoretical understanding of war by showing that the combination of a parliamentary institutional design and a democratic regime is linked to greater military success, at both global and regional levels. While the analysis deliberately excludes other factors such as economic variables or alliance membership to focus specifically on domestic political and institutional effects, it identifies consistent correlations rather than causal mechanisms, thereby providing a basis for future research into the link between internal political/institutional structures and international conflict behaviour.*

Keywords: *political regime, institutional design, system of government, presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, parliamentarism, democracy, autocracy, war, interstate armed conflict*

Introduction

Historically, interstate warfare has been a central instrument of foreign policy and international relations. Armed conflicts not only shape states' external positions but are also closely intertwined with domestic political and institutional relations. These conflicts simultaneously affect and depend on internal political dynamics. A substantial body of research has examined the causes, participation and outcomes of such wars. Realist scholars, for example, emphasise the anarchic nature of the international system, in which states prioritise the defence of their interests and borders, often through military force. However, liberal scholars argue that trade fosters peaceful relations among nations, whilst war represents an economically irrational gamble with high risks and uncertain benefits.

A large body of research has examined state behaviour, particularly the propensity for war or peace, by analysing the characteristics of political regimes. Democratic peace theory, in particular, highlights the link between international conduct and domestic regime attributes. Yet most studies stop at this level, typically treating political regimes as democratic, autocratic or hybrid. Less attention has been paid to how inter-institutional relations and institutional designs – reflected in presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems – affect the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars. This question is especially relevant in light of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and other contemporary conflicts. The present study addresses it through comparative, statistical and correlational analysis of cases at the global, regional and national levels. In doing so, it shows how different combinations of political regimes and institutional designs can shape domestic political processes and influence the causes and outcomes of wars.

The objective of this article is to examine the political and institutional factors that shape the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars and interstate armed conflicts. Particular attention is given to institutional design (systems of government) and the influence of political regimes, considered globally as well as in regional and national contexts. The article is organised into five main sections. The first sets out the conceptual framework, including definitions and classifications of key concepts such as 'war' and 'interstate armed conflict'. The second reviews the main theoretical approaches and the existing state of research on the political and institutional factors of wars, with a focus on political regimes, institutional design and systems of government. The third explains the research design, outlining the definitions, methodology and analytical framework, as well as the data selection and classification approaches. The fourth presents the empirical findings of the comparative and statistical analysis, covering both global patterns and regional context or national cases. The fifth synthesises the results, discusses observed patterns and correlations, and considers their implications for understanding the interaction between

political regimes, institutional designs and warfare. The article concludes by summarising the main contributions. It also suggests directions for future research.

Conceptual framework for analysing wars and interstate armed conflicts

The central aim of this study is to provide a comparative analysis of different political regimes and institutional designs (systems of government) as factors influencing wars before, during and after conflicts between states. The analysis examines the distinctive features, processes of initiation, levels of participation and outcomes of wars under various political and institutional conditions at the global, regional and national levels. As a first step in the theoretical framework, the study defines and categorises the key concepts employed throughout, including ‘interstate armed conflict’, ‘war’, ‘political regime’, ‘institutional design’ and ‘system of government’.

Despite extensive scholarly efforts, no broad consensus exists on how to conceptualise armed conflict. A commonly accepted approach links armed conflict between states to the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions (Diplomatic Conference 1949; Evangelista & Tannenwald 2017; van Dijk 2022). These Conventions identify key criteria, including a declaration of armed conflict, territorial occupation and the capture of opposing combatants. Accordingly, an armed conflict may be defined as a confrontation between two or more states (high contracting parties) resulting in territorial occupation and/or the capture of enemy combatants (Balendra 2008: 2461).

However, the Geneva Conventions do not provide clear guidance on distinguishing interstate from intrastate conflicts. Article 2 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Diplomatic Conference 1949) states that any dispute between states involving armed forces constitutes an international armed conflict, irrespective of its duration and intensity. The Conventions take immediate effect once armed forces are deployed to the territory of another state and casualties, victims or prisoners appear (Vité 2009). Consequently, the onset of an international or interstate armed conflict (i.e. the initiation of hostilities) is marked by the moment that the pertinent provisions of the Conventions take effect. This ambiguity allows states to classify minor confrontations as full-scale armed conflicts or wars, even when actual hostilities are limited (O’Connell 2008: 397).

Relying solely on the principles and provisions of international law when defining the concept of (interstate) armed conflict is therefore insufficient. Numerous scholars (Balendra 2008; Eriksson & Wallensteen 2004; Eriksson, Wallensteen & Sollenberg 2003; Farer 1971; Harbom & Wallensteen 2005, 2009; O’Connell 2008; Pettersson & Wallensteen 2015; Stewart 2003; Them-

nér & Wallensteen 2011, 2013, 2014) have employed various methodologies to address this challenge, reflecting the absence of a universally accepted definition of armed conflict and war. Likewise, classifications of armed conflicts in the literature (Akande 2012; Bartels 2020; Sarkees 2010: 7–10; Stojar 2017; Vasquez & Valeriano 2010; Vité 2009) vary considerably and are somewhat arbitrary, though they typically distinguish between interstate (international) and non-interstate (non-international) conflicts.

Given this study's focus on interstate armed conflicts in the context of domestic political regimes, inter-institutional relations and institutional design, it is essential to clarify the concept of war. War represents the most consequential form of armed conflict at global, regional and national levels. Yet, despite long scholarly debate, there is still no consensus on a single, unambiguous definition. It is generally accepted, however, that war is narrower than armed conflict. It is marked by high-intensity violence, often involving large-scale military operations and produces significant consequences for both the states involved and the wider international community. Scholars have defined war as organised violence between two political groups (Vasquez 1993: 23) or as a major armed conflict between the military forces of independent political entities (Levy 1983: 51). Despite the ambiguity and differences in wording, researchers broadly agree that war is distinct from other forms of armed conflict because of its scale and intensity (Eagleton 1932: 237; Greenwood 1987; Holsti 1996; Levy 1983: 51–52; O'Connell 2005: 535; Vasquez 1993: 23).

Efforts to define war have long focused on identifying clear criteria that distinguish it from other forms of armed conflict and that clarify its empirical content. Scholars have proposed a variety of thresholds and criteria. Richardson suggested that conflict must exceed 2.5 points on his scale, equivalent to at least 317 casualties (Rapoport 1957). Bodart and Kellogg (1916) required over 2,000 total casualties on both sides. Wright and Wright (1983) set the bar at the involvement of at least 50,000 military personnel. Singer (1970), founder of the Correlates of War project, defined war as producing at least 1,000 military and civilian deaths. Levy (1983: 52), by contrast, suggested a lower threshold of 100 deaths or 1,000 personnel involved. Among these approaches, Singer's (1970) definition and criteria within the Correlates of War project have gained the widest acceptance, largely due to their strong empirical foundation and extensive case coverage (Sarkees 2010: 7–10).

Despite these contributions, there is still no consolidated or universally accepted quantitative threshold and criteria for identifying the onset (initiation) of war. This lack of clarity has forced researchers to combine existing and new indicators to conduct their analyses. The criteria cited above are relatively demanding – focusing on large-scale conflicts – and thus more consistent with definitions of war than with those of armed conflict more generally. Given this context, the present study adopts its own threshold of 50 fatalities or the involve-

ment of at least 600 personnel per side as a way of distinguishing substantive conflicts (wars) from minor incidents.¹ This approach is explained in greater detail in the research design and methodology section.

Political and institutional factors of wars: Theory and state of research

Researchers often focus on identifying the factors that cause wars when defining them and categorising armed conflicts within specific criteria. This is not surprising, as scholars regularly examine how different political regimes engage in wars – from initiation through to participation and eventual conclusion. These analyses typically use the ‘maximum democracy–maximum autocracy’ continuum as their theoretical framework.

Extensive research in political science and international law has examined these factors and their relations. The literature provides compelling evidence that political regimes play a statistically significant role in war initiation, peace maintenance and conflict outcomes. This is most evident in democratic peace theory, which developed from detailed studies comparing political regimes and their war-related behaviour. The theory argues that democratic regimes are generally more peaceful internationally than autocratic regimes, which are more frequently responsible for initiating wars worldwide. Nevertheless, democratic peace theory does not fully explain this phenomenon, nor does it comprehensively analyse when and why democracies choose to use military force against other states, whether autocratic or democratic. Addressing this requires a multifaceted approach incorporating different perspectives: the normative perspective (Kant 2015; Dixon 1994), the economic perspective (Lake 1992) and the institutional perspective (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999).

The normative approach emphasises the importance of norms, practices and customs characteristic of democratic nations. This perspective draws on Kant’s (2015) concept of perpetual peace, which argues that warfare occurs primarily when force prevails over law in international relations. Kant hypothesised that increasing the number of democratic states (which he considered predominantly republics) would substantially reduce global wars. Contemporary scholars, notably Dixon (1994: 15–16), have developed this framework further, arguing that democracies apply domestic competition rules and market principles when pursuing international interests. This suggests that democracies can

1 This study’s exclusion of minor incidents reflects an analytical necessity rather than a definitional limitation. Including all cases meeting only the Geneva Conventions’ minimal criteria would encompass many situations lacking political significance or escalatory potential characteristic of interstate wars. The thresholds therefore serve as analytical filters rather than definitional boundaries to capture interstate wars, not isolated skirmishes.

transfer their domestic political processes – particularly competitive elections and decision-making – to international relations.

However, democratic competition operates within legal constraints, including protections for minority rights, especially when electoral minorities face majority rule. From this normative perspective, democratic pacifism rests on the assumption that fair competition principles have become deeply institutionalised as legal norms in democracies. The non-violent principle underlying democracy requires avoiding military measures and adopting alternative influence strategies. This principle extends to international/interstate relations, particularly in conflicts between democracies, where all parties recognise their obligation to follow international norms rather than resort to violence (Dixon 1994: 17–18). However, democracies show less restraint when confronting autocratic or hybrid regimes.

The economic approach to explaining democratic pacifism draws on micro-economic theory developed by Lake (1992: 25–27). This theory treats the state as a commercial entity that provides services and seeks to maximise profits. National security represents a primary state business, where the state functions as a monopolist due to its unique capacity to guarantee security. Typically, a monopolistic state would maximise revenue by setting prices to yield the highest rental income, potentially leading to expansionist policies as it seeks greater rent extraction.

However, Lake argues that democracies cannot rely on monopoly rents like autocracies do. Democratic regimes differ from non-democratic ones in two crucial ways. First, democratic populations participate in decision-making, which incentivises economic growth over rent extraction. Second, open borders and freedom of movement allow citizens to migrate in response to unfavourable economic conditions. These factors make democracies more economically resilient than non-democratic states, providing substantial advantages in warfare through greater national wealth and resource allocation capacity. Consequently, democracies rarely fight each other because they cannot benefit from monopoly rents in the same way autocracies can. However, democratic societies may still engage in warfare with autocratic regimes, despite the latter's potential resource advantages.

From the institutional perspective, these issues are also of considerable relevance. A substantial body of literature has examined the relations between the initiation and outcomes of wars and the characteristics of political regimes, with particular emphasis on the functionality of domestic political institutions. In democratic regimes, political leaders who assume office through elections are obliged to balance the allocation of resources between national security and the provision of benefits for their majority or coalition. This consideration becomes especially pertinent in the context of an impending war, as the outcome – victory, defeat or draw – directly influences the political leader's tenure.

Institutional analyses show that leaders of democratic states are more likely to wage war against autocratic regimes when success appears attainable. Historical data also suggest that democracies achieve more favourable outcomes than autocracies. This pattern reflects the incentives of democratic leaders to commit substantial resources to achieving victory, since their authority depends on success in a democratic system. The same logic explains why democracies rarely fight one another, instead directing military interventions against autocratic states. Democratic leaders anticipate that counterparts in other democracies will likewise mobilise all available resources to prevail (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999: 793–794). Such mutual recognition constrains conflict initiation and war escalation between democracies, whereas such constraints are less pronounced for autocratic leaders.

In summary, democratic peace theory – in its normative, economic and institutional perspectives – suggests that wars between democratic states, if they occur, are likely to be protracted, complex and unprofitable. Consequently, democratic leaders and nations tend to prioritise peace over military action. Autocratic regimes, by contrast, face fewer economic, institutional and normative constraints and have greater freedom to engage in wars. However, they remain more likely to fail because of their limited capacity to sustain prolonged military campaigns and achieve decisive outcomes.

In contrast to the well-established dichotomy between democracies and autocracies in warfare, political science and international relations still lack a coherent framework for explaining how institutional designs and systems of government shape the initiation, participation and outcomes of interstate wars. Several scholars argue that presidential systems (presidentialism) are particularly prone to initiating wars and provide empirical support for this claim. Kroenig and Schramm (2021) contend that presidential democracies are more likely to engage in warfare than other forms of democratic governance, owing to weaker constraints on executive power from other political institutions. Similarly, Albaladejo, Bel and Elias (2012: 287–288) identify a correlation between presidential systems and the high costs of developing and sustaining a military-industrial complex, since these systems require substantial resources to maintain armed forces and conduct campaigns.

These demands can generate instability within the political system and inter-institutional relations. As national production of military goods expands, the need for effective marketing strategies also grows. In such circumstances, presidential systems – or systems with influential presidents emulating presidentialism – may initiate wars as a means of managing potential overproduction crises (Albaladejo, Bel & Elias 2012). Furthermore, Amorim Neto and Accorsi (2022: 150–159) show that non-partisan military officers serving as ministers of defence are most prevalent in presidential republics, a pattern that may additionally contribute to the heightened frequency of wars associated with this

institutional design. Collectively, these findings suggest that presidential systems tend to display more assertive behaviour in international relations than other institutional designs.

Alternatively, Reiter and Tillman (2002: 820–824) argue that the likelihood of warfare is statistically negligible when comparing presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. They further suggest that premier-presidential systems (a subtype of semi-presidentialism) are the most ‘pacifist’ statistically, though this does not apply to president-parliamentary systems (another subtype). Likewise, Leblang and Chan (2003: 391–398) challenge the notion that presidential republics are inherently aggressive, finding no significant differences in international behaviour between parliamentary and presidential systems, including in war initiation and participation. Furthermore, they identify no significant correlation between the propensity for warfare and the type of government, whether single-party or coalition, holding a majority or minority.

Overall, these findings indicate that war dynamics – including initiation, participation, course and outcomes – may not be primarily determined by institutional design or inter-institutional relations. Instead, the influence of political leaders and ruling parties frequently outweighs that of formal institutions (Palmer, London & Regan 2004: 16–19). Nevertheless, these conclusions remain tentative, highlighting the continued need for research to develop and empirically test new hypotheses about the links between institutional designs and the initiation and outcomes of wars.

Research on the political factors in warfare generally indicates that democratic regimes are more peaceful than autocratic ones. Democracies are less likely to engage in armed conflict and, when involved, tend to pursue peaceful resolutions. Empirical evidence further suggests that democracies achieve more favourable outcomes in wars compared with non-democratic regimes. Scholars attribute this to several mechanisms linking different political regimes with the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars: Democracies uphold international law (Dixon 1994), their economic systems and national security expenditures shape superior military capacity (Lake 1992), and democratic leaders exercise prudence in decision-making due to the risk of losing office (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999).

By contrast, research on institutional factors in war – particularly institutional designs and inter-institutional relations – has been insufficiently developed. Studies have primarily examined governments, party systems and the ideological orientation of ruling parties, assessing their behaviour and influence on war initiation and outcomes. Consideration has also been given to electoral systems (Leblang & Chan 2003), citizen political engagement (Reiter & Tillman 2002) and governing ideologies (Palmer, London & Regan 2004). While the effects of political regimes on war dynamics are well-established, the role of institutional designs and systems of government remains comparatively underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by providing systematic analysis of how political regimes and institutional designs influence war dynamics.

This focused approach requires clarification regarding scope. The study deliberately concentrates on macro-political institutions – specifically, systems of government and political regimes – rather than attempting comprehensive institutional analysis. While economic institutions, military structures, bureaucratic arrangements and alliance systems undoubtedly shape war dynamics, including them would fundamentally alter the research design and analytical focus. The analysis therefore isolates how institutional configurations and political regime types facilitate or constrain decisions on military engagement. This narrower focus enables systematic examination of previously underexplored relations between institutional design and conflict behaviour, while providing a foundation for future research that integrates broader institutional and structural factors.

Research design and methodology in studying political regimes and institutional designs as factors of wars

Most existing studies on political and institutional factors of war rely on mathematical modelling and focus primarily on the democracy-autocracy dichotomy, treating political regime type as the decisive factor in explaining the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars. Yet research on institutional factors remains scarce, especially in statistical analyses. To address this gap, the present study develops a research framework, methodology and dataset centred specifically on wars, political regimes and institutional designs (systems of government). This framework allows us to test hypotheses about how different institutional and political arrangements shape the likelihood of war onset, participation and outcomes. In this design, systems of government and political regime types are treated as both independent and dependent variables.

The rationale for searching and utilisation of relevant data and constructing bespoke dataset was the need to analyse and compare wars – their initiation, course and outcomes – across states with different political and institutional arrangements. These comparisons are based on contemporary classifications of states' political regimes and systems of governments, applied to a century-long time frame (1919–2020). Examining such a long period makes it possible to capture the full spectrum of institutional designs (systems of government) under varying political regime types. Variation in systems of government, combined with contrasting political regimes, has historically shaped how wars have begun and unfolded.

To operationalise this, a proprietary dataset was assembled for comparative and statistical analysis. It combines existing databases, adapted where necessary, with new data verified empirically. The sources include datasets on wars and armed conflicts (modified versions of established projects), political regimes

(used largely without modification) and institutional designs or systems of government (created through a synthesis of existing analytical typologies and original coding based on constitutional texts and state practice).

For the purposes of this study, interstate wars and other armed conflicts are defined using clear quantitative thresholds to distinguish them from minor armed incidents. Drawing on both conceptual debates and existing criteria, we adopt two primary but alternative indicators. First, each state must suffer at least 50 fatalities among regular troops. Second, each state must deploy at least 600 military personnel. A war is thus subject to analysis and correlation when at least one alternative threshold is reached by each of the principal parties. By contrast, clashes that meet the Geneva Conventions' minimum definition of armed conflict but fall below both thresholds are excluded as skirmishes or disputes. This ensures that the analysis covers only full-scale wars, thereby avoiding statistical distortion from minor incidents.

While the Geneva Conventions provide the legal and functional baseline for identifying armed conflicts, they do not prescribe precise quantitative thresholds for analytical purposes and empirical research. The 50-fatality and 600-personnel criteria adopted here represent a deliberate methodological choice aimed at capturing conflicts with genuine escalatory potential. This approach builds on established scholarly practice, though at significantly lower thresholds than those used in major datasets and research such as the Correlates of War project (1,000 battle deaths; Singer 1970), Richardson's study (317 casualties; Rapoport 1957), Bodart and Kellogg's (1916) study (2,000 casualties), Wright and Wright's (1983) study (50,000 personnel) or Levy's (1983) study (100 deaths or 1,000 personnel). By contrast, our thresholds are designed to include a broader range of analytically significant cases while excluding minor incidents unlikely to represent interstate wars.

The selection of these thresholds is guided by considerations of analytical sensitivity rather than restrictiveness. While higher thresholds – such as Levy's (1983) 100-fatality / 1,000-personnel benchmark or the Correlates of War criterion of 1,000 battle deaths – are well established in the literature, they systematically exclude a range of conflicts that nonetheless involve sustained political mobilisation under different political regimes and institutional designs. At the same time, the thresholds adopted here are sufficiently restrictive to exclude isolated, accidental or purely provocative military incidents lacking independent political significance. The lower thresholds are therefore intended to capture interstate wars at earlier stages of escalation, rather than only their most destructive phases, without altering the relative distribution of political regime types, institutional designs or systems of government across the sample.

The theoretical rationale rests on the concepts of political investment, war-fighting intent and escalatory potential. The 50-fatality threshold indicates meaningful combat engagement, while the 600-personnel threshold captures

substantial deployments even in the absence of immediate casualties. Together, these alternative criteria ensure that the analysis focuses on conflicts reflecting deliberate state decisions to wage war, rather than short-lived skirmishes, diplomatic confrontations or border clashes that briefly involve military forces.

Within this framework, the ‘analytical beginning’ of an interstate war is defined as the point at which all main participants cross either the 50-fatality threshold or the 600-personnel threshold. The ‘analytical finish’ occurs once the outcome of war is clear – victory, defeat or draw. Any state that declares war, or initiates undeclared hostilities, and surpasses one of these thresholds is classified as a participant. For each analytical case of war, the number of countries is limited to seven – those most directly and significantly involved. This rule ensures broad empirical coverage while maintaining analytical clarity.

The limitation of war participants to a maximum of seven states per conflict reflects the same concern for analytical clarity that underlies the definition of thresholds. In practice, this upper bound corresponds to the largest number of active decision-making participants observed in the cases under study. Its purpose is to capture the principal decision-making actors directly involved in war initiation, conduct and outcome, while avoiding the mechanical over-representation of large coalition wars, where secondary or symbolic participants – often included through alliance membership – exert limited independent influence over strategic decisions. Including all formal participants in such armed conflicts would disproportionately weight alliance dynamics and blur the link between domestic political and institutional arrangements and war-related behaviour, given the limited independent decision-making relevance of many such participants. Alternative participant-selection rules – such as including all participants, varying the numerical cap and/or excluding large coalition wars altogether – were considered conceptually. Each of these alternatives introduces distinct sources of distortion, either by amplifying alliance membership dependence or by excluding analytically central cases. Cross-checks using alternative specifications indicate that while such adjustments affect the size of the sample, they do not alter the core patterns identified in the analysis.

The next stage involved aggregating and analysing the data, followed by further examination, correlation and interpretation to gain deeper insights. Information on wars was drawn from three existing datasets and projects: 1) the Correlates of War project (n.d.), covering 1816–2007; 2) the Major Episodes of Political Violence project, 1946–2019, by the Center for Systemic Peace (2020); and 3) the International Crisis Behavior project, 1918–2019, by Duke University (2020). The synthesis of these sources was guided by the authors’ refined definition of interstate war, developed in line with the Geneva Conventions and the specified participation thresholds. Using this approach, 59 wars between 1919 and 2020 were systematically identified and analysed. In total, 153 countries from all world regions were included as participants, representing diverse po-

litical regimes and systems of government. Among them, 68 initiated wars, 61 achieved victories, 55 were defeated and 37 ended in a draw (including repeated outcomes in some cases).

Data on political regimes, classified along the democracy-autocracy continuum, were collected without modification from two comparative projects. The primary source was the Polity IV/V project (Marshall & Gurr 2020), which assesses political regimes on a scale from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic), with anocratic regimes in between. This dataset covers the entire period 1919–2020 and allows for consistent global comparison. To supplement it, data from the Freedom in the World project (Freedom House, n.d.) were used for the period 1973–2020. This project rates countries on a 1–7 scale, with 1 denoting the most democratic (free) and 7 the most autocratic (not-free). In addition, it provides a 0–100 ‘reverse’ scale, enabling more nuanced cross-country comparisons of political regimes.

Following the identification of the states involved in wars between 1919 and 2020, a dataset on their institutional designs and systems of government was compiled from a wide range of sources. This step was necessary to capture the broader political and institutional context in which wars occurred. The final analysis drew on several projects: the Constitute Project (n.d.), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.; Elkins & Ginsburg 2022) and the International IDEA Project (n.d.). In addition, supplementary information was taken from the research blogs *Semi-Presidential One* (n.d.) and *Presidential Power* (n.d.). These materials provided both current and historical versions of constitutions, other relevant laws and evidence of political practice. Notably, the projects and blogs did not always include such features in a systematic way, which made additional coding necessary. To ensure consistency, a unified theoretical and classification framework was applied. Two distinct approaches to the classification of institutional design and systems of government were used, allowing the study to identify typical forms as well as atypical cases. The results enable comparative and correlational analysis of how institutional design relates to the initiation, participation, course and outcomes of wars worldwide between 1919 and 2020.

The first approach distinguishes six ‘pure’ types of systems of government: absolute monarchies, dualistic monarchies, presidential republics, semi-presidential republics, parliamentary monarchies and parliamentary republics. The ordering of these types is based on the extent of power exercised by the head of state (monarch or president) in forming and dismissing governments – ranging from greater to lesser influence – or, conversely, on the relative strength of parliament. This is treated as a hierarchy: Processes controlled by the head of state take precedence over those controlled by parliament, and vice versa. The classification also incorporates a scale of institutional complexity, from the most to the least complex, reflecting electoral procedures (e.g. popular versus

parliamentary election of presidents) and mechanisms for removing heads of state from office (e.g. particularly intricate in monarchies). For instance, electing a president by popular vote is considered more complex than election by parliament, while the removal of a monarch in an absolute monarchy is more complex than in a parliamentary monarchy.²

In addition to the six 'pure' types of systems of government, it is important to identify atypical institutional designs that do not fit neatly into any of these categories. A system of government is considered atypical if it meets at least two criteria: a) it operates with an atypical or unconventional scheme of inter-institutional relations that cannot be attributed to a 'pure' type – for example, a president and government elected by parliament, but without any mechanism for (parliamentary) dismissal; and b) it employs such an atypical institutional arrangement to achieve specific political goals, such as supporting single-party or non-party rule (as most of these cases and regimes are atypical), sustaining military juntas, or implementing transitional governance, etc. In practice, atypical institutional designs often approximate one of the 'pure' types, most commonly quasi-presidentialism or quasi-parliamentarism. To account for this, the present study applies three different strategies for organising data in relation to wars – their initiation, participation and outcomes. The first treats atypical institutional designs as a distinct category alongside the six 'pure' types. The second excludes them altogether, producing a classification of only six 'pure' types. The third reclassifies atypical cases by aligning them with the closest 'pure' type based on political practice, thereby situating atypical and 'pure' systems of government within a shared comparative framework.

The second classification approach divides all states into three 'pure' types, based on institutional design and inter-institutional relations. The categories

2 The classification of systems of government builds on the definitions and logic developed by Elgie (2011) and Shugart and Carey (1992). Their criteria have been adapted to cover different types of republics and monarchies. On this basis, six 'pure' types of systems of government were identified, along with clear criteria for distinguishing between typical and atypical systems (Osadchuk & Lytvyn 2023). For purposes of operationalisation in the bespoke dataset, the 'pure' types were defined as follows: presidential republic – a republic with a popularly elected president, where parliament cannot dismiss the government, as appointment and dismissal powers rest exclusively with the president; semi-presidential republic – a republic with a popularly elected president, where parliament must possess the power to dismiss the government (a power that may also be shared with the president); parliamentary republic – a republic with a president elected by the legislature, where only parliament can dismiss the government; absolute monarchy – a monarchy where the head of state exercises full control over government and the entire political process, including parliament (if it exists); dualistic monarchy – a monarchy where the head of state exclusively controls the government and the executive, while parliament exercises authority over legislation; parliamentary monarchy – a monarchy where parliament must control the government and has the exclusive power to dismiss it, while the monarch performs primarily ceremonial functions. Their ranking for correlation analyses, as explained above, follows the sequence: absolute monarchies, dualistic monarchies, presidential republics, semi-presidential republics, parliamentary monarchies and parliamentary republics. All other systems of government that do not conform to these definitions or to typical patterns of inter-institutional relations constitute the residual category of atypical systems of government.

are: systems in which the head of state holds dominant authority; systems with a mixed or balanced distribution of power; and systems in which parliament exercises predominant control, as assessed formally or in practice. The logic of this sequence rests on the extent of institutional influence over government formation and, above all, dissolution – descending in the case of the head of state and ascending in the case of parliament. At the same time, this approach cannot fully capture the complexities of electing and removing heads of state, processes that often vary significantly across institutional designs.

Within this framework, absolute monarchies, dualistic monarchies and presidential republics are classified as systems where the head of state dominates. Semi-presidential republics are placed in the balanced category, while parliamentary monarchies and parliamentary republics are classified as systems in which legislatures exercise the greatest influence. Atypical systems are added as a supplementary category, defined by the absence of a clear predominance of any one institution over the government. The same algorithms are used to link these institutional designs with war indicators. Correlations are examined under three scenarios: a) three types plus atypical systems; b) three types excluding atypical systems; and c) three types with atypical systems recategorised between the former.

The present study employed a comparative analytical approach to examine correlations between the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars and several variables. These included: political regime types (democracies, autocracies and anocracies/hybrid regimes); systems of government (six ‘pure’ types plus atypical systems); and institutional designs (three ‘pure’ types plus atypical systems). Correlation testing was conducted for both systems of government and institutional designs.³

3 The research design deliberately excludes conventional control variables such as GDP, military expenditure or alliance membership. This choice reflects the explicitly descriptive and exploratory nature of the analysis and its focus on identifying empirical regularities and correlations between political regime types, institutional designs and war-related behaviour, rather than on establishing causal relationships or testing specific causal mechanisms. Incorporating economic or alliance variables would shift the analysis toward different causal pathways and modelling strategies, thereby obscuring the independent descriptive role of political and institutional factors that constitute the core analytical focus of this study. Alliance membership, in particular, raises distinct analytical challenges. While alliances may shape resource availability, burden-sharing and military outcomes, the sovereign decision to initiate or join wars remains primarily structured by domestic political and institutional arrangements. At the same time, alliance structures may operate as confounding factors, jointly influencing both political and institutional characteristics and conflict-related outcomes. For this reason, political regime type and institutional design are treated as the core analytical variables, while classification schemes and alternative specifications are used to assess the stability of observed patterns rather than supplemented by conventional control variables. More broadly, several well-known threats to causal inference are acknowledged. These include potential confounding by economic capacity, military capabilities, geopolitical context or regional security environments; coalition dependence in multilateral wars, where outcomes are shaped by collective action rather than by the attributes of individual states; and the possible endogeneity of political regimes and institutional designs to broader historical and strategic dynamics associated with armed conflict. These limitations define the scope of the present contribution.

The evaluation proceeded in two stages. First, systems were assessed within the framework of political regime typology. Second, an independent assessment was made to disentangle the effects of regime type from those of institutional design. The statistical analysis covered the propensity – or lack thereof – of different regimes, systems of government and institutional designs to initiate or participate in wars in 1919–2020. The primary aim was to assess the interdependencies between institutional design and war outcomes, and to determine whether statistically significant relations exist. For this purpose, only cases meeting the previously defined thresholds were included. The identification of war initiators followed the methodology of Sarkees (2010: 29) and Wayman (Sarkees & Wayman 2010). In this framework, the state that first launches an armed attack on the territory or forces of its adversary is considered the initiator of the war.

In creating the bespoke dataset, particular attention was devoted to ensuring transparency of procedures and consistency of coding rules, so that the correlational analysis would not be undermined by discrepancies across sources. First, conflicting entries across used datasets were reconciled according to the principle of prioritising the most comprehensive and empirically verified source. For instance, the Correlates of War (n.d.) project was used for dates and core factual information about wars, while the Major Episodes of Political Violence (Center for Systemic Peace 2020) and International Crisis Behavior (Duke University 2020) projects were employed additionally to refine specific parameters. For political regime classification, the Polity IV/V dataset (Marshall & Gurr 2020) served as the primary source, given its broad temporal and geographical coverage, while the Freedom in the World dataset (Freedom House, n.d.) was used as supplementary evidence or in cases where Polity data were missing.

Second, different projects and datasets exhibited predominant overlap, and when discrepancies did arise, additional verification was undertaken using historical accounts and specialised scholarly studies. Where data were unavailable, the closest preceding or subsequent observations for the same country were used, or in rare cases, functionally comparable cases from similar contexts. However, this applied mainly to systems of government or institutional designs rather than political regime scores. For political regime data (such as democracy and autocracy scores) and war data (including initiators, participants and outcomes), priority was generally given to those datasets that provided the longest temporal coverage or the broadest geographical scope. Accordingly, all other parallel sources were used as supplementary rather than primary data. Political regimes were always coded strictly on the basis of established datasets, whereas

Rather than offering causal explanations, the study provides a systematic mapping of underexplored patterns across a large historical sample, establishing a descriptive baseline that can inform and guide future, more causally oriented research.

institutional designs and systems of government were coded entirely through the authors' methodology (as outlined above).

Third, for institutional designs and systems of government, all 'pure' types were always coded as distinct categories across all calculation scenarios. However, atypical systems were treated using a consistent three-scenario procedure: a) in the first scenario (three types plus atypical systems), they were coded as a separate category alongside the 'pure' types; b) in the second scenario (three types excluding atypical systems), they were not coded but alternatively removed from the analysis; and c) in the third scenario (three types with atypical systems recategorised between the former), they were reclassified into the nearest 'pure' type according to actual political practice, based on empirical evidence. The same algorithm was consistently applied to all cases, both under the six-type and three-type classification schemes for institutional designs and systems of government.

Data and results: Comparative and statistical analysis of wars under different political regimes and institutional designs

The analysis was conducted in three sequential phases, covering both global and regional contexts. The first phase examined the political and institutional factors associated with the outbreak of wars. The second analysed the level of participation in wars, while the third assessed their outcomes. Global patterns were considered first, followed by regional and national contexts.

The findings show no statistically significant relations between the propensity to initiate wars and the type of system of government or institutional design across any of the samples or classification approaches. This result is supported by correlation calculations (see Tables 1 and 5). At the same time, parliamentary and parliamentarised political systems – parliamentary republics and parliamentary monarchies – emerge as the most frequent non-initiators of wars. Their strong parliamentary oversight and control over the executive appear to reduce incentives for governments to start wars. A notable gap nevertheless exists between initiators and non-initiators within parliamentary systems, especially when compared with other institutional types. Furthermore, parliamentary and parliamentarised systems display a higher likelihood of becoming sites of warfare than other systems of government.

However, the study's findings should be interpreted with caution given their inherent limitations. Theoretically, the results remain partial and conditional, shaped by limitations of the analytical methodology applied. They focus specifically on armed conflicts or wars, whereas such phenomena do not characterise states that consistently abstain from warfare. Accordingly, the observations and conclusions are contingent upon the chosen empirical perspective and methodological design. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that a parlia-

mentary or parliamentarised system of government does not necessarily equate to parliamentary democracy. Many autocratic and hybrid political regimes also operate within parliamentary or parliamentarised frameworks.

Table 1: Initiation and non-initiation of wars by different systems of government and institutional designs, global overview (1919–2020)

System of government / Institutional design	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #
Classification of systems of government into 6 types				
Type of system of government	6 'pure' types of systems of government + atypical systems		6 types of systems of government with reclassification of atypical systems	
Parliamentary republic	19	27	33	40
Presidential republic	10	13	11	15
Semi-presidential republic	5	7	8	10
Dualistic monarchy	9	6	10	7
Absolute monarchy	0	4	1	4
Parliamentary monarchy	5	9	5	9
Atypical system	20	19	–	–
In total	68	85	68	85
	153		153	
Classification of institutional designs into 3 types				
Type of institutional design	3 'pure' types of institutional design + atypical systems		3 types of institutional design with reclassification of atypical systems	
Predominance of the parliament	24	35	38	47
Predominance of the head of state	19	23	23	27
Mixed/balanced	5	7	7	11
Atypical system	20	20	–	–
In total	68	85	68	85
	153		153	

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.), the Constitute Project (n.d.), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Elgie (2011), Elkins & Ginsburg (2022), the International IDEA Project (n.d.), Osadchuk & Lytvyn (2023), Presidential Power (n.d.), Semi-Presidential One (n.d.), Shugart and Carey (1992)

A more detailed examination of the aggregate number of participants in wars worldwide between 1919 and 2020 reveals additional statistical significance

Table 2: Participation in wars by different systems of government and institutional designs, global overview (1919–2020)

System of government / Institutional design	Number of participants, #	Number of participants, #
Classification of systems of government into 6 types		
Type of system of government	6 'pure' types of systems of government + atypical systems	6 types of systems of government with reclassification of atypical systems
Parliamentary republic	46	73
Presidential republic	23	26
Semi-presidential republic	12	18
Dualistic monarchy	15	17
Absolute monarchy	4	5
Parliamentary monarchy	14	14
Atypical system	39	–
In total	153	153
Classification of institutional designs into 3 types		
Type of institutional design	3 'pure' types of institutional design + atypical systems	3 types of institutional design with reclassification of atypical systems
Predominance of the parliament	59	85
Predominance of the head of state	42	50
Mixed/balanced	12	18
Atypical system	40	–
In total	153	153

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.), the Constitute Project (n.d.), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Elgie (2011), Elkins & Ginsburg (2022), the International IDEA Project (n.d.), Osadchuk & Lytvyn (2023), Presidential Power (n.d.), Semi-Presidential One (n.d.), Shugart and Carey (1992)

(see Table 2). Parliamentary and parliamentarised systems – specifically parliamentary republics and parliamentary monarchies – stand out as the dominant participants across all other types of institutional design. This pattern holds regardless of the classification logic employed, whether based on six or three categories. By contrast, all other institutional designs and systems of government display considerably lower levels of participation in warfare. These findings suggest that the form of institutional design, as a reflection of the type of political system, does not substantially affect the likelihood of initiating wars.

Table 3: Outcomes of wars by different systems of government and institutional designs, global overview (1919–2020)

System of government / Institutional design	Victory, #	Draw, #	Defeat, #	Victory, #	Draw, #	Defeat, #
Classification of systems of government into 6 types						
Type of system of government	6 'pure' types of systems of government + atypical systems			6 types of systems of government with reclassification of atypical systems		
Parliamentary republic	20	14	12	29	20	24
Presidential republic	8	5	10	8	6	12
Semi-presidential republic	5	3	4	5	6	7
Dualistic monarchy	4	4	7	5	4	8
Absolute monarchy	3	0	1	3	0	2
Parliamentary monarchy	11	1	2	11	1	2
Atypical system	10	10	19	–	–	–
In total	61	37	55	61	37	55
	153			153		
Classification of institutional designs into 3 types						
Type of institutional design form	3 'pure' types of institutional design + atypical systems			3 types of institutional design with reclassification of atypical systems		
Predominance of the parliament	31	14	14	39	21	25
Predominance of the head of state	15	9	18	17	10	23
Mixed/balanced	5	3	4	5	6	7
Atypical system	10	11	19	–	–	–
In total	61	37	55	61	37	55
	153			153		

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.), the Constitute Project (n.d.), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Elgie (2011), Elkins & Ginsburg (2022), the International IDEA Project (n.d.), Osadchuk & Lytvyn (2023), Presidential Power (n.d.), Semi-Presidential One (n.d.), Shugart and Carey (1992)

Instead, states with strong parliaments – and therefore relatively weak heads of state – show a marked propensity to become involved in wars, compared to other political systems. As a result, parliamentary and parliamentarised systems are statistically more likely both to initiate and engage in wars and to sustain involvement in ongoing hostilities.

Table 4: Initiation and outcomes of wars by political regime types (Polity IV/V data), global overview (1919–2020)

Initiation / Outcomes	Democratic states	Anocratic/hybrid states	Autocratic states
Initiation of wars			
Initiator, #	18	15	29
Non-initiator, #	22	21	33
In total	40	36	62
	138		
Outcomes of wars			
Victory, #	27	8	20
Draw, #	7	9	17
Defeat, #	6	19	25
In total	40	36	62
	138		

The Polity IV/V project does not provide a clear assessment of several countries in the war sample (e.g., Kingdom of Greece 1919, Turkey 1919, Peru 1932, Republic of China 1937, France/Vichy Republic 1941, Thailand 1941, Pakistan 1947, 1965, 1971, India 1947, Singapore 1963, South Vietnam 1965, Chad 1986, Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992). The aggregate figures in Table 4 therefore exclude these cases. Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Freedom House (n.d.), Marshall & Gurr (2020)

A comparative analysis of interstate war outcomes across different institutional designs and systems of government reveals several noteworthy patterns. The results show partial but consistent statistical significance, remaining robust and valid regardless of whether the classification distinguishes six or three types of institutional design. A comprehensive review of interstate wars from 1919 to 2020 demonstrates a clear correlation between parliamentary systems of government, or cases of parliamentary predominance (formal or de facto), and a greater likelihood of achieving victory in military conflicts compared to defeats or draws. This finding, supported by the detailed statistical analyses in Table 3, contrasts with the outcomes observed in states operating under alternative institutional arrangements. It also reinforces the prevailing consensus in political science and international relations that democracies tend to be more successful in war than autocracies. Remarkably, this tendency is particularly evident in states with parliamentary or parliamentarised institutional designs. Taken together, the evidence indicates that statistically significant relations are concentrated in parliamentary and parliamentarised systems.

Moreover, the results of this study reinforce the theoretical conclusions outlined above, supported by a substantial body of indirect and recurrent evidence. Specifically, the findings indicate no statistically significant relations between the initiation of interstate wars and the type of political regime – whether democratic, anocratic/hybrid or autocratic – with the partial exception of au-

tocracies, which display a comparatively higher number of participants. By contrast, a statistically significant correlation emerges between war outcomes and political regime types. Between 1919 and 2020, democracies were more likely to secure victory and less likely to suffer defeat than autocracies (see Table 4). These results align with scholarly arguments within the framework of democratic peace theory, which holds that democracies are more prone to achieving favourable outcomes in warfare. This tendency is particularly pronounced in states with parliamentary or parliamentarised institutional designs, which are predominantly characteristic of democratic regimes rather than autocratic ones.

To validate our findings, we conducted Spearman's rank correlation analysis on all variables. This comprehensive statistical assessment examined the relations between dependent and independent variables, confirming our earlier conclusions whilst revealing additional patterns and aspects. The correlation analysis found no statistically significant associations between systems of government, institutional designs or political regimes and the propensity to initiate wars in 1919–2020 (see Table 5).

Table 5 confirms the absence of statistically significant correlations between the 'Initiator' variable and other analytical variables. However, three important trends emerged from the analysis. First, consistent with established research in political science and international relations, democratic regimes show higher probabilities of achieving victory in wars compared to non-democratic regimes. Second, this study reveals a novel correlation between institutional design or system of government and war outcomes: Countries with parliamentary or parliamentarised systems – particularly parliamentary republics and monarchies – demonstrate higher success rates in wars than those with alternative governance structures. Third, combining these findings, the data indicate that parliamentary democracies (democratic parliamentary or parliamentarised systems) are most likely to prevail in wars (see Table 5).

The robustness of these findings was assessed in relation to the main research design and methodological choices discussed above. Adjusting selection parameters, including the use of more restrictive fatality or personnel thresholds and alternative participant-selection rules, affects the size of the analytical sample but does not alter the core descriptive patterns observed in the results. In particular, the overall distribution of war initiation across political regime types and institutional designs remains stable across reasonable parameter variations. Likewise, the comparatively higher success rates observed for parliamentary and parliamentarised systems persist, especially when these institutional designs are combined with democratic political regimes. These findings should therefore be interpreted as regularities rather than artefacts of specific coding or selection choices.

The findings provide a comprehensive analysis of global trends in political and institutional factors affecting war initiation, participation and outcomes across

Table 5: Correlations between war initiation/outcomes and systems of government/institutional designs (six- and three-type classifications) by political regime types/levels (1919–2020)

Spearman Rank Order Correlations (Data++)
MD pairwise deleted
Marked correlations are significant at $p < ,05000$

	Initiation	Victory_ Defeat	6 types + atypical	6 types – atypical	6 types	3 types + atypical	3 types – atypical	3 types	Polity, score	Polity, type
Initiation	1,000000	-0,039717	0,041121	-0,016055	-0,004438	0,031642	0,042204	0,005020	-0,036579	-0,021598
Victory_ Defeat	-0,039717	1,000000	0,068447	0,112691	0,088411	-0,044616	0,191821	0,156837	0,231996	0,248504
6 types + atypical	0,041121	-0,068447	1,000000	0,967755	0,688102	0,964677	0,933996	0,615345	-0,365543	-0,382571
6 types – atypical	-0,016055	0,112691	0,967755	1,000000	0,951153	0,886993	0,886993	0,886993	0,172545	0,147348
6 types	-0,004438	0,088411	0,688102	0,951153	1,000000	0,637706	0,910467	0,916529	-0,020329	-0,047830
3 types + atypical	0,031642	-0,044616	0,964677	0,886993	0,637706	1,000000	1,000000	0,636885	-0,361827	-0,386656
3 types – atypical	-0,042204	0,191821	0,933996	0,886993	0,910467	1,000000	1,000000	1,000000	0,244631	0,202977
3 types	-0,005020	0,156837	0,615345	0,886993	0,916529	0,636885	1,000000	1,000000	0,064018	0,024465
Polity, score	-0,036579	0,231996	-0,365543	0,172545	-0,020329	-0,361827	0,244631	0,064018	1,000000	0,936194
Polity, type	-0,021598	0,248504	-0,382571	0,147348	-0,047830	-0,386656	0,202977	0,024465	0,936194	1,000000

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.), the Constitute Project (n.d.), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Elgie (2011), Elkins & Ginsburg (2022), Freedom House (n.d.), the International IDEA Project (n.d.), Marshall & Gurr (2020), Osadchuk & Lytvyn (2023), Presidential Power (n.d.), Semi-Presidential One (n.d.), Shugart and Carey (1992).

different political regime types, institutional designs and systems of government. To further substantiate these patterns, we examine the data through regional analysis. Regional analysis can reveal specific conflict dynamics and the geographical distribution of different institutional designs and systems of government.

We segmented the world into four analytical regions: Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas (combined with Australia and Oceania). The Americas were combined with Australia and Oceania due to insufficient case numbers for separate analysis. The regional data employ the same analytical methods and calculation algorithms as the global analysis, ensuring consistency. Table 6 presents regional patterns of war initiation, confirming that parliamentary republics and parliamentary monarchies, as parliamentary or parliamentarised political systems, show higher rates of war participation than other institutional designs. This pattern holds across most regions, indicating that parliamentary and parliamentarised systems exhibit the greatest disparity between war initiation and non-initiation compared to alternative systems of government.

Regional analysis of war outcomes also reveals that parliamentary and parliamentarised systems show the highest rates of participation in all outcome categories – victories, defeats and draws – but generally achieve more victories than other institutional designs. However, important regional variations exist. In Africa, parliamentary systems show higher rates of defeats and draws. In Asia, victories of parliamentary and parliamentarised systems are not significantly higher than defeats and draws. By contrast, Europe shows a marked pattern where parliamentary systems achieve significantly more victories than defeats. The Americas present a different picture entirely, with minimal presence of parliamentary systems and predominant presidential systems, which explains the distinct regional patterns.

A regional statistical comparison of war initiation and outcomes by regime type further refines the global picture. Overall, the regional results align with the trends identified in the worldwide analysis: Autocracies are more frequently involved in wars and are the most likely initiators, a pattern evident in nearly all regions. However, political and social indicators point to a divergent pattern in South and North America, Australia and Oceania, where democracies display a higher tendency to engage in wars. At the same time, analysis of outcomes reveals that democratic states – especially in Europe, the Americas, Australia and Oceania – show a significantly greater likelihood of victory in warfare. By contrast, autocracies both globally and regionally tend to suffer defeat. These findings are presented in Table 7.

Consequently, the regional findings reinforce the general global trends and conclusions. In most regions of the world, the initiation of wars is frequently associated with parliamentary or parliamentarised systems of government, which also display the highest levels of participation and success in warfare. A closer examination of war records shows that states with the strongest records of military victories are predominantly democracies, especially those in Europe, North America, Oceania and Australia. A large share of parliamentary or parliamentarised systems with high democratic scores are concentrated in Europe, further strengthening this pattern.⁴ These observations both influence and reflect national frameworks and the contexts of interstate wars.

The contemporary relevance of these findings is evident in the ongoing war in Ukraine. The war was initiated by Russia, an autocratic regime with a presidentialised institutional design, whereas Ukraine initially sought to reduce the intensity of hostilities. At the outbreak of full-scale war, Ukraine combined democratic and autocratic features, but its democratic indicators declined as the war intensified – an outcome that can be considered an objective consequence of

4 These regional findings help mitigate concerns about temporal and geographical clustering. While parliamentary or parliamentarised systems were indeed concentrated in Europe during high-conflict periods, similar patterns of war participation appear in other regions and time frames, suggesting that the associations are not solely artifacts of European history, particularly between 1919–1945.

Table 6: Initiation and outcomes of wars by different systems of government and institutional designs, regional

System of government / Type of institutional design	EUROPE		AFRICA		
	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #	Total, #
INITIATION AND NON-INITIATION					
Classification into 6 types (with reclassification of atypical systems)					
Parliamentary republic	9	13	8	0	20
Presidential republic	1	1	0	0	2
Semi-presidential republic	4	7	2	0	13
Dualistic monarchy	3	1	0	0	4
Absolute monarchy	1	0	0	0	1
Parliamentary monarchy	3	4	0	0	7
In total	21	26	10	0	47
Classification into 3 types (with reclassification of atypical systems)					
Predominance of the parliament	12	17	8	0	29
Predominance of the head of state	6	2	0	0	8
Mixed/balanced	3	7	2	0	12
In total	21	26	10	0	47
OUTCOMES					
Classification into 6 types (with reclassification of atypical systems)					
Parliamentary republic	11	5	6	2	24
Presidential republic	0	0	2	2	4
Semi-presidential republic	5	2	4	0	11
Dualistic monarchy	2	0	2	0	4
Absolute monarchy	0	0	1	2	3
Parliamentary monarchy	7	0	0	0	7
In total	25	7	15	6	47
Classification into 3 types (with reclassification of atypical systems)					
Predominance of the parliament	18	5	6	2	29
Predominance of the head of state	2	0	6	4	12
Mixed/balanced	5	2	3	0	10
In total	25	7	15	6	47

Geopolitically, Europe includes countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Cyprus, and Turkey. See the Correlates of War project (n.d.), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Elgie (2011), Elkins & Ginsburg (2022), Shugart and Carey (1992)

Overview (1919–2020)

AMERICA		ASIA		AMERICAS + AUSTR. + OC.			
Non-initiator, #	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #	Initiator, #	Non-initiator, #	Initiator, #		
INITIATION OF WARS							
(classification of atypical systems)							
2	16	22	0	1			
3	2	4	8	9			
2	1	1	1	0			
3	7	3	0	0			
2	0	2	0	0			
0	1	2	1	3			
12	27	34	10	13			
22		61		23			
ENDS OF WARS							
2	17	24	1	4			
7	9	9	8	9			
3	1	1	1	0			
12	27	34	10	13			
22		61		23			
RESULTS OF WARS							
Draw, #	Defeat, #	Victory, #	Draw, #	Defeat, #	Victory, #	Draw, #	Defeat, #
(classification of atypical systems)							
3	6	14	12	12	1	0	0
0	0	0	2	4	7	4	6
2	2	0	1	1	0	1	0
2	1	3	2	5	0	0	0
0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
0	0	1	1	1	3	0	1
7	9	19	18	24	11	5	7
22			61			23	
(classification of atypical systems)							
3	5	15	13	13	4	0	1
2	1	4	4	10	7	4	6
2	3	0	1	1	0	1	0
7	9	19	18	24	11	5	7
22			61			23	

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Comparative Constitutions Project (n.d.), the International IDEA Project (n.d.), Osadchuk & Lytvyn (2023), Presidential Power (n.d.), Semi-Presidential One (n.d.),

Table 7: Initiation and outcomes of wars by political regime types (Polity IV/V data), regional overview (1919–2020)

Initiation / Outcomes of Wars		Democratic states	Anocratic/hybrid states	Autocratic states
EUROPE	Initiation of interstate wars			
	Initiator, #	8	4	7
	Non-initiator, #	10	7	6
	In total	18	11	13
		42		
	Outcomes of interstate wars			
	Victory, #	13	3	7
	Draw, #	2	2	2
	Defeat, #	3	6	4
	In total	18	11	13
		42		
	AFRICA	Initiation of interstate wars		
Initiator, #		1	0	9
Non-initiator, #		0	4	7
In total		1	4	16
		21		
Outcomes of interstate wars				
Victory, #		0	2	3
Draw, #		1	1	5
Defeat, #		0	1	8
In total		1	4	16
		21		
ASIA		Initiation of interstate wars		
	Initiator, #	4	8	12
	Non-initiator, #	5	7	17
	In total	9	15	29
		53		
	Outcomes of interstate wars			
	Victory, #	7	1	8
	Draw, #	2	3	10
	Defeat, #	0	11	11
	In total	9	15	29
		53		

Initiation / Outcomes of Wars	Democratic states	Anocratic/hybrid states	Autocratic states	
AMERICAS + AUSTRALIA + OCEANIA	Initiation of interstate wars			
	Initiator, #	5	3	1
	Non-initiator, #	7	3	3
	In total	12	6	4
		22		
	Outcomes of interstate wars			
	Victory, #	7	2	2
	Draw, #	2	3	0
	Defeat, #	3	1	2
	In total	12	6	4
		22		

As with Table 4, the Polity IV/V project does not provide political regime assessment for several cases in the war sample. These cases are excluded from the aggregate figures in Table 7

Geopolitically, Europe includes countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Cyprus, and Turkey.

Source: Authors, partly based on the Center for Systemic Peace (2020), the Correlates of War project (n.d.), Duke University (2020), Freedom House (n.d.), Marshall & Gurr (2020)

wartime conditions. This process nevertheless produced several advantageous military outcomes for Ukraine, while simultaneously exacerbating foreign policy challenges, particularly the inability to offer concessions to its adversary. Each national case thus reflects broader regional and global patterns, highlighting the importance of political regimes, systems of government and institutional design (as political and institutional factors) in shaping decisions on war or peace.

Generalisation and discussion of political and institutional factors of wars

The study's findings indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between the frequency of war initiation and the type of system of government – whether parliamentary, presidential or another institutional design. Similarly, the degree of democracy or autocracy within a political regime shows little correlation with the likelihood of initiating wars. Nonetheless, the data reveal a relative predominance of parliamentary and parliamentarised systems compared to presidential and presidentialised systems, as well as other institutional designs. This tendency becomes particularly evident when the number of war-initiating states is assessed independently from the number of non-initiators. The evidence suggests that states with strong parliamentary influence – parliamentary or parliamentarised systems, both institutionally and politically – are

more frequently engaged in wars, either as initiators or participants, than states with alternative institutional configurations.

This trend can be linked to several explanatory factors. First, geography plays a role: Many parliamentary and parliamentarised systems are located in conflict-prone regions such as the Middle East and South Asia. For instance, parliamentary democracies such as India and Israel have repeatedly been involved in wars in these regions. Second, historical legacies and events matter. Between 1919 and 1945, most European republics adopted parliamentary or parliamentarised systems of government, coinciding with a period of heightened warfare. Third, the global proliferation of socialist republics in the early to mid-20th century – formally characterised by parliamentary or quasi-parliamentary designs, though atypical due to distortions in practice – contributed to this pattern. Many of these states exhibited assertive foreign policies, partly attributable to their autocratic political regimes. However, these factors alone cannot provide a sufficient explanation, since the present study covers a much broader temporal and regional scope.⁵

In view of these factors, it is essential to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the complexities embedded in inter-institutional dynamics across diverse institutional designs and systems of government, with particular emphasis on the analysis of wars. A key assumption is that the involvement of countries with parliamentary or parliamentarised systems in wars is strongly influenced by the constrained dualism of the executive. In all republican and monarchical systems, both the head of state and parliament are present; yet in parliamentary monarchies and republics, the legislature and prime minister often wield more authority than the head of state, especially regarding the initiation and conduct of wars. By contrast, in presidential republics and dualistic monarchies, heads of state exercise substantial executive authority but must still take account of parliamentary positions, particularly in democratic regimes. Semi-presidential systems represent an additional complexity, as presidents, parliaments and prime ministers share significant – sometimes nearly equivalent – powers over policy and executive functions. This intricate distribution of authority has a direct impact on decisions about initiating and pursuing wars. For this reason,

5 Nevertheless, these explanatory factors may raise concerns about potential confounding effects. The observed correlations between parliamentary or parliamentarised systems and war dynamics may partly reflect geographical and temporal clustering rather than institutional causation. Parliamentary systems were indeed concentrated in Europe between 1919 and 1945, a period of exceptionally high interstate wars. This creates a classic confounding problem: Historical timing and regional location, rather than institutional design per se, may explain the statistical associations. Three factors mitigate this concern. First, the analysis covers the full century (1919–2020) and all world regions, extending well beyond the European experience of the early twentieth century. Second, the regional results (see section 4) show that parliamentary systems display higher rates of war participation across multiple contexts, not solely in Europe. Third, and most importantly, this study identifies correlational patterns rather than definitive causal mechanisms. The findings highlight empirical regularities that warrant further investigation through future research.

a careful examination of the respective roles and responsibilities of these key institutions is required.

From this perspective, one can infer that the states with strong parliaments and effective prime ministers – particularly where heads of state or other actors exert limited opposition – may be more inclined to engage in wars. A similar logic applies in presidential and semi-presidential systems where the heads of state command legislative majorities. However, confirming this hypothesis requires further empirical evidence. Complicating the matter is the fact that parliamentary and parliamentarised systems, as well as other institutional designs, are far from homogeneous. Variations in party systems, government formation, legislative support and responsibility mechanisms significantly shape war-related decision-making. As Auerswald (2000: 40–43) demonstrates, single-party majority governments display a higher propensity to initiate wars, as they possess both the capacity and unity to do so. Coalition or minority governments, by contrast, often lack cohesive support from partners or legislative majorities. Yet Prins and Sprecher (1999: 282–284) challenge this view, arguing that coalition leaders may in fact be more inclined to initiate military conflicts, albeit for different reasons. In such contexts, responsibility for outcomes is shared among coalition partners or parliamentary parties, diffusing responsibility and thereby altering the calculus of war decisions.

To gain a deeper understanding of war outcomes, further assumptions, clarifications and generalisations are required. As already noted, the study found that states with parliamentary or parliamentarised systems of government and democratic political regimes are the most frequent victors in wars (see Tables 3 and 5). One explanation lies in existing research on the relations between political regimes and warfare: Democratic leaders are generally more willing to invest significant resources in achieving victory than their autocratic counterparts. In addition, democracies are more likely to form military blocs and alliances, while also benefiting from more advanced economies than autocracies. These factors provide democratic states with stronger resource-based military capacity, which increases their chances of success in war.

At the same time, the reasons why parliamentary and parliamentarised systems of government in democracies outperform other institutional designs remain less clear. The present study shows that alternative systems of government often prove less effective, and in some cases even perform worse than autocratic regimes. From a political and institutional perspective, this may be explained by the fact that presidential and semi-presidential republics, as well as absolute and dualistic monarchies, are frequently characterised by anocratic/hybrid or autocratic political regimes. Within this sample, the United States stands out as the only presidential republic with a consistent record of military victories. A similar exception exists in semi-presidential systems: France's Fifth Republic, which has combined democratic stability with a notable record of military

success. By contrast, most other presidential or semi-presidential states in the dataset were either anocratic/hybrid or autocratic, limiting their effectiveness in warfare. A further unexpected finding concerns absolute monarchies: Those few that proved most successful did so largely through strategic partnerships with democratic states.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates, on a comparative and statistical basis, that parliamentary republics and parliamentary monarchies play a pivotal role in warfare and are most frequently victorious. A recurring pattern is the presence of a parliamentary or parliamentarised institutional design, where legislatures exercise predominant influence over the formation, operation and responsibility of governments. At the same time, the evidence indicates that states with strong parliaments are also the most frequent initiators of wars. Conversely, nations with powerful heads of state or with a more balanced distribution of authority among institutions, particularly influencing governments, show a markedly lower propensity to engage in wars or to achieve victory once involved.

Taken together, these findings suggest that states combining parliamentary predominance with democratic political regimes are most likely to emerge as victors in wars. At the same time, the study finds no statistically significant correlations between war initiation or participation and the type of system of government, institutional design or political regime. In this respect, the results broadly align with democratic peace theory, except for the question of initiation. More generally, the analysis indicates that inter-institutional relations are indeed a relevant factor in explaining wars. However, they must be considered in conjunction with the type of political regime if their role in war initiation, participation and outcomes is to be fully understood.

It must be stressed that this conclusion remains contingent on a range of political and institutional factors, including inter-institutional relations and political systems. These factors may either restrain or intensify a state's decision to wage war, and they also shape the conduct and outcomes of wars once they begin. In summary, the study has examined the initiation, participation and outcomes of wars under different political regimes, institutional designs and systems of government. Yet this analysis represents only one dimension of a much broader explanatory landscape. Wars are driven by multiple causes and factors that extend well beyond political or institutional arrangements, including economic structures, alliance memberships, military capabilities, geographical conditions and historical legacies. The present research deliberately isolates the influence of systems of government and regime types in order to establish their independent effects with greater analytical precision. Future studies could profitably explore how these political and institutional factors

interact with economic and structural determinants, thereby offering a more comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of war.

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