

and established its “postmodern” character (pp. 81, 114–115), but altered presidential struggles for authority as well.

This second thesis takes center stage in Skowronek’s essays on George W. Bush, the most provocative portions of this collection. The first draws the connection between Bush’s location in political time and his “leadership posture,” a constructed “framing device” that serves as “an assertion of political authority” (pp. 118, 119). Skowronek identifies Bush’s belief that “definitions effectively asserted can create their own reality” (p. 122) as the foundation of his posture as a president who “leads by definition” (p. 121). Yet, the effectiveness of Skowronek’s argument is diminished by his conflation of Bush’s efforts to define political reality and the stubborn inflexibility with which he went about this task. As David Zarefsky contends, the need to define political reality is the work of all contemporary presidents; the fundamental quality of Bush’s posture was that he did so with unwavering rigidity, a characteristic shared with fellow “orthodox innovators” (p. 135) struggling with the politics of articulation.

Akin to those with whom he shared a moment in political time, Bush pursued a course that left him appearing “dangerously out of touch with reality and lacking in credibility” (p. 143). Yet, he was able to break from their pattern and secure reelection. Does this signify that the unbridled presidentialism that inspired Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.’s imperial presidency thesis has been realized? Skowronek doesn’t think so. His final essay argues that the Bush-as-unitary-executive years resulted from the convergence of “a uniquely virulent configuration of developmental dynamics” (p. 161) including the altered conditions of postmodern politics, lockstep partisan support, the events of September 11, and, importantly, a moment in political time that invited presidential overreach. This assessment is enlightening, but (as Skowronek admits) not very comforting.

Skowronek’s collection is an important contribution to our understanding of presidential leadership in American politics. Interestingly, its primary deficiency exists beyond the confines of the text—its nonexistent epilogue on the election of Barack Obama. Reading Skowronek during this moment in secular time provokes the question of what moment in political time Obama will occupy. Is he a preemptive leader, opposed to a regime that has temporarily lost its way? Or a reconstructive leader, following an incumbent for whom the politics of articulation during his first term degenerated into the politics of disjunction in his second? Only time will tell.

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Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism by Michael C. Desch. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 248 pp. \$45.00.

It is fast becoming conventional wisdom among international relations scholars that democracies are uniquely advantaged when it comes to winning wars,

both because they are better at choosing which wars to start (known as the “selection effects” argument) and because they fight more effectively once engaged (the “war-fighting” argument). These “democratic triumphalist” arguments are the primary targets of Michael Desch’s spirited book *Power and Military Effectiveness*. Although Desch lodges a few challenges to the logic underpinning these theories, his critique is primarily empirical: he aims to show that the quantitative correlation between democracy and victory does not hold, and that even when democracies win, it is not for the reasons posited by triumphalists.

Some readers may already be aware of Desch’s quantitative critique, which appeared in the journal *International Security* in 2002 and 2003. In a controversial move, Desch eliminated most of the wars from democratic triumphalists’ datasets, arguing that these cases were better accounted for by alternative explanations, such as gross imbalances of power or interests and mixed alliances between democracies and autocracies, where the latter provided the lion’s share of the capabilities. After stripping away these “unfair fights,” Desch found that democracies were no longer more likely to win. This move prompted sharp rejoinders from some triumphalists, who argued that selection effects cause democracies to seek out such unfair fights.

The novel contribution of the book lies in its qualitative critique of democratic triumphalism. Desch first derives a number of hypotheses from the selection effects and war-fighting arguments. According to the selection mechanism, for example, decisions to initiate wars in democracies should be “characterized by full and free debate”; leaders who win wars “should prosper politically by doing so,” while those who lose should be punished; and leaders “should not lie or otherwise misrepresent the costs, benefits, or probability of various outcomes” (pp. 47–48). The war-fighting argument also generates several hypotheses for process tracing: democracies should engage in less rent-seeking than autocracies (resulting in greater levels of wealth), come to each others’ defense, be skilled at strategic evaluation, enjoy strong public support in wartime, and field troops who fight more effectively on the battlefield.

Desch then adopts a clever research design: he selects wars won by democracies, in which the balance of power between the belligerents was roughly equal, including the Russo-Polish War, several Arab-Israeli Wars, and the Falklands War. According to Desch, “cases in which democracies won without a decisive power advantage” are “ideal for ascertaining how much of an independent role democracy played in the outcome” (pp. 61–62). Overall, Desch finds little support for democracy as the key to victory. In terms of selection effects, Desch shows that democratic leaders repeatedly kept their own counsel and initiated wars without broad public support or significant societal debate. Desch argues, for example, that a quartet of Israeli leaders, led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, engineered the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 “despite overwhelming opposition from the cabinet and the public” (p. 102). In fact, Desch paints a highly

undemocratic picture of Israeli decision making on security matters, showing that most decisions for war have been made secretly by a handful of individuals. The open, vigorous “marketplace of ideas” touted by the triumphalists is nowhere to be found.

Nor does Desch find much support for democratic war-fighting arguments. Poland, for example, received hardly any support from its supposed democratic allies in the Triple Entente. The Poles triumphed over Russia, according to Desch, because they possessed numerical superiority in the crucial Battle of Warsaw and because the Soviet invasion inflamed Polish nationalism. Israel, too, received little wartime aid from the United States, Britain, or France; Desch attributes Israel’s wartime effectiveness largely to necessity—the Jews had to win or be driven into the sea—and nationalism. In the lone Israeli war in which national survival was not at stake—the Lebanon War—the Israel Defense Forces fought less effectively and the Israeli body politic was divided. Finally, Desch concedes that British troops out-fought their Argentine counterparts in the Falklands War, but attributes this to factors other than democracy, such as the strong unit cohesion that characterizes an experienced, well-trained, professional, army.

In the end, as the title of the book implies, Desch wants to argue that material power trumps democracy when it comes to producing military effectiveness. Indeed, Desch contends that the relationship between democracy and effectiveness is spurious: national wealth explains both democracy *and* victory. The book does not develop a sustained argument for the importance of material power, however, nor does it test this argument in a systematic fashion; it is much more a refutation of democratic triumphalism than an argument in favor of power. Any power-based explanation of military effectiveness would, at a minimum, have to address Stephen Biddle’s recent refutation of preponderance and offense–defense arguments in his book *Military Power*. Yet Desch also endorses several non-material factors as explanations for military effectiveness, such as degree of government consolidation and nationalism. These and other non-material factors—such as strategy, force employment, civil-military relations, culture, and identity—strike this reviewer as more promising avenues for future research.

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The American Voter Revisited by Michael S. Lewis-Beck, William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2008. 512 pp. Cloth, \$80.00; paper, \$29.95.

There might be no better group of scholars to reevaluate the “Michigan model” of American electoral behavior. The book’s four co-authors were once graduate students in Ann Arbor studying with the four co-authors of *The American*