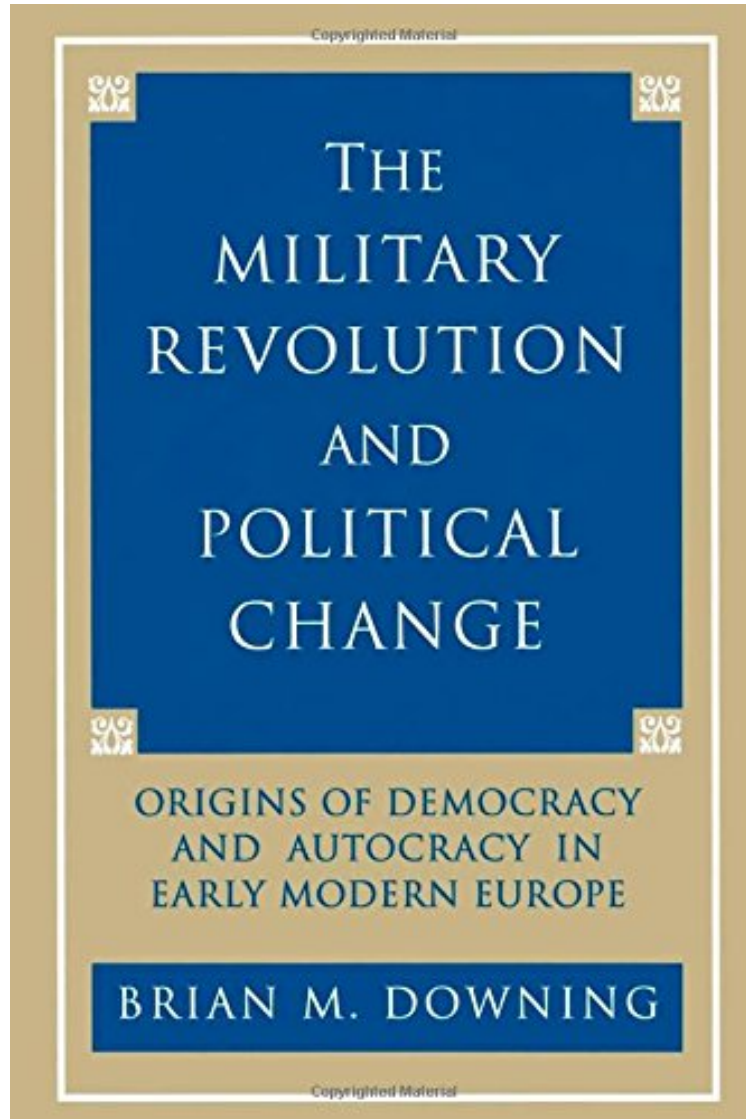


(Free) The Military Revolution and Political Change

# The Military Revolution and Political Change

*Brian Downing*

*\*Download PDF / ePub / DOC / audiobook / ebooks*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#1367968 in Books Princeton University Press 1992-12-29 1993-01-18 Original language: English PDF # 1  
9.00 x .81 x 6.00, 1.08 #File Name: 0691024758308 pages | File size: 44.Mb

**Brian Downing : The Military Revolution and Political Change** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Military Revolution and Political Change:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, Argued Well, ThinBy R. Albin This clear and well argued book is an effort at a modification of Barrington Moore's work on the origins of democracy and dictatorship in the modern world. Where Moore stressed economic features of modernization, Downing reaches farther back to look at historical features of national development in early modern Europe. Downing argues specifically that the survival of

Medieval constitutional institutions, particularly representative institutions like estates and parliaments, would later provide an institutional framework for democratic development. This is essentially a model of what some biologists call exaptation, in which a trait or organismic feature evolved for one purpose is later coopted for another purpose. In Downing's model, the key determinant of the vitality of Medieval constitutionalism is the response of individual nations to the Military Revolution of the early modern period. In Prussia, where the demands of international conflict and the expenses of a modern military resulted in a highly centralized, authoritarian state and the destruction of Medieval representative institutions. France pursues a similar trajectory while in England, Holland, and Sweden, events allowed the persistence and actual strengthening of these institutions. Downing is careful to point out that mere survival of Medieval institutions is not by itself the key factor; he discusses the example of Poland, where adherence to Medieval institutions produced a weak state dismembered by powerful neighbors. Downing's general idea is laid out well and the individual chapters on examining his model in several European countries are done well and informative. In some ways, this is a very traditional idea, harking back to 19th century constitutional historians and even to thinkers like Voltaire and Montesquieu who were enthusiasts about English constitutional arrangements. Downing arguably commits some anachronistic errors. In his discussion of Poland, for example, he treats the Polish gentry as if they had relatively modern national feelings but failed to make the decisions needed to preserve the Polish state. But if the gentry attachment to their Medieval constitutional forms was the cause of their downfall, doesn't this indicate that the Polish gentry thought in terms of the Medieval feudal bond rather than national attachment? Similarly, he refers repeatedly to the survival of Medieval representative forms as necessary for democracy, this is inaccurate because what they really preceded was forms of Republicanism with democracy coming later. The biggest defect of Downing's argument is that his effort to produce a grand generalization is ultimately a bit thin. The basic idea seems solid but the discussions of the histories of individual nations reveals such diversity of events and outcomes that it undercuts his effort to produce a simple explanatory framework.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Interesting thesis, well written book  
By Marc and Susan Osborne  
Downing makes a strong and easy to follow argument that European governments were able to support the modern standing armies of the 17th and 18th centuries only by destroying decentralized proto-representative institutions inherited from medieval times and taking direct control of taxation, conscription, and military leadership. Such governments then developed into autocracies, whereas, in countries that either didn't need large standing armies or were able to support those armies by plunder rather than taxation, the medieval institutions survived and eventually developed into democracies. The argument is backed by interesting, although brief, comparative historical analyses of Prussia, France, Britain, Poland, Holland, and Sweden. Personally, I wasn't entirely convinced, but Downing is an unusually clear and concise writer and knows his stuff, so it's worth deciding for yourself.

10 of 28 people found the following review helpful. interesting but flawed interpretation of Early Modern Era  
By A Customer  
downing notes that a "military revolution" is the driving force behind the transformation of the demesne state towards our own modern day liberal democracy. i find myself questioning downing's basis of causality. besides taking a step much too large for his short tract, i am overcome by great difficulties in his reasoning. why could this idea not work in the opposite direction? the author provides little to answer this basic contention. is it possible that it was the emerging form of government that provided the foundation for such increasingly complex and 'revolutionary' war efforts and not the other way around as downing suggests? to me this seems at least equally plausible and possibly more so. this interpretation is based on a theory of governmental change just as downing has his argument based on an assumption of military change. in short, how is it possible to tell which is changing and therefore affecting the other? the author makes no attempt to clarify this. e.g. gunpowder was around early on but was not widely proliferated in battle until much later due to poor casting and inconsistent manufacturing. if war were really the driving force behind the political developments then why is it that only when the political superstructures have seemingly evolved sufficiently that we find gunpowder in sudden widespread use? his effort is to be lauded in that he has at least provided an interesting and somewhat comprehensive account of a difficult and complex subject matter.

To examine the long-run origins of democracy and dictatorship, Brian Downing focuses on the importance of medieval political configurations and of military modernization in the early modern period. He maintains that in late medieval times an array of constitutional arrangements distinguished Western Europe from other parts of the world and predisposed it toward liberal democracy. He then looks at how medieval constitutionalism was affected by the "military revolution" of the early modern era--the shift from small, decentralized feudal levies to large standing armies. Downing won the American Political Science Association's Gabriel Almond Award for the dissertation on which this book was based.

"A refreshing return to a realistic view of political history."--William R. Hawkins, *Chronicles From the Back Cover*  
When the manuscript of this book came to my attention, I intended to do no more than skim it to see if I could help a young scholar unknown to me. Instead I found myself reading every word straight through to the end. The author's emphasis on the role of the instruments of violence and repression in inhibiting liberal and democratic trends is new to scholarship and quite convincing. Here is comparative history at its best. This book takes a big step beyond

my Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy."--Barrington Moore, Jr.