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Defending democracy: Reactions to political extremism in inter-war Europe

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Abstract. While the strategies of political actors and institutions have been largely analyzed with reference to cases of democratic breakdown, democratic survival has often been viewed as a consequence of socio-economic and cultural 'preconditions'. The analysis of successful reactions to strong extremist challenges in three cases of democratic survival (Czechoslovakia, Finland and Belgium in the inter-war period) against the background of two cases of breakdown in the same historical context (Italy and the Weimar Republic) is a useful complement to this view. The analysis of the selected cases shows how a stable coalition of democratic forces can effectively protect the democratic system from dangerous extremist attacks by pursuing both repressive and inclusive strategies.

Introduction

Are there political and institutional strategies that democratic rulers can use to react against strong extremist challenges that formally 'play the democratic game'? Under what conditions can such strategies be successful in making the regime survive? This article addresses these issues – rarely analyzed in the comparative politics literature – in relation to selected cases among the inter-war European democracies. In fact, if the most famous cases of democratic breakdown of the 1920s and 1930s have already been the object of comparative analysis (Linz & Stepan 1978), with rare exceptions the cases of survival have not been analyzed comparatively, at least not without a strong emphasis on the so-called social and cultural 'prerequisites' of democracy.[1] By contrast, the problem of short-term reactions against extremists and the institutional defense of democracy has mainly been dealt with by political theory and constitutional law (for a review, see Boventer 1985a), rather than political science.[2]

The importance of social and cultural factors in making democracy stable cannot of course be denied, but as Linz rightly notes the predominant focus on them leads to a lack of temporal perspective (Linz 1978). While social and cultural prerequisites can be crucial for the long-term stability of a democracy, they cannot offer a satisfactory explanation for the solution of political

crises in the short term. In a structure-driven political world, the behaviour of institutions and actors would not make a difference, and on the contrary, they would suffer from a paradox. If a democracy only persists because of its societal basis, then institutional reactions and short-term political strategies will only be effective when the extremists against whom they are directed are weak, which, however, makes these useless at the same time. When extremists are strong, none of these strategies can reach its proposed aim. Thus, institutional and political reactions to extremism in the short term would oscillate, in this view, between triviality and impossibility. If one focuses on the short-term perspective instead, the question that becomes important is the following: under what conditions are political and institutional reactions against extremists possible? It goes without saying that the stronger the challenge, the more difficult it will be to defend the democratic regime, and beyond certain limits, it will even be impossible. But how strong is 'strong', and what are these limits?

Defending democracy: The problem of short-term reactions to political extremism

The idea of defending democracy goes back to the eternal dilemma of democratic rule, that of 'tolerance for the intolerant'. Rather than exploring the normative implications of this dilemma, however, this article focuses on some of its empirical aspects. By 'defending democracy' I mean here the elaboration and enactment of short-term political strategies,[3] whether inclusive or repressive in nature, which are explicitly aimed at reacting against those political forces that exploit the rights and guarantees of democracy in order to undermine its fundamental bases.

Defenders of democracy must strike a delicate balance between two opposing threats to democracy. On the one hand, to discriminate against an individual or group for political or ideological reasons represents a serious restriction of civil and political rights that, if pushed too far, can give rise to authoritarian tendencies. On the other hand, tolerating anti-democratic (extremist) forces might lead the system to collapse in a time of crisis. This dilemma is particularly urgent when extremists have strong support. In such cases, when democracy is most vulnerable it is most difficult to defend.

In the following sections, through the analysis of cases in which democratic regimes survived strong extremist challenges, and through comparison with cases of breakdown, I highlight the role of the most important political actors in defending democracy, what strategies they used, and the political conditions under which such strategies could be successful. I first select the most appropriate cases for analysis. Then I discuss the effectiveness and lim-

its of 'militant democracy' when confronted with strong extremist challenges. Following this I identify the main political and institutional actors involved in defending democracy and analyse their strategies, first within Sartori's theoretical framework for party systems analysis, and then in greater detail in each of the selected cases. The last section of the article is devoted to a summary investigation of the 'inclusive' strategies of democratic defense adopted in the selected countries, as important complements of anti-extremist repression. The article concludes that although there can be different paths to democratic persistence, short-term reactions against strong extremist challenges are indeed possible in 'difficult' democracies (Sani & Sartori 1983) and should be taken into account more systematically in the comparative analysis of democratic survivals and breakdowns.

Challenges to democracy in inter-war Europe

The experience of those democracies in which very strong extremist challenges were present and were successfully counteracted is particularly interesting for an analysis of the conditions and consequences of short-term reactions against extremism. In order to select suitable cases for the analysis I operationalize the strength of the challenge to a democratic regime in terms of the percentage of seats held by extremist parties in the lower chamber in the period under analysis. This operationalization is driven by the very nature of the enterprise. In fact, although political actors other than political parties (such as interest groups, the army etc.) can pose a threat to democracy, when extremism takes the form of a political party, it brings the challenge into one of the most important – if not *the* most important – institutions. In most democracies, in fact, parliament is the main arena where political majorities are formed to support measures against extremists, whether this means passing special legislation or simply backing the executive in its measures against extremists. In conditions in which extremist parties enjoy significant parliamentary representation, it is reasonable to expect that they would perceive themselves as future victims of such measures, and would therefore use their position to challenge the majority that helped put them in place. While at any one time a single extremist party will constitute the main challenge to democracy, all other extremist formations, possibly very far ideologically from the main challenger, will constitute a political constraint for democratic forces seeking agreement on a common defensive strategy. This is why I have chosen the total number of seats of all extremist parties as a measure of the scale of the challenge to democracy. The lower chamber is chosen because it is normally more important than the upper chamber, as well as for reasons of parsimony. Finally, I consider as 'extremist' those parties that on the basis

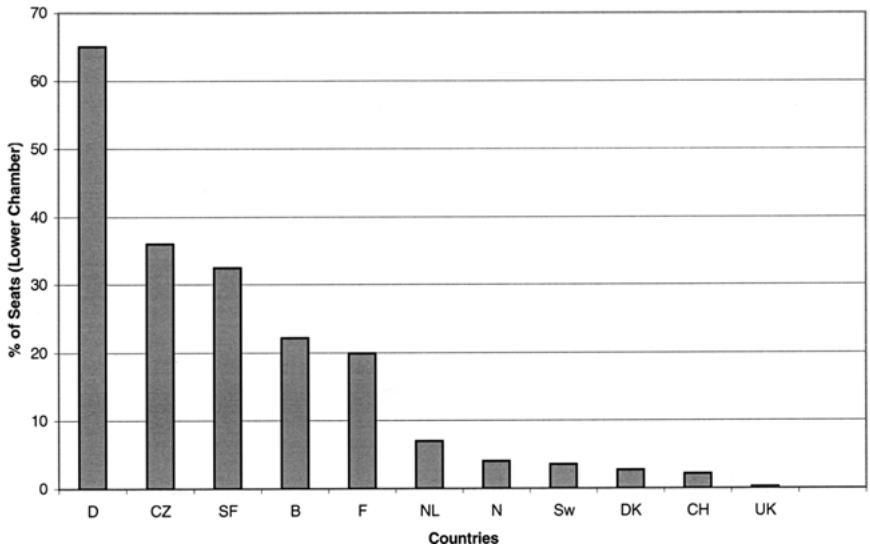

Figure 1. Peak results of extremist parties 1919–1939.

of their 'controlling goals' (Dahl 1966) are against either the fundamentals of pluralist democracy or the territorial unity of the state, or both. This definition restricts the field of such formations to Nazi, fascist or authoritarian parties, communist parties, and secessionist-irredentist parties.[4]

Focusing on those European countries that enjoyed a certain democratic continuity during the inter-war years,[5] Figure 1 ranks eleven cases (ten survived democracies, and the Weimar Republic) on the basis of the 'peak' percentage of seats reached by extremist parties in the lower chamber between 1919 and 1939.

The case of Germany is well known (the peak represents the situation after the elections of November 1932), but it can be noticed that three of the countries that survived had in fact to face very strong challenges. In Czechoslovakia after the 1935 elections, and in Finland in 1930–1931, extremist parties had about one third of the parliamentary seats in the most important chamber, while in Belgium (1936–1939) this percentage was slightly below one quarter. These three cases[6] therefore present themselves as critical ones for the assessment of the scope for possible democratic defense strategies and their success. Here, the political conditions for the coordination of democratic forces in pursuit of a common strategy were worse than in any other case of survival, and this study focuses on them. Prior to that, though, it is necessary to set out the main actors and strategies of democratic defense. I do so by first addressing the assets and liabilities so-called 'militant democracy'.

Shifting the boundaries of legality: Effectiveness and limits of legislative responses to extremism

Reinforcing the legislative apparatus for repression against extremists was a strategy to which most European democracies resorted in the inter-war years to respond to internal challenges. Although country-based studies in this field are not infrequent – see, for example Backes & Jesse (1996) and Jesse (1985) on the German case – this phenomenon is largely understudied in a comparative perspective.[7] In a series of articles published in the late thirties, Karl Loewenstein coined the term 'militant democracy' to define what he considered as a natural politico-constitutional development of democracies in those years, responding to the necessity of fighting especially fascist and Nazi tendencies with special legislation (Loewenstein 1937a, b; see also Friedrich 1957). Although, according to his view, militant democracy includes both a political and a legislative dimension, his real focus is on anti-extremist legislation, essential in his opinion to make democracy resilient to the 'fascist technique of power takeover' (Loewenstein 1937a, 1938a, b).

The special legislation against political extremism passed in the various European democracies is very complex and covers a very broad area. In Table 1 such legislation is classified on the basis of its object. The first cluster of anti-extremist legislation includes rules reinforcing the 'core' state institutional machinery. These involve two important areas of legislation: special provisions conferring on the cabinet or the head of state extraordinary powers to deal with emergency situations,[8] and the provisions aimed at protecting the bureaucratic and military structures of the state from extremist influences in order to guarantee their loyalty. In the second cluster I have included special legislation setting limits to political pluralism by enabling the government to ban or temporarily suspend parties or associations considered threatening to some fundamental feature of the system. This is in principle the most visible governmental weapon to defend the system from extremist challenges. The third cluster groups together pieces of special legislation limiting some types of political propaganda. Basically, this kind of legislation is aimed at reducing the capability of extremists to delegitimise and discredit the democratic system in the eyes of the electorate. Examples include explicitly prohibiting discrediting democratic institutions, democratic leaders and holders of high offices in the state, increasing the penalties and widening the scope of political libel cases, prohibiting the glorification of political crime, and spreading false news. Other provisions that fall in this category include a general tightening of censorship on press and other means of public expression and limitations on foreign political propaganda. Lastly, the fourth cluster includes special legislation aimed at the protection of public order. This kind of legislation aims to maintain public peace and ensure a non-violent development of polit-

Table 1. Clusters of special anti-extremist legislation

Type	Legislation on	Specific areas of special legislation include	Main objective
I	Institutional protection	Rules on the state of siege Rules on treason and treasonable acts Legislation against incitement to disaffection among the armed forces Legislation against disloyalty of public officials	To ensure loyalty of the state apparatus
II	Party and association bans	Legislation on suppression/suspension of political parties Legislation on suppression/suspension of political associations	To eliminate 'enemy' parties and groups from the political scene
III	Anti-propaganda	Legislation protecting democratic institutions Legislation for the protection of personal honour Legislation against glorification of political crime Legislation against false news Legislative restrictions on the freedom of the press (newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, books) Legislation against infiltration of foreign propaganda	To curb the possibility of launching delegitimising messages to the electorate
IV	Anti-extremist forms of behaviour	Legislation against party uniforms (symbols etc.) Legislation against party militias Legislation against military training of members of private associations Legislation against the wearing of arms Legislation restricting the freedom of assembly	To preserve public order

ical conflict. Unlike legislation protecting core institutions, which defends the state from direct military attacks by extremists, this type of anti-extremist legislation is more indirect. To put it simply, it restricts the choice of strategies for extremists by preventing them from using illegal and unconventional behaviour to delegitimize the democratic procedures of conflict resolution.

Analysis of the anti-extremist legislation in the eleven countries included in Figure 1 reveals a mixed picture (Capoccia 2000). Czechoslovakia and Finland, which survived the worst political crises of the interwar years had the most elaborate systems of protection against extremism, with strong legislative restrictions in virtually all areas listed in Table 1. Here much of this legislation was adopted during or after the onset of the most severe political crises, and must therefore be seen as a conscious reaction by democratic elites to the rise of extremism (Capoccia 1999b). Less important, although not irrelevant, was the role played by *ad hoc* legislation in the overall defensive

strategy of the Belgian democratic elites against the challenge of the Rexist Party.

Special anti-extremist legislation could also be found in the Weimar Republic, where a Law for the Protection of the Republic, passed in 1923 and reiterated in a partially weakened form in 1930, introduced restrictions on some types of extremist activities. Furthermore, several presidential decrees in 1931 and 1932 introduced severe legal restrictions especially in the area of protecting public order and curbing extremist political propaganda (Jasper 1963). What differentiated Czechoslovakia and Finland from Germany was the persistence throughout the crisis of a democratic coalition sufficiently strong to devise and enact a coherent *political* strategy against extremists.[9] Special legislation can be an important part of such a strategy as it gives the government stronger repressive weapons that can make the democratic game much more difficult, and even impossible, for extremists to play but the crucial factor is the *politics* of democratic defense. It is therefore necessary to look more closely at the political actors involved in developing defensive strategies and the conditions for the success of their actions.

Actors of democratic defense

The main institutional actors in the short-term defense of democracy are the government and the head of state. Crucial for a democratic government in its attempt to act effectively against extremists is the stability of the political coalition on which it is founded. In systems where extremist parties are strong, as in the cases considered here, the strategy of those parts of the coalition ideologically closest to the extremists is critical for political stability. Sartori's analysis of polarized party systems shows that in such systems there is an inbuilt tendency to 'centrifugal competition', since extremist parties compete in such a way to force all others, and in particular those bordering them, towards extreme positions. Extremist parties, by using 'outbidding' propaganda tactics, attract electors from the centre and especially from the moderate wings of 'border' parties. Thus the dynamics of party competition push the border parties towards the extremes to regain the electors that they have lost, and this nurtures the overall polarizing trend (Sartori 1976).

Answering his critics, Sartori reaffirmed that his model identifying systemic propensities in different types of party systems is not deterministic. Although polarization and centrifugal competition push the system towards breakdown, they only identify some 'inertial' systemic tendencies, and do not determine what will happen to a particular government regime. Political actors can stop or even counteract these propensities in the party system and therefore have an impact on their eventual effects on the regime (Sartori

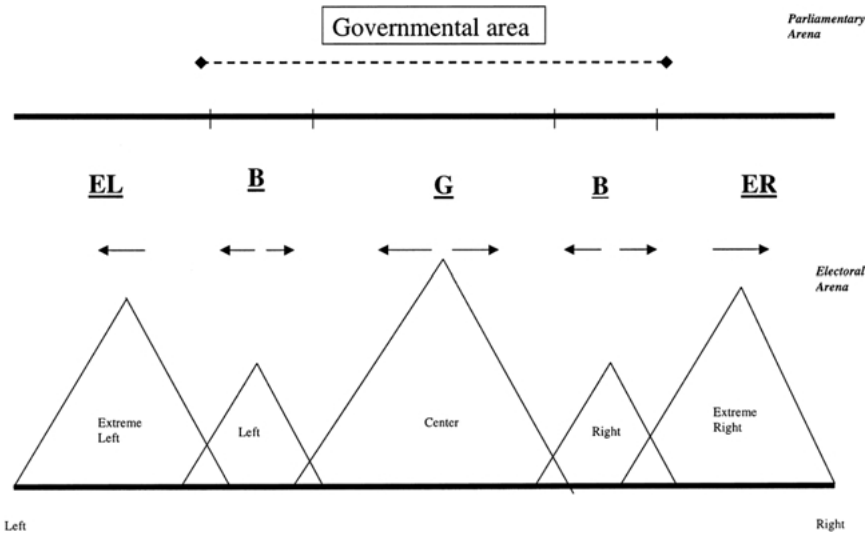

Figure 2. Party system propensities in the electoral and parliamentary area (adjusted from Sartori 1976). ER: extreme right; EL: extreme left; B: border parties; G: government's core.

1982). In general, depending on the historical context, a number of actors and a variety of strategies can successfully counteract the centrifugal tendencies of a polarized party system. In the cases analyzed here, the decisive reactions to extremism came mainly from the leader of the border parties, the government and the head of state.

Focusing first on the border parties and the government, it can be expected that the centrifugal tendencies identified by Sartori's analysis in the electoral arena give rise to defectionist tendencies in the parliamentary arena (Figure 2). In polarized systems, the government is normally supported by a centre-based coalition. By definition, the stronger the parliamentary representation of extremists, the more likely it is that border parties will be part, in one form or another, of the government majority, and possibly a numerically necessary part of it. A further consequence is that the government majority will also be heterogeneous, which on the one hand makes governmental paralysis likely, and on the other makes border parties uncomfortable.

In other words, we can say that border parties generally face a choice: either they make a common front against the extremist party, perceived as a common enemy to the democratic system, or they put their immediate electoral and political interests first and defect from the governmental alliance. In other words, they might choose to defect from the centre either in order to regain the votes that they are losing to extremists, or to create the political conditions for a different governing majority in which they will have more power, sustain their policy preferences and satisfy their voters.

The decisions of border parties during crisis periods is the crucial factor in shaping the short-term options of those defending democracy against a challenge by strong extremist parties (Capoccia 1999a). The causal process is described in Table 2. The cooperation of the border parties, by stabilizing the governmental majority, puts the government in a position to react against the extremists, and this increases the probability of a decline in the popular support for extreme groups. When border parties defect, on the other hand, this triggers the opposite causal process, leading to increasing centrifugal tendencies in the party system and ultimately to democratic breakdown, either in the form of an extremist takeover or of a suspension of democratic rule by a government that can no longer count on a political majority.

The head of state is also a crucial actor in the short-term defense of democracy. While the effectiveness of the government in acting against extremists is largely conditioned by the strategies of border parties, the head of state can generally operate with a greater degree of independence. This is certainly the case in semi-presidential systems in which the head of state has a major executive role (such as in the Weimar Republic and in Finland), but it is true also of cases in which, although formally endowed with limited powers, the head of state enjoys great personal prestige. Of course, heads of state cannot ignore the relative strengths of the different political forces when making choices, especially at critical political junctures, but they can nonetheless be decisive in using their personal prestige and political influence to channel the crisis in a particular direction. Generally speaking, the head of state can intervene in all the intermediate steps of the causal process described in Table 2 by influencing interactions between the parties and the process of coalition formation, by offering public support for the government and its strategy, and in some cases by exerting influence on the policy choices of the cabinet. Moreover, heads of state are in some cases given legal powers of their own to take actions to defend the regime in exceptional situations.

Reactions to political crises

Table 3 shows the divergent strategies of border parties, the government and the head of state in survived and collapsed democracies. In what follows, I concentrate on the three cases of democratic survival rather than the familiar stories of the breakdown of democracy in Italy and the Weimar Republic (Farneti 1978; Lepsius 1978). Generally speaking, one of the main factors precipitating political crisis in both Italy and Germany was the decision of border parties, or important parts of them, to defect from the political centre and to pursue alternative political alliances that, at one stage or another, would have foreseen the inclusion of the extremists. In pursuing this strategy, they

Table 2. Process from centrifugal tendencies to regime outcome

Nature of the variables	Contextual variable	Explanatory variable	Intervening variable	Intervening variable	Intervening variable	Dependent variable
Variables building the process	Systemic propensities: polarizing tendencies	Border parties' strategies	Stability of governmental majority	Possibility of defensive measures	Decline in popular support for the extremist actor	Regime outcome
Path leading to survival	Yes	Cooperation	High	Yes	Yes	Survival
Path leading to breakdown	Yes	Defection	Low	No	No	Breakdown

were mainly driven by the mistaken belief that they would have the leading role in any such alliance. In fact, large sectors of the Italian Liberals and Conservatives formed an alliance with the emerging Fascists in 1921, and again in 1924, when Mussolini was already in power but political pluralism had not yet been completely eliminated. In the Weimar Republic, the National Conservatives (DNVP) also moved towards the extreme right after 1928. After the fall of the Great Coalition following the break between the centrist forces and the Social Democratic Party in 1930, the centrists relied on the support of President Hindenburg to govern by decree. The landslide electoral victory of the Nazi party in September 1930 following the dissolution of the *Reichstag* made it increasingly difficult to reconstitute a democratic coalition – after 1932 it became numerically impossible to do so (Matthias & Morsey 1979). After the 1930 election the issue of the inclusion of the NSDAP in government increasingly came to feature on the political agenda. In other countries similar political strategies were proposed within border parties, but were defeated, and this was decisive for the survival of the democratic system.[10]

The same contrasting patterns of behaviour between cases of survival and breakdown can be seen in the political strategies and actions of the heads of state in periods of crisis. The actions of Finnish President Per Evind Svinhufvud in exercising emergency powers against the Lapua insurrection in 1932, the political activism of President Edvard Beneš in Czechoslovakia after 1935, and the determination of King Leopold III of Belgium in solving the political deadlock of a hyper-fragmented party system were decisive at key junctures of the political crises in these countries. By contrast, the decision of Victor Emmanuel III of Italy not to oppose the fascist insurrection of 1922, and especially those of Hindenburg and his advisers between 1930 and 1933 in Germany, were crucial in tipping the balance away from a democratic outcome to the crises they faced (Dorpalen 1964; Candeloro 1978).

Finland

An important feature of the Finnish case is the particular timing of its defense against a challenge on two fronts. In the 1920s the government repressed the challenge from the Communist Party mainly with firm police action and extensive use of the intelligence services. Many Communist militants and leaders were charged with treason or sedition, and the party's organization, both overt and secret, was repeatedly disbanded during those years (Hodgson 1967; Upton 1973; Mäkelä 1987). Although the Communists were the object of continuous repression and politically isolated (the Social Democratic Party constantly kept its distance from them), they remained in the public sphere. Constantly changing its organization, the party managed to stay in

Table 3. Defensive actions of the head of state and the government

Country	Belgium	Finland	Czechoslovakia	Italy	Weiman
Challenge	Rexists (1936–1939)	Lapua Movement/NC (1929–1932)	SdP (1933–1938)	PNF (1919–1925)	NSDAP (1928–1933)
Actor					
Head of state	(Leopold III) Interventions on coalition-making process to solve deadlocks. Constant exclusion of Rex.	(Svinhufvud) Orders military reaction against armed insurrection of Lapua. Outlaws movement afterwards	(Beneš) Appeals to public opinion; influence on governmental policies in favor of moderate German parties	(Victor Emmanuel III) Vetoes state of siege proposed by government against Fascist insurrection (Oct. 1922). Appoints Mussolini as PM thereafter	(Hindenburg) Suspends parliamentary rule after break of Grand Coalition in March 1930. Destabilizing influence on cabinet thereafter
Border parties	(Catholic Party) No defection. Prompt reaction at organizational and propaganda levels.	(Agrarian Party) Defection until early 1931. No defection afterwards	(Agrarian Party) Internal right wing defects consistently before 1935, and sporadically later. Countered by an alliance of rest of the party with Socialists and Presidency	Large sectors of the liberals prefer an alliance with the Fascists in 1921 and in 1924 to a center-based alliance	Extremization of National Conservatives after 1928. Move to the right of centrist parties after 1930.
Government (majority)	Administrative provisions against Rex. Some *ad hoc* legislation. Appeals to public opinion.	Implementation of 'anti-Communist' legislation against Lapua	Policy concessions (to moderate German parties). Strong anti-extremist legislation	Negotiations with Fascists to stop political violence fail	Scarcely autonomous from the Presidency after 1930 (presidential decrees)

the political arena and contest elections until 1929. The decisive factor for the eradication of communism from Finland in the interwar period was the emergence at the end of 1929 of a strong extreme right-wing movement (the Lapua Movement), which itself later turned into a danger for Finnish democracy. Backed by large and influential parts of the Finnish establishment, this

movement unleashed an unprecedented wave of political violence throughout the country and forced the parliament to pass a very elaborate framework of anti-extremist legislation and use it against the Communists, eradicating them from public life by 1931 (Micheles Dean et al. 1934).

Shortly after this, the same legislation was used against the Lapua Movement. President Svinhufvud used the exceptional powers that the new laws conferred on him to react against an armed uprising by Lapua in early 1932, and then outlawed the movement. Svinhufvud's prompt reaction (and the support given to it by the Chief of Staff Aarne Sihvo, who resisted strong pressure from within the army) was certainly of a crucial importance, but such a strategy was helped by the increasing political isolation of Lapua after 1931. While large sectors of the bourgeois establishment initially gave their support to the Lapua Movement, after 1931 most bourgeois parties clearly distanced themselves from it. The political trajectory of the Agrarian Party, the most important centrist party at that time, is crucial in this respect. Once the Communist challenge had been removed, it was no longer necessary for the moderate parties to tolerate Lapua's outright political violence, as well as its increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic stance (Rintala 1962).

Czechoslovakia

In the First Czechoslovak Republic (1920-1938), the Communist and Fascist challenges were of limited importance. The main challenge to the regime came from German ethnic parties (about one quarter of the population of Czechoslovakia was German-speaking and concentrated in border regions). The political expression of this ethnic cleavage had two faces: a moderate one, and an extremist one. The moderate face was that of the German bourgeois and Social Democratic parties, which decided quite early (between 1921 and 1922) to cooperate with the new Czechoslovak state, and were fully integrated politically within a few years (Brügel 1968). The other face of German ethnic political representation was both nationalist-secessionist and anti-democratic, and was represented by the DNP (German Nationalist Party) and the DNSAP (German National Socialist Workers' Party). These two parties had little significance in the 1920s, when the regime was stable and they were entirely politically isolated. They became a cause for concern, however, after Hitler's rise to power in January 1933.[11]

The Czechoslovak government's first reaction was to ban these two organisations in October 1933, and to reinforce anti-extremist legislation in several areas. In 1933–1934 several special laws were passed limiting political propaganda, introducing political screening for public employees and allowing bans on extremist parties (Hartmann 1933; Sander 1935).[12] Most members of the two disbanded parties, however, moved to its successor, the Sudeten

German Home Front (SHF). For the remaining years of the Republic the SHF was the fifth column of Nazi Germany within democratic Czechoslovakia.

Although it was legally possible to ban the SHF, and the majority of the governing parties were in favor of banning it before the elections, the government did not ban it.[13] The discussion over whether the party should be banned went on for the whole of 1934, and as late as a few weeks before the general elections it was still by no means clear whether the SHF would be able to compete in them.

The Agrarian Prime Minister Jan Malypetr, given the disagreement on this issue within the cabinet, passed the decision on to the President of the Republic, Thomas Masaryk. The President and his advisors (the 'Castle') were in principle favorable to the ban, but it was clear that to insist on this course of action would have jeopardized the stability of the government. In the end, Masaryk decided against disbanding the SHF, believing that the party would be 'parliamentarised' after the elections. Parliamentary participation would have led it to adopt more moderate positions. Then, if the need arose, the party could be dissolved anyway (Mamatey 1973).[14] This decision was based on a gross miscalculation, but there were not many alternatives at the time. In compensation for banning the SHF, it would have been necessary to make generous concessions to the German minority in general, and no Czech party was willing to do that on the eve of the elections. Thus, as the elections came closer, the position of the forces pushing for a ban grew weaker, and the prospect of outlawing the SHF became increasingly remote.[15]

Rather than putting this down to a political mistake by Masaryk, the real reasons for this 'non-decision' are to be found in the strategies of important political groups, notably the two Agrarian parties in the government coalition. In Czechoslovakia, as in other countries, the emergence of a new extremist group had triggered plans for a political reorientation, offering some members of the democratic coalition the chance of reaping greater political dividends.

The first group to react in this way to the emergence of the SHF was the German Agrarian Party (*Bund der Landwirte* – BdL). Feeling threatened in their rural strongholds by the dynamism of Henlein's party, which had by then (and only shortly after it had been founded) attracted more members than the disbanded DNP and DNSAP together, the BdL first tried to reach an agreement with the SHF and started negotiations that continued for most of 1934. According to of this agreement, the BdL would aim its propaganda at the rural areas, while the SHF would target its campaign efforts on urban districts. In the negotiations allusions were made to a common programme which would include a corporatist reorganization of the economy and the state (Brügel 1967).

The strategy of the German Agrarians soon became part of a more comprehensive political plan among right-wing members of the Czechoslovak Agrarians, the largest party in the country, whose leaders aimed to shift the balance within the national government towards the right.[16] More specifically, their aim was to bring about a realignment of existing political forces and form a new coalition that excluded the Social Democratic groups, and could elect a new President of the Republic more sensitive to their political orientations than Masaryk was. To this end, the SHF was to form an electoral alliance with the BdL, in which the SHF was expected to win 'fifteen or twenty seats', and reinforce the new majority (Brügel 1967). The role of the BdL in this scenario – and the Czech Conservatives and Fascists would also be included in the new alliance – would be that of guarantor of the SHF at the same time as controlling it, thereby ensuring that the new majority had sufficient electoral support in the Sudeten German regions.

Most active in pursuing this project were Agrarian leaders such as Viktor Stoupal and Rudolf Beran, who was elected to the presidency of the party in 1935, but had *de facto* been the party's most influential figure since 1929.[17] Their incentives, and those of their party allies, were not electoral, rather they were linked to their policy preferences, and most of all to their power within the government, both of which were limited in a coalition in which the moderate working class parties played a major role and had also traditionally enjoyed the political support of a powerful and charismatic head of state (Mamatey 1973).

The large electoral victory for the SHF (renamed as SdP) in the elections of 1935, rendered this project more difficult to realize. The SdP turned out to be the strongest party in Czechoslovakia in terms of votes (about two-thirds of the Sudeten Germans voted for it), and in parliamentary representation it trailed the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party by just one seat. It became obvious that the SdP was not easily willing to play a subordinate role in the political plans of others. In particular, the German Agrarians assumed a more confrontational attitude, while right-wing circles in the Czechoslovak Agrarians still displayed, although less continuously, defectionist tendencies.

In any case, the main factor leading to the effective defeat of the project of the right-wing Agrarians was the timely political alliance formed between Masaryk and Beneš (and the Social Democratic forces influenced by them) and the leader of the Slovak wing of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party, Milan Hodža, who was very influential within the party and became Prime Minister after the 1935 elections. This alliance proved decisive in stabilizing the political situation on the several occasions before and after the elections, that right-wing Agrarians defected from the majority (Brügel 1967; Mamatey 1973).

Although they faced difficult internal and international conditions,[18] the governing parties and the President of the Republic devised a three-pillar defensive strategy against the SdP between 1935 and 1938. First of all, they drove forward rearmament and the construction of military fortifications on the Western borders at a tremendous pace (Hauner 1986). The second pillar of the strategy was to equip the state with the legal powers needed to cope with internal and international emergencies through the 1936 Law on the Defense of the State. This legislation has been defined as the most elaborate self-defense provision ever enacted in a democratic system in times of peace (Loewenstein 1938a; Wiskemann 1967). It gave the government the legal power to declare military rule and govern by decree across the whole national territory or large portions of it (Kier 1936; Sander 1937). Lastly, a more systematic nationality policy in respect of the German minority was pursued. The cabinet, also under the influence of the new President of the Republic, Edvard Beneš, sensibly made extra concessions to the German minority and the President himself embarked on an intensive programme aimed at courting public opinion, concentrating on the Sudeten German regions and supporting the cause of coexistence and cooperation between Czechs and Germans. This managed to keep the SdP at bay, although obviously it could not avoid the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia following the Munich Agreement in 1938 between the European powers and the subsequent military conquest by Germany in 1939.

Belgium

Belgian democracy faced a dangerous challenge between 1936 and 1939, with the emergence and rise of the Rexist Party, an authoritarian right-wing Catholic organization. In the elections of May 1936, Rex, created only a few months earlier, obtained about 11 per cent of the seats in parliament, while the Flemish nationalist and authoritarian *Vlaamse Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National League – VNV), and the Communist Party also reported a large victory and together obtained a further 12 per cent. Thus, in 1936, almost one quarter of the Belgian Parliament was composed of anti-democratic parties.

The Rexist challenge, the most aggressive and dangerous of the three, was counteracted quickly and effectively, thanks to the prompt reaction of the establishment. In particular, the strategy of the Catholic Party, which had been the heaviest loser to Rex in 1936, deserves attention since it was decisive in allowing an effective defense.

The Rexist Party developed from within political Catholicism, and its young leader, Leon Degrelle, was director of a Catholic publishing house. After Rex was founded as an independent political party in February 1936, and Degrelle had made his strong propaganda attacks against Catholic lead-

ers, the Catholic Party reacted promptly by officially severing all contacts with Rex (Beaufays 1973). Moreover, internal organizational reforms – ongoing since 1935 – were accelerated to make the party and its leadership less vulnerable to aggressive Rexist propaganda and to gain stricter central control over its loosely-connected peripheral Catholic political organizations. In the campaign for the May 1936 elections, the new Catholic leader Hubert Pierlot developed strategies specifically designed to capture the vote of younger Catholics, to whom Degrelle's oratory appealed (Conway 1994). The creation of new groups of young Catholics was sponsored and supported, with this precise goal (Gérard 1985). This was not enough to save the Catholic Party from defeat in those elections, when virtually all of the Rexist Party's votes came from the ranks of the Catholic electorate. Degrelle's campaign strategy was primarily one of attacking the traditional parties and the Catholics, mainly by associating them with cases of corruption and bribery which were widespread at that time (Étienne 1968).

After the elections, the main danger for Belgian democracy came not so much from the increasing popular successes of Degrelle, but rather from the presence of a sector of the Catholic Party itself that was in favour of a political alliance with Rex in a 'bloc d'ordre'. Needless to say, this would have helped Rex's chances of coming to power. The Catholic Party was in disarray, and Pierlot's frantic attempts at internal reforms met with unconcealed internal opposition from various sectors of the party. Moreover, the Catholic Party also had to confront the challenge from the VNV in the Flanders where the party had lost around 100,000 votes, many of them to the VNV (Rex had been more successful in Wallonia). The political orientation of the VNV – authoritarian and corporatist, as well as Flemish nationalist – was, in fact, markedly Catholic.[19] This situation gave the Catholic Party the additional problem of devising an appropriate strategy for Flanders.

After the elections of 1936, several proposals to regroup the Flemish Catholics in different coalitions emerged, and were discussed in an innumerable series of private meetings and public appearances by various Catholic personalities (see Gérard 1985). A further problem for the Catholic Party was the political alliance signed in October 1936 by Degrelle and the leader of the VNV, Staf De Clercq, which envisaged a fusion between the Flemish sector of Rex and the VNV. The leadership of the Catholic Party reacted to this difficult situation by changing its internal organization and giving more visibility to its Flemish membership. In October 1936 the party's executive committee, a body endowed with full powers, was divided into two separate wings – the *Parti Social Chrétien* (PCS) and the *Katholike Vlaamse Volkspartji* (KVV)– each separately responsible for the activities of the party in Wallonia or Flanders (Gérard 1985; Mabille 1986).

This change strengthened the position of the Flemish leaders of the Catholic Party. Verbist, the leader of the KVV, started negotiations with the VNV which ended in an agreement of principle between the two parties in December 1936. Although this agreement did not have any real effects, and it met with the opposition of the Christian Labor Union and the bishops (Gérard 1985: 477–478), it partially countered moves towards including Rex and VNV in a right-wing Catholic front. It must be kept in mind that the agreement in question was signed under very unfavorable conditions, especially for the Catholic Party. The party was in crisis after the election defeat, undergoing a process of internal restructuring, torn by centrifugal tendencies in the wake of the political dynamism of Rex, and it was a senior partner in a government coalition whose members were attacking in their propaganda not only Rex but also the VNV.[20]

In the difficult conditions described above, the prospect of the Catholic Party splitting up or disintegrating was real if plans for a broader right-wing alliance had materialized (Gérard 1985). Despite these centrifugal tendencies, the leadership of the party managed to keep a firm route towards a centrist alliance with the Liberals and the Socialists, and to resist the various attempts of the traditionalist wing of the party to move the whole party to the right. This gave the government the political strength to react effectively to Rex's open challenge.

King Leopold III was also important in channeling the political crisis following the 1936 elections towards a democratic solution, in particular by intervening actively to force the three traditional parties to agree to form a government. Coalition formation had always been difficult given the extreme internal fragmentation of the Catholic, Liberal and Socialist parties which dominated the Belgian political scene. Every government coalition had to strike a difficult balance between the internal factions of the three parties, and this normally took a long time to negotiate.[21] After the 1936 elections, several attempts to form a government failed, and the country was left without a government for a month; during which time there were big Communist-led strikes, blocking several industrial sites, and Rex continued to ride the wave of its political success. After the resignation of several *formateurs*, Leopold III intervened directly, summoning the leaders of the internal factions of the three parties (all politically necessary to form a government) and asking them to agree a tripartite coalition. The decisiveness of this intervention is demonstrated by the fact that the new government, led by the Catholic-leaning technocrat Paul Van Zeeland, emerged only two days later (Höjer 1946).

Once formed, the Van Zeeland government decided to react to the continuous challenges from Degrelle and Rex. It banned a Rexist mass demonstration in Brussels, it denied Degrelle access to the state radio to make a propaganda

broadcast, there were arrests of some Rexist journalists and militants, and prosecutions of Rexist members already in the pipeline were hastened along. The government also took up the most overt and symbolically loaded challenge that Rex offered it: a by-election, tactically provoked by Degrelle in April 1937, in which the Rexist leader would stand in person. The majority supporting the government responded by passing an *ad hoc* law forbidding frivolous by-elections in future, and then by putting up Prime Minister in person to stand against the Rexist leader. Van Zeeland, supported by all the traditional parties and even by the Communists – who decided not to contest the seat, easily defeated Degrelle – this marked the beginning of his decline and that of Rex (Étienne 1968).[22]

The inclusive mechanisms of democratic defense

As the Italian and the German cases show, a strategy of inclusion in respect of a totalitarian party might be dangerous, yet successful short-term reactions against political extremism are not confined to political exclusion and legal repression. On the contrary, they are normally accompanied by explicit attempts by the democratic establishment to include *specific sectors* of the extremist challenge. Apart from the attempts by border parties to appeal to voters supporting extremist groups, inclusive strategies can be developed and put into effect by institutional actors too. In fact, the government and the head of state can develop inclusive strategies aimed at integrating rank and file extremists or parts of the extremist elites. Table 4 summarizes the use of these mechanisms in Belgium, Finland and Czechoslovakia.

The use of repressive measures, particularly strong in Finland and Czechoslovakia, has already been analyzed. Defensive strategies labeled 'integration of rank and file' aim at reducing the electoral appeal of the extremist party. This category includes the explicit appeals to public opinion against extremism, resorted to by both the Belgian and the Czechoslovak governments. In the category 'appeals to public opinion' I include the public speeches, meetings, and conferences held by important political figures (the head of state, the prime minister, and democratic leaders) and explicitly aimed at alerting the electorate to the dangers posed by extremists, and at increasing the legitimacy of the system. More specifically, I only refer to those appeals made as part of a conscious strategy to meet the extremist challenge, as was the case in both countries.

In Belgium, the Van Zeeland government decided without hesitation to react against Rex's increasingly aggressive propaganda, with the Prime Minister taking an active role.[23] A programme of public meetings and speeches by the Prime Minister and several ministers and democratic leaders was planned,

Table 4. Mechanisms of democratic defense (Finland, Belgium, First Czechoslovak Republic)

Country	Belgium	Finland	Czechoslovakia
Extremist actor	Rexists (1936–1939)	Lapua Movement/NC (1929–1932)	SdP (1933–1938)
Strategy			
Repression	Medium	Strong	Strong
Integration of rank and file	Appeals to public opinion; sector organizations of the Catholic Party created for electoral appeals	Attempt to create a new organization	Appeals to public opinion; strategic policy concessions to German moderate parties
Integration of sectors of the elite	No	Attempt to create a new organization	(Sterile) contacts with SdP

in which they warned the population, and in particular the Catholic electorate, about the danger posed by Rex. Several defensive actions of the Czechoslovak democratic political elite after 1935–1936 were also intended to regain the support of the electorate who voted for the extremists. In Czechoslovakia, the most active figure in seeking to undermine public support for the extremists was Beneš, who had succeeded Masaryk as President in December 1935. He had been clearly designated Masaryk as his successor, and this gave him particular prestige. In 1936 and 1937 he toured incessantly the German regions of Czechoslovakia. He held conferences where he addressed the problem of national minorities and highlighted the government's willingness to meet any reasonable request for equal treatment for all citizens (see Brügel 1967 and a selection of texts reproduced in Beneš 1937). He instructed several ministries to allocate their spending to the German areas in proportion to their population. The government independently followed the same line, both in allocating public expenditure, and in accepting other requests from the moderate German parties, which needed support to restore their credibility with the Sudeten community after the landslide victory of the SdP. The government and the moderate German parties reached an agreement on further concessions to the German minority which was formalized in February 1937. The agreement in question included guidelines for increasing German representation in the civil service, the German share of welfare and cultural spending, the allocation of public contracts to German firms with German workers, and the official use of the German language (Brügel 1967; Wiskemann 1967).

Ad hoc inclusive strategies can also be aimed at extremist elites and seek to bring at least its more moderate sectors into the democratic process.[24] This can be done by meeting some of the extremists' demands without, however, questioning the fundamentals of the democratic regime. An attempt to integrate both the rank and file and part of the extremist elite was made by the Finnish President Svinhufvud after outlawing the Lapua Movement. The difficult situation following the repression of the Lapua Movement, and his profound personal aversion towards Marxism in any form led Svinhufvud to try to recreate an all-inclusive, new right-wing movement under his control, which would continue the work of the Lapua Movement without endangering public order. Emphasis was to be put, in his opinion, on educational means: 'even though they take more time, they will certainly lead in the end to definite results' (quoted in Rintala 1962: 221). These were the ideals on which the People's Patriotic Movement (IKL) was originally founded. However, this attempt failed. Less than one month after the founding convention of April 1932, Svinhufvud's collaborators found themselves sidetracked and outnumbered, completely lost control of their own creation and left the IKL shortly afterwards.[25]

In Czechoslovakia, the government led by the Agrarian politician Milan Hodža, after seeking an agreement with the moderate Sudeten German parties, also had repeated contacts with Henlein. Although these probably came too late to attract part of the SdP elite – in that phase fully directed by Berlin – towards a more moderate position, fact that they took place shows that the Czechoslovak government, although certainly uncompromising, did not want to shut out the Sudeten German nationalists completely.[26]

Whether successful or not, the presence of inclusive strategies in the toolbox of short-term democratic defense shows that democratic elites clearly saw that repression alone was not sufficient to respond effectively to a dangerous extremist challenge. Repression is necessary, but so is regaining the loyalty towards the democratic system of as many extremists as possible, as this reduces the costs of defending democracy and the risk of authoritarian revolution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, not all strong extremist challenges to democracy in interwar Europe led to democratic breakdown. In Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Finland the political elite managed to react effectively against severe antidemocratic threats by isolating the extremists and using both repressive and inclusive strategies. The high degree of political intolerance against the extremists generally reached in these democracies was in fact accompanied by

parallel attempts to integrate some of them back into the system. The fact that Germany and Italy went in the opposite direction in this respect, as well as the centrifugal propensities of electoral competition in systems with extremist actors (Sartori 1976), highlight both the non-obvious nature and the political importance of the political choices of those defending democracy in Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Finland. If they had acted differently, as they could have done, the democratic systems in those countries would very likely have come much closer to breakdown than they did (on this, see Fearon 1991 and Tetlock & Belkin 1996).

Obviously, the causal path identified in the analysis – involving exclusively internal actors, necessarily presuming open antagonism between a democratic and an extremist front, and the enactment of inclusive mechanisms being only targeted on the rank and file or on a part of the extremist elites – can only partially be generalized beyond the context analyzed here. Other 'difficult democracies', in different historical and geographical contexts, may find different paths to survival than those presented here. Recent literature on consensus democracy and power-sharing stresses rather the integration of 'extraneous' forces (via institutional engineering, or other mechanisms), as well as the diffusion of democratic culture and practices, as best strategies to achieve democratic stability. The involvement of international or supranational actors in the enterprise and the decline of totalitarian ideologies now render these strategies certainly more viable and rewarding than repression in most cases.

Yet, constitutional or statutory provisions that limit anti-democratic and/or secessionist parties or groups can be found, albeit largely aimed at prevention, in many democracies (Tomuschat 1992). Anti-extremist rules can be found in the recent experience of the UK (special legislation on Northern Ireland of 1991), the USA, Canada and France. The Federal Republic of Germany is well known to possess one of the most elaborate and efficient systems for protecting democracy which has been used until very recently against a few extremist right-wing groups and associations (Jaschke 1991; Canu 1996). The problem of banning extremist parties has also been debated in Israel (Gordon 1987). Many new democracies of Eastern Europe have included in their constitutions rules that deny political legitimacy to ideologically extremist or ethnic parties. Such rules can be found in Croatia, Poland, Lithuania, and Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria (Fox & Nolte 1995). Moreover, as shown by some recent political crises in democratizing countries (for example, in Algeria in the early 1990s) and political developments in Europe (the recent entry into government of the Austrian FPÖ, and more generally the rise of the so-called 'new' extreme right wing parties), the decline of totalitarian ideologies has not rendered democracy safe – for a comparative analysis of recent

developments in this respect in five Western European countries, see van Donselaar (1995). In the present political climate in which international context shapes domestic political outcomes, the strategies used by domestic political and institutional actors to react to political extremism remain relevant.

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Notes

1. The reference here is not much to the long tradition of studies on the 'prerequisites' of democracy – for a general review, see Diamond (1992) – although the basic assumptions and findings of this literature are echoed in the analyses mentioned below. More specifically on inter-war Europe, Luebbert (1991) adopts a structure-driven explanation of regime outcomes. A 'sociological bias' is often present in the studies that deal precisely with the topic of institutional protection of democracy in specific countries, such as the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) – see for example Lameyer (1978). Boventer concludes his comparative analysis of democratic protection in FRG, France and the USA with the following statement: 'Democratic self-defense is first of all a matter of competence of the citizen and his political commitment. This liberal (*freiheitlich*) ethos is the best and most effective protection against the 'totalitarian challenge' (Boventer 1985a).
2. A notable exception to this rule is the recent research project on the comparative study of inter-war European democracies led by Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jeremy Mitchell (Berg-Schlosser & Mitchell 1999; see also Berg-Schlosser & De Meur 1994, and Berg-Schlosser 1998 for a summary of the overall findings), which incorporates in a complex analytical framework the impact of both structural and actor-based variables on the regime outcome. The inclusion of 18 countries and many variables in this interesting analysis, however, cannot but leave the more detailed aspects of the strategies of political actors in political crises unexplored. For an actor-based analysis of the political reactions to the socio-economic consequences of the Great Depression in some European democracies, see the analysis by Zimmermann & Saalfeld (1988). More focused on political strategies is instead a more recent piece by Zimmermann (1993), where most of the attention is devoted to the Weimar case.
3. In principle, democracy can be also 'defended' by strategies with long-term goals, such as those aiming at promoting a democratic culture through education, or democratic propaganda etc. These strategies are very important in the present phenomenon of the 'protection and promotion' of democracy in newly democratizing states, but out of the picture of the present analysis (Schmitter & Brouwer 1999).

4. It goes without saying that secessionist and anti-democratic parties constitute two completely different challenges for a democratic system, and should be considered separately. However, both share an interest in bringing the system down, although for different reasons, and might constitute a political constraint for on democratic forces to achieve the necessary coordination for a common defensive strategy (Capoccia 2000).
5. In these cases (with the addition of Italy) there was a struggle between democratic forces in the government and opposition extremist forces, facing democratic rulers with the double danger of suspending democracy from above and giving up the system to an anti-democratic opposition, using democratic rights and guarantees to take over the system. Starting with the whole set of European democracies between the wars, I exclude from the analysis those that have been 'terminated from above', that is, suspended after a *coup* by the government itself, the King or the military. In those cases, which include a large majority of the new democracies that emerged in Eastern Europe after WWI (as well as Portugal and other cases), the struggle between democratic and non-democratic forces assumed a completely different logic. In Spain, the struggle degenerated into a Civil War. The Austrian case, in which the first defensive measures against the Nazi and the Communists were followed by the legal elimination of all political opposition, highlights a further aspect of this problem: the possible instability of militant legislation, leading from some restrictions on some opposition parties to the outright elimination of pluralism (Loewenstein 1935a, b). In none of the cases included in Figure 1 has this happened.
6. Data on France, representing the strength of the Communists and the right-wing 'independents' in the last Parliament of the III Republic, probably overestimates to some extent the strength of the extremist challenge, since not all MP reported as 'independents' could be considered extremists. Precise historical research on the matter is still lacking, and it is impossible to determine exactly the political belonging of all the MP classified in this group (Le Béguec 1992).
7. The recent interesting work by van Donselaar is an exception to this rule (van Donselaar 1995).
8. The inclusion of these norms in the realm of 'militant democracy' is contested, since virtually all constitutional states have them, in some form (Boventer 1985b).
9. This is the basic argument of the well-documented study on the constitutional protection of democracy in the Weimar Republic by Gusy, in which the author carries out a formal analysis of the legal means and possibilities of defending the Republic against the extremists, which were not implemented due to the lack of the political will to do so (Gusy 1991).
10. On the pursuit of this strategy by the Italian liberal leader Giolitti, see De Felice (1966) and Candeloro (1978). On the strategies of the German conservatives and parts of the moderate political forces in this sense, see Bracher (1953, 1974). The various trends and political perspectives on the German political scene in 1930–1933 are well portrayed in Winkler (1992).
11. The Sudeten German nationalists were not the only extremist challenge that the new Czechoslovak Republic had to confront. Apart from the Communists and Fascists, a serious threat for the Republic also came from the Slovak autonomists of the Slovak People's Party (HSL'S). However, for reasons of space as well as of clarity of the analysis, I have preferred to concentrate on the governmental response to the most dangerous extremist challenge. It is however important to keep in mind that other challenges were also present and constituted further constraints on the action of the democratic forces in defense of the regime.

12. This legislation was also implemented against Slovak nationalists, which were growing more extremist in those years: the party newspaper of the HSL'S was suspended, and one of the party's main leader was arrested and convicted for treason (Mikus 1963; Jelínek 1980; Felak 1994).
13. The government was supported by a coalition including the Czechoslovak and German Social Democrats, the Czechoslovak National Socialists (a party of moderate socialist orientation), the Czech People's Party, and the Czechoslovak and German Agrarians. The Socialist-oriented forces supported the ban, while the Agrarians were against it.
14. To overcome a last barrier against it, the SHF was forced to change its name before being admitted into the electoral competition. Since the expression 'Front' was not acceptable in a democracy, it renamed itself as *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (Sudeten German Party – SdP).
15. It must be also kept in mind that the leaders of the SHF, and in particular Konrad Henlein, took extreme care in formally abiding to democratic rhetoric and institutions in public, while developing revolutionary strategies in close contact with Berlin behind the scenes (Brügel 1967).
16. The right wing of the Czechoslovak Agrarians had also dabbled in the politics of the extreme right in the preceding years, even financing Fascist groups, although these tendencies never went so far as to endanger the country's democratic stability.
17. In 1930 the historical Agrarian leader Antonin Švehla was appointed Chairman of the Agrarian Party, but his lead was weak and little more than formal, since Švehla was old and ill. Beran, as of 1929, was the party's General Secretary, supported by a very strong faction. Švehla died in 1933, and for two years the chair was left vacant, until in 1935 Beran himself was appointed in compensation for the appointment of Hodža at the Premiership. See Heumos (1979: 371 ff.). On the figure of Švehla, see Miller (1999).
18. Hitler's repeated successful challenges to the Locarno system of alliances, which was also supposed to indirectly guarantee the security of Czechoslovakia, exposed the country to a greater danger, and suggested caution in dealing with the Sudeten German minority.
19. The problem of minority rights for the Flemish had already found political expression in the 1920s with the *Frontpartij* (Front Party), and had already elicited some legislative reactions to improve the conditions (especially as regards the use of the Flemish language) of the Flemish. New laws were also passed during the 1930s about the use of Flemish in the bureaucracy, the educational system, the justice administration, and the army. However, the implementation of these laws was slow and partial, and far from offering a satisfactory solution to the problem for the Flemish minority (Witte & Craeybeckx 1987).
20. In the elections of 1939 the Catholic Party managed to recover about 4 per cent of the votes, while the VNV, exploiting the collapse of Rex, increased its share of votes by 1.5 per cent in the region. The war then radically changed the situation.
21. The three parties, and in particular the Catholics and the Liberals, had a variety of internal divisions: right vs. left, generational, Flemish vs. Walloon, Chamber vs. Senate members, etc. To this one should add the importance of the various organizations representing the different areas of the Catholic world and referring to the Catholic Party, and the intra-party cliques gathering around certain personalities. Moreover, often the appointed Prime Minister should also pay attention to include in the cabinet a minister from each of the biggest Belgian cities (Höjer 1946).
22. Explicitly using Hitler's electoral landslide as his model, Degrelle was convinced that the best tactic to increase Rex's power and its image as the political force that was going to take over the 'rotten' Belgian parliamentary system was to score growing results in a series of closely scheduled elections. He thus provoked the resignation of one of the

Rexist MPs elected in Brussels, and of all the substitutes, and stood personally in the by-election. A success in this by-election, or at least a good result, higher than the quota of votes obtained ten months earlier by Rex and the VNV together (the two parties supporting Degrelle in the by-election), would have allowed Degrelle to claim that the people supported his fight against the *ancien régime*. Further strategically provoked by-elections would have probably continued the same strategy, until a general election was forced, in which Rex would have struck the final blow to the regime (Étienne 1968).

23. One of the main arguments of the Rexist campaign were the attacks against the corruption of the Belgian traditional politicians (*les pourris* – 'the rotten ones', in the words of Degrelle), revealed by several recent scandals. Van Zeeland was not a traditional politician, being rather a technocrat (before 1935 he was Vice-President of the Central Bank), and had an immaculate image. Thus, he represented in this sense a political resource against Rex for the traditional parties (Höjer 1946). Van Zeeland himself, however, fell victim in October 1937 of a scandal that forced him to resign (Étienne 1968). However, at that point the political battle against Rex was largely won.
24. In the last convulse months of the Weimar Republic, a major effort was made by some parts of the conservative establishment (notably General Kurt von Schleicher) to split the NSDAP by intense contacts with a wing of that party opposing Hitler. The goal was that of integrating that fraction of the NSDAP, led by Gregor Strasser, into the government and isolating Hitler. The political setting of Weimar at the end of 1932 can hardly be defined as 'democratic', but the logic of the strategy is the same: weakening the adversary by attracting the sectors that are ideologically closer and isolating the most radical ones.
25. The leadership of the new movement decided to constitute a political party with totalitarian and Nazi-like orientations. After a phase in which this party managed to exert control on the conservative party National Coalition, the IKL was isolated and did not constitute a serious danger for Finnish democracy (Rintala 1962).
26. The demands of the SdP leader Konrad Henlein, if accepted, would have meant the end of a unitary Czechoslovak State. The requests of the SdP were articulated in eight points. Without going into detail, it will be enough to mention that one of these was the creation of a 'national census' according to which each individual would have belonged to one ethnic community and be governed in full by an ethnically-based government (Lipscher 1979).

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