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# Democratic Spells in Interwar Europe – the Borderline Cases Revisited

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## Abstract

Bei der Mehrheit der europäischen Fälle stimmen die vorhandenen Datensätze in Bezug auf die Abgrenzung demokratischer und nicht-demokratischer Perioden europäischer Länder überein. Es gibt aber auch einige „Grenzfälle“, konkret Bulgarien, Finnland, Italien, Litauen, Portugal, Rumänien, Spanien und Jugoslawien, bei denen es erhebliche Unstimmigkeiten bezüglich der Antwort auf die Frage gibt, ob und in welchen Perioden sie in der Zwischenkriegszeit demokratisch waren. Wir zeigen, dass manche der Unstimmigkeiten unter Bezugnahme auf historische Untersuchungen gelöst werden können. In anderen Fällen hingegen spiegeln die Differenzen wider, dass es anhand der vorhandenen Informationen kaum möglich ist festzustellen, ob die Qualität der Wahlen oder die Regierungsernennung in diesen Ländern in der Zwischenkriegszeit den Anforderungen einer minimalistischen Demokratiedefinition entsprach.

## I. Introduction

Since the advent of modern democracy there has only been one large-scale democratic rollback in the overall tally of democracies.<sup>1</sup> This rollback took place in a hugely interesting context, that of interwar Europe. Interwar Europe is characterized by a fascinating variation in a series of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors, all wrapped up in a particular region with a limited number

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1 See Jørgen Møller/Svend-Erik Skaaning, *Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective. Conceptions, Conjunctures, Causes, and Consequences*, London 2013, Chapter 5.

of countries.<sup>2</sup> That the issue of democratic breakdown and survival in interwar Europe has been subjected to a number of comparative studies is therefore unsurprising.<sup>3</sup>

However, these comparative studies have been burdened by a particular problem: the relatively poor quality of cross-national data on regime change. The only four extant democracy measures covering the interwar period<sup>4</sup> are out of sync with each other and with respect to a number of countries they also fit poorly with the descriptions of regime change we find in more qualitative overviews of democratic breakdowns.<sup>5</sup> This is somewhat surprising considering that most of these measures are based on a crisp distinction between democratic breakdown and survival. One would imagine that the relatively modest ambitions of these datasets make for high validity and reliability.

The datasets do indeed display consensus with respect to the status of the countries that entered the interwar period with a substantial pre-World War I democratic legacy. These were the “old” democracies of Northwestern Europe and they were consistently democratic up until the outbreak of World War II. However, as Michael Mann<sup>6</sup> points out, in this period, there were “two Europes”. The second Europe was made up of the new democracies in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe. And with respect to this cluster of countries, we find some stark incongruities both among the extant datasets and when comparing these to other attempts to provide general accounts of interwar regime change. As we

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2 Cf. Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Introduction. In: Dirk Berg-Schlosser/Jeremy Mitchell (eds.), *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1919–39. Comparative Analyses*, Hampshire 2003, pp. 1–39.

3 See Berg-Schlosser/Mitchell (eds.), *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1919–39. Comparative Analyses*; Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times. The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*, Princeton 2003; Giovanni Capocchia, *Defending Democracy. Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe*, Baltimore 2005; Christoph Gusy, *Auf dem Weg zu einer vergleichenden Verfassungsgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit – Ein Tagungsbericht*. In: Id. (ed.), *Demokratie in der Krise. Europa in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Baden-Baden 2008, pp. 417–439; Lauri Karvonen, *Fragmentation and Consensus: Political Organization and the Interwar Crisis in Europe*, Boulder 1993; Gregory M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy. Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, Oxford 1991; Richard Overy, *The Inter-War Crisis 1919–1939*, New York 1994; Dietrich Rueschemeyer/Evelyn H. Stephens/John Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Chicago 1992.

4 See Charles Boix/Michael K. Miller/Sebastian Rosato, *A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes, 1800–2007*. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 46 (2012), pp. 1523–1554; Michael Bernard/Timothy Nordstrom/Christopher Reenock, *Economic Performance, Institutional Intermediation, and Democratic Survival*. In: *Journal of Politics*, 63 (2001) 3, pp. 775–803; Ted Robert Gurr/Keith Jagers/Monty Marshall, *The Polity IV Project. Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2012 – Dataset Users’ Manual*, 2013 (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscri/p4manualv2012.pdf>); Tatu Vanhanen, *Democratization. A Comparative Analysis of 170 Countries*, London 2003.

5 See, e.g. Bermeo, *Ordinary People*; Capocchia, *Defending Democracy*.

6 Cf. Michael Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge 2004, Chapter 2.

show below, no less than eight European countries are scored in strikingly different ways and therefore make up what we term borderline cases of democracy in the interwar period.

In this article, we revisit these cases in order to set the record straight. Our reassessment is based on a thorough review and discussion of the qualitative, country-specific accounts of historians and social scientists working on interwar Europe. Instead of merely scratching the surface – as many coders of cross-national datasets have done due to the large number of cases that had to be coded – we establish a more valid scoring of these borderline cases based on a deeper acquaintance with the relevant historiography. Our vantage point is a minimalist, Schumpeterian definition where democracy is solely equated with competition among leadership groups that vie for a relatively broad electorate's approval during recurring elections.<sup>7</sup> Thus, our scoring is not premised on fully free and fair elections, high respect for the political liberties of freedom of speech and association, and equal and universal suffrage.<sup>8</sup> All that is required to pass the bar is genuine competition over political power based on elections which are regularly repeated.<sup>9</sup> This can be translated into two more particular requirements:

- With respect to elections, what matters is whether violations reach a level where competition – the potential possibility of incumbents losing the elections to opposition parties and the powers-that-be accepting the results – is absent, i.e., whether what Adam Przeworski et al. term *ex post* uncertainty and *ex ante* irreversibility are a reality or not.<sup>10</sup>
- With respect to the designation of government, what matters is whether the executive power is either directly responsible to the electorate or indirectly responsible via approval in parliament.

There are two virtues of using such a minimalist definition. First, and theoretically, it arguably captures the most important distinction between different political regimes, to wit, the distinction between regimes where power is accessed via genuine competition based on recurring elections with contending parties and regimes where no such genuine competition exists, whether or not there are recurring elections and contending parties. A number of scholars have identified this as the crucial distinction both with respect to causes and consequences of democracy.<sup>11</sup> Second, and empirically, all else equal the difficulty of categorizing an empirical

7 See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London 1974 (1942).

8 Cf. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven 1989.

9 See Michael E. Alvarez/José A. Cheibub/Fernando Limongi/Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and Development. Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World*, New York 2000, pp. 16–18; Jørgen Møller/Svend-Erik Skaaning, *Regime Types and Democratic Sequencing*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 24 (2013) 1, pp. 142–155.

10 Cf. Alvarez/Cheibub/Limongi/Przeworski, *Democracy and Development*, p. 16.

11 See, e.g., Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism*; Milan Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, New York 2012; Alvarez/Cheibub/Limongi/Przeworski, *Democracy and Development*; Boix/Miller/Rosato, *A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes*.

case correctly increases as the definition is augmented with additional attributes. The more minimalist the definition, the lesser the risk that we miscode particular cases and thereby establish erroneous similarities or differences across cases.<sup>12</sup>

Upon inspection, it turns out that some of the borderline cases are difficult to categorize even based on such a minimalist definition. To reflect that these cases are borderline cases in an even more literal sense, we propose both a preferred coding and an alternative coding grounded in our review of the secondary sources. However, other cases are easier to make sense of and our article therefore serves to establish with greater confidence which countries were democratic in interwar Europe and, if so, when they obtained this status. Furthermore, we identify a number of shorter spells of democracy, sometimes interspersed with undemocratic spells, which have largely been ignored by the coders of extant datasets.

## II. Extant Datasets Compared

We have identified four indices and a general overview that attempt to score interwar patterns of regime change based on categorical differences between democratic survival and breakdown. The first is Michael Bernhard et al.'s dataset.<sup>13</sup> Bernhard et al.'s scoring is premised on Robert A. Dahl's concepts of competitiveness and inclusiveness.<sup>14</sup> It includes four criteria: that the political regime is characterized by competitive elections without vote fraud affecting the general outcome; the absence of extensive or extreme violence that inhibits voters from expressing themselves; that there is no banning of political parties representing a substantial portion of the electorate; that suffrage is extended to at least 50 percent of adult citizens.

The second measure is the recently introduced Complete Data Set of Political Regimes constructed by Carles Boix et al.<sup>15</sup> It identifies years when the executive is directly or indirectly elected in popular elections and is directly responsible to voters or to an elected legislature; when the legislature (or the executive if elected directly) is chosen in free and fair elections; and when a majority of adult men have the right to vote.

The third is the well-known Polity IV dataset.<sup>16</sup> This measure builds on indicators on executive recruitment, political competition, and executive constraints

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12 Cf. Giovanni Sartori, *Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics*. In: *American Political Science Review*, 64 (1970), pp. 1033–1053; Jørgen Møller, *Composite and Loose Concepts, Historical Analogies, and the Logic of Control in Comparative Historical Analysis*, unpublished manuscript (2014).

13 Cf. Bernhard/Nordstrom/Reenock, *Economic Performance*.

14 Cf. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven 1971.

15 Cf. Boix/Miller/Rosato, *A Complete Data Set*.

16 Cf. Gurr/Jagers/Marshall, *The Polity IV Project*.

that reflect the presence of institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies and leaders, on the one hand, and the existence of institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive, on the other. It follows from these requirements that the extent of suffrage only enters the Polity IV codings to a minor extent. Countries are scored on a 21-point polity scale, ranging from -10 to 10. We use the standard procedure, suggested by the people behind the Polity measure, to distinguish between democracies and non-democracies, i.e., a polity scoring at least 6 on the polity scale is considered democratic.

The fourth measure is Tatu Vanhanen's dataset on democracies.<sup>17</sup> His measure is a fine-grained scale, constructed by multiplying the ratio of opposition seats in parliament with the level of electoral participation. We use Vanhanen's own threshold to make a distinction between democracies and autocracies. To qualify as democratic, a case needs to score at least 30 percent on the Competition indicator, at least 10 percent on the Participation indicator, and at least 5 on the Index of Democracy.

We supplement these datasets with a general overview constructed by Nancy Bermeo.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Bermeo does not link her coding to an explicit definition of democracy or particular coding criteria so it is difficult to establish whether disagreements with her overview are due to differences in the definitions of democracy.

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17 Cf. Vanhanen, *Democratization*.

18 Cf. Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, p. 23; cf. Berg-Schlosser/Mitchell, *Authoritarianism and Democracy*. Bermeo's overview is almost identical to those provided in other comparative overviews of democratic breakdowns in the interwar years, e.g. those of Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*; Gusy, *Auf dem Weg*; Stephen Lee, *The European Dictatorships 1918-1945*, London 1994; and Overy, *The Inter-War Crisis*.

Table 1: European countries identified as democracies by different datasets, 1918–1939

Country	Bernhard et al.	Boix et al.	Polity IV	Vanhane	Bermeo
Austria	1919–1933	1920–1933	1920–1933	1919–1934	1919–1933
Belgium	1920–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Bulgaria	1919–1920				1919–1923
Czechoslovakia	1920–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	1920–1939	–1938
Denmark	1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Estonia	1919–1934	1919–1934	1919–1933	1919–1934	1919–1934
Finland	1919–1939	1918–1939	1918–1930	1918–1939	–1939
France		1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Germany	1919–1933	1919–1933	1919–1933	1919–1934	1919–1933
Greece	1926–1936	1926–1936	1926–1936	1924–1936	1926–1936
Ireland	1922–1939	1922–1939	1921–1939	1922–1939	–1939
Italy		1919–1922		1919–1925	1919–1922
Latvia	1922–1934	1920–1934	1920–1934	1920–1934	1920–1934

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Lithuania	1920–1926	1920–1926	1920–1926	1920–1926
Netherlands	1919–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Norway	1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Poland	1919–1926	1918–1926	1919–1926	1919–1926
Portugal		1918–1926		1919–1926
Romania				1919–1938
Spain	1931–1936	1918–1923, 1931–1939	1931–1939	1931–1936
Sweden	1919–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Switzerland		1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
United Kingdom	1918–1939	1918–1939	1918–1939	–1939
Yugoslavia		1921–1929	1920–1929	1920–1929

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Table 1 presents a general overview of the years between 1918 and 1939 for which European countries figure as democracies according to these sources. As already mentioned, there is a lot of agreement among the datasets. Virtually all the “old” democracies of Northwestern Europe produce little in the way of incongruities. Only France and Switzerland stick out in the data provided by Bernhard et al.<sup>19</sup> and this is solely because they did not introduce universal (female) suffrage until after World War II. Moreover, as illustrated in Table 1, a number of “new” democracies, such as Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Poland, and Ireland, are scored in consistent ways across the five accounts. The small differences we find between the codings of these cases are mainly due to the fact that some datasets score countries based on the status at the beginning of a year whereas others choose the ending of a year to categorize. The year of a democratic transition or a democratic breakdown therefore sometimes differs. For instance, in the Polish case some datasets code 1918 as the first democratic year whereas others opt for 1919. Similarly, in the Czechoslovak case some datasets identify 1938 as the year of breakdown with others opting for 1939.

However, in more than a handful of cases, there is no consensus about whether democratic breakdowns occurred at all. Most conspicuous are the salient disagreements with respect to the scoring of six countries: Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Bermeo considers all of these six countries democratic at some point in the interwar period.<sup>20</sup> The other accounts only assign a democratic status to some of these cases and, for several of the cases, the years tallied as democratic differ. On top of this, Spain and Finland also stand out because the Polity IV scores indicate that they experienced democratic breakdowns in 1923 and 1930, respectively, while the other accounts only identify a democratic collapse in Spain at the time of the civil war (1936–1939) and score the Finnish case as a democratic survivor throughout the period in question.

Several of the inconsistencies that emerge in Table 1 are due to the fact that the distinctions are based on different conceptions of democracy. As mentioned above, some of the overviews are based on different suffrage criteria. Even disregarding the “old” democracies of France and Switzerland with no female suffrage, seven of the controversial cases highlighted were not characterized by universal adult suffrage in the interwar period. In fact, only one of the disputed cases, Finland, had introduced universal suffrage before the end of World War I.<sup>21</sup> That said, different suffrage criteria are obviously not the sole reason for the disagreements as indicated by the fact that Polity IV, although considering Spain as democratic from 1918 to 1923, is one of the most restrictive datasets even

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19 Cf. Bernhard/Nordstrom/Reenock, *Economic Performance*.

20 Cf. Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*.

21 Indeed, it was the first European case to do so, in 1906, i.e., in a period when the parliamentary principle was not in operation due to tsarist control of the appointment of government in Finland.

though it does not take the extension of suffrage into account. Moreover, Bernhard et al.<sup>22</sup> – the most restrictive in terms of assigning democratic status to the interwar European cases – consider Bulgaria 1919–1920 as democratic, which the other indices do not. One reason for these disagreements might be that the basic understanding of competitiveness differs across the datasets. Another possibility is that some of the cases have been miscoded in some of the datasets.

The suspicion about miscoding is supported by the relatively long democratic spells that we find in all columns of Table 1. Apart from the Italian democratic breakdown in 1922, there is only one instance of a short post-World War I democratic spell, namely Bernhard et al.’s aforementioned scoring of Bulgaria 1919–1920 as democratic. This runs counter to an established point in the historiography of especially East-Central Europe between the wars, namely that a virtually ubiquitous, genuine democratic competition in the immediate aftermath of World War I was repeatedly suffocated when the popularly elected governments began to threaten elite interests.<sup>23</sup> If correct, this would indicate that many datasets have been too quick to either deem most of the 1920s a democratic spell or as constantly undemocratic, instead of appreciating the possibility of shorter democratic spells discontinued or interspersed by undemocratic spells. We return to this observation below.

In what follows, we revisit the eight borderline cases to create more valid categorizations for the interwar period. In most cases, we start with a narrative of the key political developments from 1918 up until World War II, followed by a discussion about the status of the political regimes. We concentrate on the periods of which there is debate about the democratic status of each country.

### III. Bulgaria

Competitive elections were held in Bulgaria in the immediate aftermath of World War I. The outcome was a clear defeat for the “bourgeois” parties that had dominated pre-war Bulgarian political life and a corresponding victory for the leftwing anti-war parties. Alexander Stamboliski’s Agrarian Union won 85 of 236 mandates, followed by the Communists with 47 seats, and the Socialists with 38 seats.

Stamboliski formed a coalition government, but already in 1920 called for new elections based on compulsory voting (to bring out the peasant vote). The Agrarians increased their vote share dramatically – to 38 percent – but still fell short of a majority. Stamboliski proceeded by annulling the election of 13 opposition

22 Cf. Bernhard/Nordstrom/Reenock, *Economic Performance*.

23 See Alan Palmer, *The Lands Between: A History of Eastern Europe, 1815–1968*, London 1970; Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the World Wars*, Seattle 1974.

mandates on technical grounds, turning the Agrarian share into a slim majority of 110 versus 106. New elections were called for again in April 1923 and this time the Agrarians won a large majority (212 out of 245 seats in the legislature). However, this result – in conjunction with Stamboliski's increasingly aggressive anti-elite policies – drove his enemies, including the Military League of army officers, IMRO (a Macedonian terrorist organization), and the National Alliance (consisting of the old, hitherto dominant parties) to carry out a coup d'état on June 9, with the tacit blessing of Tsar Boris. A multi-party electoral authoritarian regime followed with elections that were not genuinely competitive, held in November 1923 and again in 1927.<sup>24</sup> However, new elections in 1931 were won by a successor party to the Agrarians. A coalition government – accepted by Tsar Boris – ensued, but was stopped short by a second military coup in May 1934. In 1935, Tsar Boris seized power himself. After this, there were to be no more democratic experiments in interwar Bulgaria.

To what extent do we find democracy, premised in our minimalist definition, in the period reviewed here? The big difference to neighboring Romania (described below) is that the monarch did not play a very active role in politics until 1934.<sup>25</sup> The operation of the parliamentary principle is therefore less shrouded in ambiguity and the main problem is to establish whether elections were competitive and their outcome determined who would govern.

There is no evidence in the sources we have surveyed that the 1919 elections were systematically violated by the state apparatus. To the contrary, the old regime parties that before the war had been wont to rely on substantial election manipulation were routed. A compelling piece of evidence here is that the Broad Socialists, controlling the Interior Ministry, and as a consequence 52 out of 84 police districts, only came in third in the election. Before the war, holding sway of this position would surely have been capitalized to secure a better outcome.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as a consequence of the electoral outcome, Stamboliski assembled a coalition government with majority backing in parliament.<sup>27</sup>

With respect to the 1920 election, matters are more complicated. The Agrarians used a paramilitary force, the so-called Orange Guard, to first break a national strike organized by the Communists and then to harass opponents during

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24 Cf. Tatiana Kostadinova, *Bulgaria 1879–1946. The Challenge of Choice*, Boulder 1995, pp. 56–64; Nikolaj Poppetrov, *Flucht aus der Demokratie: Autoritarismus und autoritäres Regime in Bulgarien 1919–1944*. In: Erwin Oberländer (ed.), *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, Paderborn 2001, pp. 379–402, here pp. 385–388.

25 Cf. Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804–1999*, London 2001, pp. 438 f.

26 Cf. Kostadinova, *Bulgaria 1879–1946*, p. 44.

27 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 334; Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 130 f.

the elections.<sup>28</sup> Gaining more than 38 percent of the popular vote, the Agrarians handily won the election. But they did not achieve an absolute majority. This in itself indicates minimalist competition. However, Stamboliski used his governmental power in several illegitimate ways to first secure and then bolster his victory. To ensure 'reliable' local authorities, scores of oppositional municipal councils were disbanded before the elections, and to intimidate voters Stamboliski's government used coercive measures such as the arrest of opposition activists in municipalities controlled by the Agrarians.<sup>29</sup> Next, as mentioned above, Stamboliski subsequently turned his plurality into a majority by having thirteen opposition mandates, including nine communists, three Democrats, and one Progressive Liberal, declared invalid. He did so based on a very selective reading of the election laws, a reading that was not without precedence (it had been employed before the war), but which was based on clauses that had usually not been enforced – and with the measures only targeting opposition members.<sup>30</sup> According to Richard J. Crampton, "[t]his, plus the fact that the agrarians had not been averse to the use of pressure during the elections, showed that however much Stamboliski might rail against the iniquities of the old system he was not averse to borrowing some of its more dubious methods".<sup>31</sup>

We consider these problems as *de facto* violations of the principles of uncertainty and irreversibly of elected mandates, therefore rendering Bulgaria undemocratic after the 1920 election. The final set of elections under Stamboliski – in April 1923 – clearly does not pass our uncertainty criterion. This time, there is evidence of even more systematic electoral manipulation. Stamboliski jailed the leading liberal and conservative politicians before the campaign, and the Orange Guard systematically harassed all opposition parties. These violations were effective as the Agrarians secured a landslide victory of 212 mandates against 31 to the opposition, albeit only on the basis of 53 percent of the popular vote.<sup>32</sup>

Stamboliski's electoral authoritarian regime was then cut short by the coup on June 9, 1923. However, we find a second potential democratic episode in the early 1930s. Here, an undemocratic government under Lyapchev had to call an election after having lost support in parliament. The new elections took place before a new government was appointed, making it more difficult for a particular

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28 Cf. Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, pp. 130 f.; Frederick B. Chary, *A History of Bulgaria*, Santa Barbara 2011, p. 59.

29 Cf. Todor Galunov, *The 1920 Parliamentary Elections in Bulgaria and Their Violation*. In: *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3–4 (2009), pp. 115–124.

30 Cf. Galunov, *The 1920 Parliamentary Elections*, pp. 130–136; John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power. Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1923*, Princeton 1997, p. 224; Chary, *A History of Bulgaria*, p. 59; Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, pp. 130 f.; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 335.

31 Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, Oxford 2007, p. 224.

32 Cf. Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, pp. 130 f.; Chary, *A History of Bulgaria*, p. 65; Crampton, *Bulgaria*, pp. 232 f.; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 340.

party to “arrange” the elections. The sources we have perused agree that the election of 1931 was open<sup>33</sup> and “inaugurated the only peaceful and constitutional governmental transition that Bulgaria was to experience in the interwar period”.<sup>34</sup> Tsar Boris accepted the outcome and a coalition government under the Democratic leader Malinov formed a cabinet on June 29, 1931. This democratic spell was terminated by the second coup d’état on May 19 in 1934. Accordingly, we consider 1919–20 and 1931–1934 as democratic periods, while 1920–1923 (until the April elections, not the June coup d’état) are fairly close to crossing our threshold.

#### IV. Romania

Universal suffrage for men was introduced in the first Romanian national election after the war, which was held on November 8, 1919. The most influential of the old Romanian parties, the Liberals under Brătianu, conducted the election but lost the vote. Based on the electoral results, a coalition government headed by the Transylvanian Nationalist Vaida-Voevod and incorporating the Peasant Party of the Old Kingdom was formed. After a mere four months, King Ferdinand ousted this government over the issue of land reform. Ferdinand first installed a caretaker government under General Averescu, which conducted – and handily won – the election of May 1920. In December 1921, Averescu fell out with the king and was dismissed. New elections were conducted by the Liberal Party in March 1922, the result of which was a landslide victory for Brătianu.

The Liberals proceeded to implement a new constitution in 1923 in which the Crown retained a number of important prerogatives, including the right to dissolve parliament and to dismiss cabinets at will. This was followed up by an electoral “bonus” law on March 28, 1926 which ensured that any party receiving more than 40 percent of the votes would gain a clear majority. The Liberals dominated Romanian politics – at times heading government, at other times hiding behind frontmen such as General Averescu – until the end of 1928. But on November 10, 1928, the regency (King Ferdinand had died in July 1927) dismissed Brătianu and appointed a National-Peasant government under Iuliu Maniu. New elections took place on December 12, 1928, with Maniu as the clear victor. During his spell in government, Maniu accepted the return of Prince Carol who became king in June 1930. Later in 1930, Maniu and Carol fell out, Maniu was dismissed, and after a short period with another prime minister from the peasant party, Carol proceeded to appoint a new government under the his-

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33 Cf. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, p. 241; Nissan Oren, *Bulgarian Communism. The Road to Power*, New York 1971, p. 8.

34 Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 347; see also Kostadinova, *Bulgaria 1879–1946*, p. 65; Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered. Agrarianism and Communism in Bulgaria*, Baltimore 1973, p. 13.

torian Iorga. This caretaker government conducted – and won – new elections on June 1, 1931. After this point in time, Carol was the dominating force in Romanian politics and all subsequent elections were clearly arranged to suit the wishes of the monarch.

Was this democracy according to our minimalist standards? If we look at the interwar period as a whole, the answer is clearly no. The evidence we have processed agrees that most interwar Romanian elections were arranged. Having dismissed a particular government, the king or regency would normally designate a new government which conducted elections. This gave the caretaker government an enormous advantage, and the usual pattern was that it won landslide victories. The result of some of these elections is almost a caricature: General Averescu swept the elections of March 15, 1920 with a brand new People's party; in the March 1922 elections, the Liberal caretaker government increased their tally of seats from 17 to 260, while Averescu's tally fell from 209 to 11; in the elections of May 1926, Averescu, again conducting the elections, won 292 mandates whereas the Liberals received 16, a pattern which was turned upside down at the election of 1927 where the now-governing Liberals won 318 seats with Averescu's party receiving none.<sup>35</sup> On top of this, both before and after the implementation of the 1923 constitution, the king had the prerogative and actual ability to dismiss governments at will. So, the general pattern is one of systematical electoral fraud in the absence of parliamentarism.<sup>36</sup>

However, there is a danger that this general pattern may disguise particular exceptions: short-lived spells of minimalist democracy. Two such episodes are repeatedly singled out in the country-specific literature: the 1919 election and the subsequent Vaida-Voevod cabinet and the 1928 elections and the subsequent Maniu cabinet.

Even though the hitherto dominant Liberals seemingly planned to steal the 1919 elections, they were unable to follow through on this design because the administration in Bucharest did not have sufficient infrastructure to control newly incorporated Transylvania (the electoral stronghold of Vaida-Voevod's Romanian National Party).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, “[t]he king was not prepared to risk an open clash with the western powers, and he thus refused to support the Liberals in the

35 See Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp. 297–299.

36 Cf. Palmer, *The Lands Between*, pp. 197–200; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp. 296–305; Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Twentieth Century Rumania*, New York 1970, pp. 35–47; Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Romania: Crisis without Compromise*. In: Dirk Berg-Schlosser/Jeremy Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–1939. Systematic Case Studies*, Basingstoke 2000, pp. 381–395, here pp. 390–393; Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, Oxford 1994, pp. 377–414; Mattei Dogan, *Romania, 1919–1938*. In: Ergun Özbudun/Myron Weiner (eds.), *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*, Durham 1987, pp. 369–389; Klaus P. Beer, *Zur Entwicklung des Parteien- und Parlamentssystemes in Rumänien 1928–1933*, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, pp. 175–178.

37 Cf. Hitchins, *Romania 1866–1947*, p. 406.

elections of autumn 1919, which were thus subject to little official interference”.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the elections were – against the design of the ‘incumbents’ – characterized by genuine competition as “the government’s administrative apparatus had failed to deliver an absolute majority to the party running the elections”.<sup>39</sup>

The elections of December 12, 1928 are also repeatedly singled out as “genuinely free”.<sup>40</sup> Whether this is correct is difficult to ascertain with confidence. We lack the suggestive evidence of 1919 – that the government which had a royal blessing and conducted the elections lost. On the contrary, the regency entrusted Maniu with holding new elections, which he won by a landslide, taking 78 percent of the popular vote and a consequent 316 seats.<sup>41</sup> This result came a mere year after Brătianu had attempted to close a deal with Maniu, which would give the Liberals 55 percent of the vote and Maniu’s National-Peasants 45 percent of the vote. Had we attempted to assign democratic status to the Romanian case based on objective indicators such as electoral outcomes, the 1928 elections would clearly conform to the prevailing undemocratic pattern. Meanwhile, the regency retained the undemocratic right to dismiss both the cabinet and the parliament at will, and it is therefore problematical that we lack the “least likely” logic of 1919 when the king backed the losing side in an election, but nonetheless appointed a government consisting of the winning side. Had one chosen to err on the side of caution, the 1928–1930 episode could have been coded as undemocratic.

However, the case for the 1928 elections being competitive rests on a strong agreement in the literature we have processed that they were in fact free. To quote Keith Hitchins at some length:

“The elections of December 1928 were the most democratic in Rumanian history, and for the first time the decision of the monarch (the regency) and the choice of the electorate coincided. To be sure, Maniu took the usual pre-election measures. He appointed new prefects in the judete from among the leaders of his party’s local organizations and replaced many communal councils with interim bodies composed of National Peasant supporters. But at the same time, on 19 November, he abolished censorship on all publications and limited the interference of administrative personnel and the police in the voting. The National Peasants were swept into power by an enthusiastic electorate convinced that a new era had begun in the history of their country and that the rights and liberties long promised would finally become a reality.”<sup>42</sup>

38 Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictators. The History of Eastern Europe since 1918*, London 1975, p. 82.

39 Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, p. 406; Palmer, *The Lands Between*, pp. 174, 197; Hans-Christian Maner, *Romania’s Parliament in the Interwar Period*. In: Id./Sorin Radu (eds.), *Parliamentarism and Political Structures in East-Central and Southeastern Europe in the Interwar Period*, Sibiu 2012, pp. 137–160, here 144.

40 See Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 301; Palmer, *The Lands Between*, p. 200; Fischer-Galati, *Twentieth Century Rumania*, p. 41; Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, p. 414; Polonsky, *The Little Dictators*, p. 84.

41 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 301; Fischer-Galati, *Twentieth Century Rumania*, p. 41; Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, p. 414.

42 *Ibid.*

Against this background, we opt for coding both the 1919–1920 and the 1928–1930 spells as democratic. But hesitations about the 1928 elections can be marshalled in favor of a more restrictive perspective in which only the 1919–1920 episode would be coded as democratic.

## V. Yugoslavia

In the first two years after the creation of the new Yugoslav state, the Serbian core was fully in charge of government. The only lip-service paid to democracy was the creation of a Provisional National Assembly (March 1919 till November 1920), which was unrepresentative. For instance, it did not include the strong Croatian Peasant Party. Elections to a Constituent Assembly were held on November 28, 1920. This assembly proceeded to create the so-called Vidovdan Constitution of June 28, 1921, which was to be the formal-institutional framework for the political life of Yugoslavia up until the royal coup d'état in 1929.

The Constituent Assembly doubled as the first elected parliament. Under the Vidovdan constitution, further elections were held in 1923, 1925 and 1927. The consequent governments were dominated by the two major Serbian parties, the Serbian Radicals and the Serbian Democrats (later split into two). The overshadowing personality was the Radical leader Pašić. But King Alexander also repeatedly weighted in, both with respect to government formation and with respect to policy. Meanwhile, the Slovene and Croatian districts consistently voted for their own parties (the Slovenian People's Party and the Croatian Peasant Party, respectively), the former dominated by the Catholic minister Korošec, the latter by the peasant leader Radić, and the Serbian areas in the old Habsburg domains never came round to fully support the Radicals.

A series of governments were appointed in the following years. But it is telling that only one government was headed by a non-Serb, namely the short-lived coalition government under the above-mentioned Korošec in 1928. The Serbian dominance was to some extent facilitated by Radić's refusal to enter regular parliamentary competition, including prolonged episodes when representatives of the Croatian Peasant Party simply boycotted parliament (including the Constituent Assembly). The parliamentary decade was cut short by Alexander's suspension of the Vidovdan Constitution and the dissolution of parliament and ban on several trade unions and political parties on January 6, 1929.

Parliamentary competition, shifting governments, royal meddling, and regular boycotts of parliaments by opposition parties: Was this democracy according to our minimalist formula? We have already seen that the dominant datasets disagree. Likewise, in the literature we have reviewed we find some strikingly different views on this issue. At one end of the spectrum, Alan Palmer cheerily declares that the Vidovdan Constitution was a "fundamentally democratic

instrument of government, with a single-chamber parliament elected by manhood suffrage and with the principle of ministerial responsibility firmly established. Moreover, Prince-Regent Alexander (who only succeeded to the throne on King Peter's death in August 1921) honestly desired to act as a constitutional monarch serving as trustee for all his peoples."<sup>43</sup>

Less sweepingly, Joseph Rothschild describes most of the period from the election of the Constituent Assembly in 1920 until the coup of 1929 as one characterized by genuine competition for power based on relatively free elections and also characterizes the Vidovdan Constitution as democratic.<sup>44</sup> Others have been less sanguine about the interwar Yugoslavian polity. Laslo Sekelj and Mark Biondich have virtually the opposite description of Palmer, depicting the Vidovdan Constitution as relatively undemocratic due to royal prerogatives and describing King Alexander as an autocrat-in-waiting.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, different accounts testify to irregularities during some or all the elections.<sup>46</sup>

Can we act as an umpire between these starkly different readings of the period? There is no doubt that the Yugoslavian parliamentary system would not survive any threshold based on high integrity of elections and a completely neutral constitutional monarch. All elections were characterized by irregularities, especially in the Southern parts of the country, and these irregularities seem to have increased from election to election. On top of this, the Communist Party, which had done well in the 1920 elections, was outlawed on August 2, 1921. Finally, as already mentioned, King Alexander played an active part in political life throughout the period, but especially after the election of 1925 and the subsequent death (in December 1926) of the political figure who had dominated Serbian politics for more than a generation, namely, the Radical leader Pašić, who "had been the one politician with sufficient authority to block a royal or military dictatorship".<sup>47</sup>

However, we can use the "least likely" logic employed in the Bulgarian and Romanian cases to say a bit more about the nature of electoral competition in the surveyed period. The irregularities of the 1920 election notwithstanding, the results bear testimony to the existence of genuine competition. First, and most generally, no political camp received anything in the way of a working majority, the Croatian and Slovene parties swept the Northern district in spite of their

43 Palmer, *The Lands Between*, p. 190.

44 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp. 213–235; see also Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System*, Stanford 1983, Chapters 2–3.

45 Cf. Laslo Sekelj, *Diktatur und die jugoslawische Gemeinschaft – von König Alexander bis Tito*. In: Erwin Oberländer (ed.), *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, Paderborn 2001, pp. 507 f.; Mark Biondich, *The Historical Legacy: The Evolution of Interwar Yugoslav Politics, 1918–1941*. In: Leonard Cohen/Jasna Dragovic-Soso (eds.), *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, West Lafayette 2008, pp. 55 f.

46 Cf. John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice There Was a Country*, Cambridge 1996, p. 136; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 124.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

opposition to the old Serbian regime in Belgrade, and the Communist party also did well, receiving 12.4 percent of the vote. Second, and more particularly, Pašić's Radical party, which had dominated the Provisional National Assembly and the interim government, did worse than its main Serbian competitor, the Serbian Democrats (receiving 17.7 percent of the popular vote against 19.9 for the Democrats). This testifies to the nonuse or the inability of the state apparatus to seriously twist electoral outcomes, at least outside of Montenegro and Macedonia, probably due to the ethnic and religious cleavages which tended to create regional bastions for different parties. The Radicals did better in the subsequent elections, but only by coalescing with a splinter party of the Democrats (the so-called Independent Democrats) in the 1925 elections did they achieve an actual majority in parliament, based on 43.4 percent of the popular vote. Meanwhile, the Croatian Peasant Party and the Slovene People's Party held on to their ethnic bastions in the North. In fact, both parties – though vehemently in opposition to the Serbian core – increased their support in both 1923 and 1925.<sup>48</sup>

Regarding cabinet responsibility, the Serbian Radicals' ability to obtain a working majority was enhanced by the Croatian Peasant's boycott of parliament in some periods and by the imprisonment of Radić and other leaders of the Croatian Peasant Party in other periods. Nonetheless, the clear norm in the entire "Vidovdan" period of 1920–1929 was that the shifting governments rose and fell as a consequence of their ability to gain support in parliament.<sup>49</sup> For instance, in 1924, government rotated between the Radicals and the Democrats (the latter buttressed by the Slovene People's Party, the Bosniak Muslims, and in a period also supported by the Croatian Peasant Party), after the king had refused Pašić's wish for new elections in the summer of 1924.<sup>50</sup>

However, there is a partial exception to this norm. This is the period between the 1925 and 1927 elections when the king meddled more actively than both in the periods 1920–1925 and 1927–1929. First, the king was very active in convincing Pašić's Radicals to co-opt Radić's Croatian Peasant Party, in spite of the fact that the Radicals had a working majority with the Independent Democrats.<sup>51</sup> Second, on April 17, 1927, King Alexander appointed a government that did not seek a mandate in parliament for the simple reason that it did not stand a chance of obtaining such a mandate. The king proceeded to dissolve the assembly, to allow the new government to function during the spring and summer, and to conduct the elections on September 11, 1927.<sup>52</sup>

Next, the outcome of the 1925 elections is also suspicious in that the Radical-Independent Democrats coalition, which conducted the elections, received

48 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 215–224.

49 See, e.g., Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, pp. 28 f., 30 f., 42, 45–48.

50 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 221.

51 Cf. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, Chapter 3.

52 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 228; Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, p. 46.

a majority of the mandates. The opposition cried foul,<sup>53</sup> and it is clear that the 1925 outcome differs in a qualitative sense from the outcomes of 1920, 1923, and 1927. Though the 1927 elections were also characterized by more irregularities than those in 1920 and 1923,<sup>54</sup> we thus find no similar clear-cut victory for a consolidated Serbian core in this election. On top of this, the king seems to have tampered less with the principle of cabinet responsibility in the period between the elections of 1927 and 1929.<sup>55</sup>

On this basis, our preference is to consider the entire period from 1920 to 1929 as democratic. However, we are open to the notion that the democratic episode was interspersed with an undemocratic spell that began with the 1925 elections and ended with the 1927 election. In any case, we emphasize that the Yugoslav case is notoriously difficult to categorize and that the main reason for genuine competition seems to have been the composite character of the post-World War I Yugoslav state, which made it much more difficult for singular parties to steal elections and also made it well-nigh impossible for the king to solely invest one particular political camp with government.

## VI. Portugal

Portugal entered the interwar period with a bang, in the form of the assassination of the recently appointed dictator, Pais, in December 1918. An armed conflict between monarchists and republicans ensued. The republicans won the struggle, secured a hold on government, and the major republican party, the Democrats, won an absolute majority in the elections held on May 11, 1919. Soon after taking government power, the Democrats splintered as a Liberal Republican party was formed by some of the more moderate forces in the party. The following years saw an oscillation between unstable Liberal and Democrat cabinets.

New elections on July 10, 1921 were won by the Liberal government, but instability continued. The Liberal Prime Minister, Granjós, was killed during an insurrection headed by army officers who were dissatisfied with the dismissal of the Democratic government headed by Pinto. Additional elections were held on January 29, 1922, and this time the Democrats won a majority. The consequent Democrat government – under Prime Minister Silva – lasted from February 1922 to October 1923. It was followed by yet another period of instability, including several short-lived governments headed by army officers. However, from

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53 Cf. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, p. 36.

54 Cf. Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p. 228.

55 Cf. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, Chapters 2–3.

this point up until the coup carried out on May 28 in 1926, the main pattern was one of a succession of short-lived Democrat cabinets.<sup>56</sup>

Let us take a step back and try to get an overview of the democratic credentials of Portugal between 1918 and 1926. We have already seen that three of the reviewed datasets consider Portugal to be under democratic rule during the entire period from 1919 to 1926. Many indications do indeed speak in favor of Portugal being a minimalist democracy throughout the period. Multiple parties competed in the elections, there was no king to interfere with government formation, cabinet turnover was extremely high, different parties assumed government responsibility, the otherwise dominant republican Democratic Party lost the parliamentary election in 1921 and did not achieve a clear majority in 1922, and the president from 1919 to 1923 was not a Democrat.

That said, other pieces of evidence point in a different direction. Most importantly, the multiparty system that we find in the period 1918–1926 was one that revolved around a single dominant party, i.e., the Democratic Party. This party had inherited the pre-war Republican Party electoral machine and it normally held sway of government. This gave it a string of key electoral advantages. First, its closeness to the state apparatus made it the main supplier of patronage, especially in rural areas. Second, it was the only party with a strong and reasonably stable national party structure. This facilitated not only its attempt to secure votes during elections, but also its ability to arrange extra-parliamentary street protests – often marked by systematic violence – which were conducive to bringing down presidents or governments not to its liking.<sup>57</sup> It is telling that the only elections lost by the Democratic Party were characterized by the Liberal government abusing its grip on the administration to secure an electoral victory through manipulation.<sup>58</sup>

The upshot of these things was that fair elections were never held in interwar Portugal. Via its formidable political machinery, the Democrats were adept both at silencing opposition parties using threats and violence and at buying votes via local patronage networks.<sup>59</sup> This pattern was especially pronounced in rural areas, where Democrats controlled local administration and patronage.<sup>60</sup> So, despite rampant internal divisions – sometimes producing actual splits – the

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56 Cf. Stanley Payne, *A History of Spain and Portugal*, Vol. 2, Madison 1973, pp. 568–570; Douglas Wheeler, *Republican Portugal. A Political History 1910–1926*, Madison 1978, Chapters 11–12.

57 Cf. Antonio Costa Pinto, *Portugal: Crisis and Early Authoritarian Takeover*. In: Berg-Schlosser/Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–1939. Systematic Case Studies*, pp. 354–380, here p. 364.

58 Cf. Wheeler, *Republican Portugal*, p. 203.

59 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 227; Philippe Schmitter, *The Impact and Meaning of ‘Non-Competitive, Non-Free and Insignificant’ Elections in Authoritarian Portugal, 1933–74*. In: Guy Hermet/Richard Rose/Alan Rouquié (eds.), *Elections without Choice*, Basingstoke 1978, pp. 145–168, here p. 150.

60 Cf. Costa Pinto, *Portugal. Crisis and Early*, pp. 364 f.

Democrats remained the dominant party of the system. The party could survive the loss of urban votes exactly because its clientelist machine ensured that the rural vote was garnered and that urban votes could be intimidated.<sup>61</sup> The only genuine threat to the Democrats' hold on power was therefore political intervention by the armed forces.<sup>62</sup> Needless to say, these repeated acts of intervention do not enhance the democratic status of Portugal in 1918–1926.

On this basis, our main preference is to code the entire period 1918–1926 as undemocratic. This verdict is based on reservation about both the competitiveness of the elections and severe limits to the operation of the parliamentary principle. Regarding the former, the Democratic Party's electoral machine – based on patronage and violence – suffocated genuine political competition. Regarding the latter, the Democratic Party and its supporters used extra-parliamentary threats and violence. Coupled with recurring military interventions in politics, this means that the fate of cabinets was often not decided in parliament. The result of this combination was instability, political violence, and misgovernment. Democracy in our minimalist conception can coexist with all of these. But this was not the case in Portugal.

## VII. Less Problematic Cases: Italy, Finland, Lithuania, and Spain

We have seen that there is also significant disagreement with respect to the scoring of Italy, Finland, Lithuania, and Spain across the five accounts presented at the outset of this paper. However, our reading on these cases reveals that it is somewhat easier to make relevant distinctions here. For this reason, we will refrain from producing narratives of political development and will simply describe the lay of the land.

Italy clearly had competitive elections up until the fascist takeover in 1922. Furthermore, the principle of cabinet responsibility to parliament was the guiding rule of the political system. In fact, to a large extent the parliamentary principle had operated ever since 1848.<sup>63</sup> But until the introduction of universal suffrage in 1913, the political elite had been able to manipulate the elections.<sup>64</sup> Even after 1913, the results were not always pretty, partly due to minor irregularities, especially on the local level, but mostly due to the state of flux which, as a consequence of the absence of consolidated political parties, often characterized the 'shifting sands' pattern of alliances in parliament. This also tended to give the

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61 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 365–375.

62 Cf. Payne, *A History of Spain and Portugal*, p. 571.

63 Cf. Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860–1980. The Class Cleavage*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 346–348.

64 Cf. Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*, Madison 1995, p. 88.

king a large say “because there were never majority parties in the House upon whom the choice to form a Cabinet had unsuitably to fall”.<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, the erratic character and personalist basis of most Italian governments should not be taken as the expression of an undemocratic regime, at least not according to our minimalist definition. On the contrary, the immediate post-war period exhibits a number of government turnovers, in each case based on the loss of support in parliament.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the November 1919 elections are highlighted as the freest in Italy’s history. The Nitti government, which conducted the elections, “declined to use the government’s traditional electoral weapons and had ordered his prefects to remain impartial”.<sup>67</sup> The competitiveness was reflected in the result, as the “pre-war parties” lost out to the two new mass parties, the Socialists and the Catholic Popolari. The Nitti government was able to remain in power, but only by securing Popolari support. The 1921 election, conducted by Giolitti’s government, was characterized by the renewed use of some of the old (pre-war) tactics to secure votes, especially in the South. But the general outcome of the election virtually mirrored that of 1919, a strong evidence of the existence of genuine competition.<sup>68</sup> We therefore code Italy as democratic from the first postwar elections of September 1919 up until Mussolini’s takeover in 1922.

In Finland, some would argue that democracy broke down with the anti-communist laws of 1930 or the subsequent clamp-down on the Lapua Movement in 1932. In fact, as mentioned earlier in the paper, one of the datasets surveyed – Polity IV – only scores Finland as a democracy in the period 1918–1930. However, based on our reading, there is little reason to disqualify Finnish democracy in the 1930s. It is not only among extant measures, but also in the case-specific literature that the majority opinion is that Finnish democracy survived throughout the interwar period. The main reason being that genuine electoral competition between contending political camps survived both the 1930 and 1932 occurrences and that – among the parties that remained legal – the parliamentary principle decided who would take charge of government; all of this in the

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65 Cf. Samuel E. Finer, *Mussolini’s Italy*, New York 1935, p. 62; see also Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization*, pp. 346–348.

66 See Marco Tarchi, *Italy: Early Crisis and Fascist Takeover*. In: Berg-Schlosser/Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–1939: Systematic Case Studies*, pp. 294–320; Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870–1925*, London 1967, pp. 509, 536, 547–550, 559. More generally, the literature we have reviewed repeatedly mentions examples of governments falling after coming in minority in the House. This even goes for Finer (*Mussolini’s Italy*; see e.g. p. 135) and it runs counter to his assertive claim that “Italy from 1879 to 1922 had a Parliament but no parliamentarism” (*ibid.*, p. 62). This assertion is quite obviously based on a somewhat tacit comparison with the much more consolidated – and well-structured – English party system.

67 Cf. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism*, p. 549.

68 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 587 f.

context of high electoral integrity, a consolidated party system, and equal and universal suffrage.<sup>69</sup>

Coding Lithuania is in some ways even less troublesome than e.g. Italy. The reason for this is that it had no monarch to potentially tamper with the parliamentary principle. The Christian Democratic Party played a dominant role in Lithuanian politics from independence until 1926. However, it mostly shared government responsibility with other groups – both when it had a majority in 1920–1922, and after the party lost its majority in the national elections in October 1922. In May 1926, it finally had to relinquish government power when a number of opposition parties won the national elections and formed a coalition government.<sup>70</sup> The literature we have processed gives a clear impression of competitive elections and cabinet responsibility in the period from the election of the constituent assembly in 1920 to the coup in December 1926.<sup>71</sup>

Moving on to the case of Spain between 1918 and Primo de Rivera's putsch in 1923, the king retained considerable political powers, including the appointment of governments. What is more, the conservatives and the liberals colluded to manipulate election results as they took turns with government power. According to Raymond Carr, this "turno pacífico came into play when a ministry was 'exhausted' and the king appointed an alternative ministry of the party in opposition. The minister of the interior of the new ministry could obtain an overwhelming majority for the incoming ministry by a judicious use of the 'moral influence' provided by his control, in a highly centralized system, over judges, civil governors, and mayors."<sup>72</sup>

The dominant parties were basically "called to office by the king in order to 'make' elections for themselves and guarantee themselves a parliamentary majority for several years".<sup>73</sup> What is more, in the national elections in 1923, 146 of 409

69 Cf. Risto Alapuro/Erik Allardt, *The Lapua Movement. The Threat of Rightist Takeover in Finland, 1930–32*. In: Juan J. Linz/Alfred Stepan (eds.), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes. Europe*, Baltimore 1978, pp. 122–141; Lauri Karvonen, *Finland. From Conflict to Compromise*. In: Berg-Schlusser/Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–1939: Systematic Case Studies*, pp. 129–156.

70 Cf. Manfred Hellmann, *Litauen zwischen Demokratie und autoritärer Staatsform*. In: Hans-Heinrich Volkmann (ed.), *Die Krise der Parlamentarismus in Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*, Marburg 1967, pp. 156–167, here pp. 161–164; Stanley V. Vardys, *Democracy in the Baltic States, 1918–1934: The Stage and the Actors*. In: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 10 (1979) 4, pp. 320–336, here pp. 324 f.

71 Cf. Vardys, *Democracy in the Baltic States*; Raimundas Lopata, *Die Entstehung des autoritären Regimes in Litauen 1926*. In: Erwin Oberländer (ed.), *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, Paderborn 2001, pp. 95–142; Hellmann, *Litauen zwischen Demokratie*, pp. 161–164; Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence*, Berkeley 1974, pp. 79, 120; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp. 377–381.

72 Raymond Carr, *Liberalism and Reaction, 1833–1931*. In: Id. (ed.), *Spain. A History*, Oxford 2000, pp. 205–242, here p. 223.

73 Stanley Payne, *Spain's First Democracy. The Second Republic, 1931–1936*, Madison 1993, p. 10.

seats were assigned without election because there were no official competitors in these electoral districts, and republicans were only ‘allowed’ to hold a maximum of 4 percent of the seats in the legislature.<sup>74</sup> Even though elections slowly became more contested in the larger cities, and third parties were increasingly allowed to participate, elections and governments before 1931 never reached the point where one could justify that they reflected the political will of the voting citizens.<sup>75</sup> This means that Spain cannot be considered even a minimalist democracy from 1918 to 1923.

### VIII. How Do We Know Democratic Competition When We See It?

Several of our borderline cases highlight the difficulty of a crisp scoring of democracy, even based on minimalist Schumpeterian criteria. This is probably the place to present some more general considerations about what we have learned with respect to drawing boundaries after having surveyed the borderline cases. How do we know democratic competition when we see it in the interwar period? In the borderline cases we have examined, the only clear evidence is this: opposition parties not favored by the head of state (normally the king) and not in charge of conducting the elections win. The problem is that it is much more difficult to tell when regime-supported parties prevail based on actual competition rather than on stolen elections. The Romanian election of 1928 is one among several examples of this conundrum, the Yugoslav election of 1925 is another. In this situation, additional evidence is necessary.

One way of traversing this testing terrain is to present two different scorings of the borderline cases: one that prioritizes coding some systems that are in fact democracies as non-democracies, and one that prioritizes avoiding coding some systems that are in fact non-democracies as democracies.<sup>76</sup> The consequent assignments of democratic status to the discussed cases are reported in Table 2 below. We should make clear, however, that in each of the cases we have a preferred coding, which we find most valid based on the secondary sources we have perused. This is the coding that we inclined to in the discussion of the cases above and it is reported in column the second of the table. But we are open to an alternative coding, also mentioned in the country analyses above, which is the one reported in column the third.

74 Ibid., p. 11.

75 Cf. Walter L. Bernecker, Spain: The Double Breakdown. In: Berg-Schlusser/Mitchell (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–1939: Systematic Case Studies*, pp. 396–425, here p. 402.

76 See Alvarez/Cheibub/Limongi/Przeworski, *Democracy and Development*, pp. 23 f.

Table 2: Spells of minimalist democracy for the disputed interwar cases

Cases	Interwar spells of minimalist democracy	
	Preferred coding	Alternative coding
Bulgaria	1919–1920 & 1931–1934	1919–1923 & 1931–1934
Finland	1918–1939	
Italy	1919–1922	
Lithuania	1920–1926	
Portugal		
Romania	1919–1920 & 1928–1930	1919–1920
Spain	1931–1936	
Yugoslavia	1920–1929	1920–1925 & 1927–1929

This procedure could be extended to some of the remaining cases of interwar Europe, where particularly the timing of breakdown is sometimes disputable based on secondary sources. For instance, some argue that Weimar democracy broke down in 1930 with the introduction of “presidential governments”, whereas others (including all the surveyed datasets) point to the subsequent Nazi *Machtergreifung* in 1933 as the cutoff-point.

## IX. Conclusions

In this paper, we have drawn attention to eight cases which have been coded in strikingly different ways in the extant datasets: Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Yugoslavia. To shed light on the disagreements, we have employed a crisp, Schumpeterian minimalist definition which only emphasizes genuine competition for political power via competitive elections. Finland, Lithuania, Italy, and Spain turned out to be relatively easy to code on this basis. Not so with Bulgaria, Portugal, Romania, and Yugoslavia which are definitely borderline cases, given the crisp minimalist definition of democracy we have proposed. As with beauty, whether these cases were democratic is very much in the eye of the beholder. One way of dealing with this is to present two different scores, one the most preferred and the other the alternative one. We have done so, and we suggest that there might be benefits in extending this logic to some of the European cases which the datasets agree on.

While this article only deals with descriptive inference, its findings are still of quite some consequence. The disagreements among the extant datasets are not small potatoes. Just to single out one striking incongruity, two of the five accounts we have surveyed do not count Italy as a democracy in the period 1919–1922 and one codes the period until 1925 as democratic, meaning that Mussolini’s takeover of power in 1922 did not represent a democratic breakdown according to any of these accounts. Italy is obviously a crucial case for many theories of democratic breakdown in the interwar period, and the lack of consensus therefore does little to strengthen our confidence in some of the extant findings.

More generally, much of what we know about the causes (and consequences) of interwar regime change might be sensitive to changes in coding. Furthermore, all the datasets ignore some interesting trends in the borderline cases, especially the presence of a number of short democratic spells, discontinued by or interspersed with undemocratic spells. There has been little attempt to theorize the causes of these oscillations which were pronounced in the immediate aftermath of World War I.

These cases – concentrated in Southern and East-Central Europe – seem to anticipate what has been written about post-communist “pluralism by default”.<sup>77</sup> More particularly, in the context of an immediate post-World War I “international liberal hegemony” strikingly similar to the one after 1989–91,<sup>78</sup> democracy was established in cases such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, at least partially because the state apparatus was unable to manipulate elections in large parts of the country. In Romania and Yugoslavia this seems to have been a consequence of the composite character of the new states, brought about by the incorporation of areas from the politically, administratively, and economically more advanced Habsburg Empire. Seen from this vantage point, the main difference with cases such as Moldova in the 1990s was that the state apparatus, organized around the relatively assertive monarchs of these countries, soon consolidated its power, rooting out the “pluralism by default” in favor of some interwar version of what in the post-communist literature is termed as “dominant-power politics”.<sup>79</sup>

Taken together, our analysis thus shows that “mere description” serves a number of crucial functions of social science, including getting hold of reality, creating a more valid basis for causal inference, and potentially formulating new hypotheses about regime change.<sup>80</sup>

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77 Cf. Lucan Way, *Pluralism by Default in Moldova*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002) 4, pp. 127–141.

78 Cf. Steven Levitsky/Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, New York 2010.

79 See Thomas Carothers, *The End of the Transition Paradigm*. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002) 1, pp. 5–21.

80 See John Gerring, *Mere Description*. In: *British Journal of Political Science*, 42 (2012) 4, pp. 721–746.

