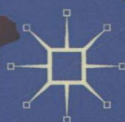
A stylized map of Europe is the background of the cover. The map is divided into regions, some of which are highlighted in red, while others are in a dark blue. The red regions include parts of the British Isles, Scandinavia, and several areas in Central and Eastern Europe. The dark blue regions cover the rest of the continent. The map is outlined with white lines.

POLITICAL EXTREMISM IN DEMOCRACIES

COMBATING INTOLERANCE

WILLIAM M. DOWNS



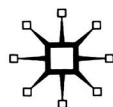
POLITICAL EXTREMISM IN
DEMOCRACIES

COMBATING INTOLERANCE

William M. Downs



palgrave
macmillan



POLITICAL EXTREMISM IN DEMOCRACIES

Copyright © William M. Downs, 2012.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2012 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-0-230-34079-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Downs, William M., 1966–

Political extremism in democracies : combating intolerance /

William M. Downs.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-230-34079-4 (hardback)

1. Political parties—Europe. 2. Radicalism—Europe. 3. Right-wing extremists—Europe. 4. Toleration—Europe. I. Title.

JN50.D68 2012

324.2094—dc23

2011042058

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: June 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Political Extremism in Democracies

Toleration is good for all, or it is good for none.

Edmund Burke, 1773



PREFACE

This book is the result of more than a decade of professional interest in politics at the edges of European party systems. In an era in which scholarship on Europe has largely focused on the region's integration and presumed harmonization, what has impressed and troubled me the most has been the persistence of difference. Democracies cultivate and defend difference, but difference—if strategically harnessed—can traumatize democracy. Difference can be benign and even healthy, but it can also entail rejection and a return to past practices that have torn societies apart. Europe's politics—while certainly not alone—struggle with double-edged historical legacies. The European identity is one that can rightly lay claim to distinctively advancing democratic ideals and practices across centuries; at the same time, however, it cannot hide from a past also marked by intolerance, xenophobia, persecution, and even genocide. History shapes the contemporary political terrain, and almost all twenty-first-century European democracies have witnessed the rise and sustained electoral success of one or more parties deemed to be too extreme by the existing political establishment. Such parties—"pariahs" we shall call them—challenge many of our cherished assumptions about the virtues of proportional representation electoral systems, about the presumed moderating effects of incumbency, and about the ability of pluralistic societies to accommodate popular but unsavory messages. For the scholar of comparative politics, the study of pariah parties lies at the intersection of key theoretical and even philosophical debates; equally important, it also connects with substantively meaningful and enduring realities of modern governance.

My journey of exploration on this topic began (as it likely did for many others) with the reading of Herbert Kitschelt's *The Radical Right in Western Europe* (1995). That book generated enthusiasm for theoretically inspired and empirically rich research on political extremism for a new generation of comparativists. Where I ultimately deviated from Kitschelt and from most of the cohort publishing subsequently in his tradition was that, instead of focusing on the admittedly important effort to categorize and explain the rise of radical parties,

my research passion was in categorizing and explaining responses by other parties to the success of such pariahs. I owe much of that early decision to an invitation from Amatai Etzioni to present my work at a panel on “The Rise of the Right in Europe: What is to be Done?” at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in 2001. That conference and my ensuing research projects forced me at each new occasion to reconcile a pressing call for policy prescription with the social scientist’s obligation to remain neutral and analytical. Indeed, my treatment of political extremism in the present book embraces the role of the neutral social scientist without shying away from the fact that more normative concerns inspired the original research questions. Real-world observations continue to reinforce the need for social scientific attention to political extremism within democracies; nowhere was this more evident than in July 2011, when as this book neared its completion a Norwegian lashing out against multiculturalism murdered 77 people in one of that country’s—any country’s—darkest national tragedies. While nonviolent but intolerant parties could not be directly blamed for the actions of a mass murderer, much of the public debate following the killings focused on the roles played by such parties in mainstreaming rejectionist philosophies. That process of mainstreaming and legitimating, some observers were quick to conclude, can embolden others in society who are bent on destruction.

As will be explained at length in the pages that follow, the use of “pariah” in this book is indicative of the recognition that “radical” or “extreme” may at times be unnecessarily laden with pejorative interpretations. “Pariah” is an empirical condition—that is, initial ostracism by the political establishment—that can be employed without suggesting any judgment on a party’s ideological or programmatic merit. When this condition intersects with illiberal programs, we are likely to witness democracy’s painful paradox of deciding whether to tolerate the intolerant. The necessity of charting reactions to that paradox provides special motivation to the observer of European political parties; yet, the underlying research questions and theoretical treatment are also intended to appeal more generally to students of comparative party systems and democracy regardless of region.

Additional inspiration for this book is owed to the participants who attended a multidisciplinary conference I hosted in Atlanta on “Democracy and Extremism.” That event in June 2008 brought together researchers from across the country and across the globe to wrestle with the problematic interplay between these two concepts.

Among those participants, I should single out several—Tim Bale, Miroslav Mares, Gur Bligh, Joel Olson, Ben Bowyer, and David Art—whose work has proven instructive for my own. So, too, should recognition go to the panelists and audiences at numerous academic conferences who provided insights and helpful criticism, including a Cas Mudde-led panel at the 2007 American Political Science Association (APSA) annual meeting, as well as those who organized and participated in the panel on “Legal Responses to Political Extremism” at the 2011 APSA annual meeting. The opportunity to exchange ideas with other scholars working in this area—including on that occasion Michael Minkenberg, Giovanni Capoccia, and Joost van Spanje—is invaluable.

In writing this book, I have incurred many debts. I am grateful to my faculty colleagues and graduate students at Georgia State University who have provided the intellectual stimulation needed to think critically about this topic. Here I acknowledge the diligent work of Veronica Armendariz, Shannon Jones, and Vanja Petricevic who served as graduate research assistants at various stages of the project’s development. Conduct and production of this study was no easy feat, especially while chairing a major academic department, codirecting a new Center for Human Rights and Democracy, launching international programs in both France and the United Kingdom, and then moving into a new position as associate dean. I am fortunate to have had the support of two Deans, first Lauren Adamson and now William Long, as well as my fellow associate deans (MaryAnn Ronski, Carol Winkler, and Chuck Derby) who made it both easy and gratifying to be a research-active scholar/administrator.

Over the course of my research, Georgia State University generously funded three successive International Strategic Initiative Grants so that I could travel to study democracy and extremism in South Africa, Northern Ireland, France, and Germany. The University’s Research Conference Support Grants Program also funded conferences on “Democracy and Extremism” as well as “Immigration Policy and Human Rights” that helped shape and reshape my thinking on the topic of this book. I should also thank the many elected officials and party representatives from across Europe who shared observations, preferences, and information that supplied both background context and empirical fodder for the analysis presented here. In researching this book I have enjoyed the good fortune to spend extended time in the key battlegrounds contested by pariah parties—most especially France, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, and the United

Kingdom. Special appreciation goes to my colleagues and friends in Strasbourg, France, which has become a preferred base from which to conduct research. I should also thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided constructive feedback on the manuscript in its many early forms; the final product is, I am convinced, that much stronger for having received such good input. I am likewise grateful to Robyn Curtis, Matthew Kopel, and the editorial and production teams at Palgrave Macmillan for their early and sustained support of this project.

This book is deservedly dedicated to my family. To my parents, who first introduced me to Europe, I owe my original passion for the region and for its history. Despite my protracted periods absorbed in research, travel, and writing, my wife Kim refused to formally designate me a pariah. For that, she has my enduring gratitude. For my children, Rachel and Bradley, I hope political science can provide the world—their world—with knowledge and understanding to help overcome democracy's vulnerabilities and imperfections.

William M. Downs
Atlanta, October 2011



ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
AN	Alleanza Nazionale
AV	Alternative Vote
BGB	Bauern-, Gewerbe- und Bürgerpartei
BNP	British National Party
BZÖ	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
CVP	Christelijke Volkspartij
DF	Dansk Folkeparti
DS	Dělnická strana
DSSS	Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti
DTP	Demokratik Toplum Partisi
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
EU	European Union
FN	Front National (Belgium, France)
FrP	Fremskridtspartiet (Denmark)
FrP	Fremskrittspartiet (Norway)
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post
HZDS	Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko
KDH	Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie
KPB	Kommunistische Partij van België
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
KSCM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy
LiF	Liberales Forum
LKP	Latvijas Komunistiskā partija
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MIÉP	Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja
MP	Member of Parliament
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano

MSZP	Magyar Szocialista Párt
NPA	Nouveau parti anticapitaliste
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands
N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei
PCB	Parti Communiste de Belgique
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus
PES	Party of European Socialists
PR	Proportional Representation
PS	Parti socialiste (France)
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid
REP	Die Republikaner
SD	Sverigedemokraterna
SDKÚ-DS	Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia–Demokratická strana
SMER	Smer-sociálna demokracia
SNS	Slovenská národná strana
SP.A	Socialistische Partij Anders
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs
SRP	Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands
SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei
SZDSZ	Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége
VB	Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang
VLD	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten
VNV	Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond
VU	Volksunie



CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xv
1 Pariahs in Their Midst: Organized Extremism and the Problem of Tolerance in Contemporary Democracies	I
2 Ignore, Isolate, Co-Opt, Collaborate, or Ban? Mapping Strategic Responses to Pariah Parties	25
3 Determinants of Democratic Defensiveness	53
4 Is the <i>Cordon Sanitaire</i> Effective?	81
5 The Moderating Effects of Incumbency?	III
6 Responding to Political Extremism without Succumbing to It	147
7 Ban the Bans, but Guard the Threshold? "Lessons" from Old to New Democracies	173
<i>Notes</i>	203
<i>Bibliography</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	229



FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

2.1	Classifying responses to threats from pariah parties	31
2.2	Strategic risks for moderate parties and democratic quality	48
3.1	Determinants of democratic defensiveness	54
3.2	Historical memory and alternative responses to party-based extremism	60
4.1	Antwerp city council: The cordon sanitaire in practice	104
6.1	Net migration in Europe, 1997–2008	150
7.1	EU-level sanction of Smer	183

Tables

1.1	Select “pariah” parties in Europe, 2000–2010	16
2.1	Legal thresholds for representation in select European electoral systems	35
2.2	Constitutional provisions regulating party behavior in select European states	40
2.3	Select party bans and dissolutions in Europe	42
4.1	From pariah to powerhouse: The electoral evolution of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang, 1978–2010	91
6.1	Opposite trajectories: Electoral fortunes of center-left and far-right parties in select European countries, 1999–2011	152
6.2	Attitudes of German left-identifiers toward non-European immigration, 1990–1996	164
6.3	Attitudes of German left-identifiers toward immigrants and asylum seekers, 1997–2003	167
6.4	Issue salience of immigration for left, center, and right identifiers, 2005–2009	170

CHAPTER I

PARIAHS IN THEIR MIDST: ORGANIZED EXTREMISM AND THE PROBLEM OF TOLERANCE IN CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES

If an extremist group does have a substantial part of the votes, denying it representation is as silly as an ostrich's sticking his head in the sand. It is said that "the best way to discredit a fool is to hire him a hall." And if, as sometimes happens, a "faddist" or "extremist" turns out to be not a fool but a wise man ahead of his time, then too the best thing to do is to hire him a hall.

—George H. Hallett Jr., 1940¹

It's very important for the future of the political culture here in the Czech Republic. It will set the boundaries for the political activities of extremist parties. It provides a clear distinction on what is acceptable and what is against the law, which are mostly the acts of violence but also the xenophobic rhetoric and the racist and anti-Semitic statements of the party members.

—Vojtěch Šimíček, 2010

*Head of Czech Republic's Supreme Administrative Court,
on that country's first-ever verdict outlawing a political party²*

This book addresses a crucial question of contemporary politics: how do democracies resolve the paradox of having to tolerate the intolerant in their midst? Specifically, when political "extremists"—organized into parties that compete openly and successfully in democratic elections—enter the conventional institutional arena, how do mainstream actors react? Established democracies founded on principles of free voice and open competition typically struggle with how best to cope with pariah parties that

ostensibly play by the rules of the democratic game but then espouse exclusivist and rejectionist positions. Indeed, cross-national evidence demonstrates significant variation in responses to such apparently illiberal parties, from calculated disregard to outright bans. The results of those actions appear to likewise vary in dramatic ways, at some times successfully containing the perceived threat while at others seeming only to fuel its further growth. Although considerable research has already been published looking at the historical, sociological, and economic conditions that help explain the resurgence and persistence of party-based extremism (especially the far-right variant) in Western democracies, we presently know remarkably little about the relationship between democracy and efforts to combat extremism. Understanding how democracies respond to party-based extremism, and with what consequences, constitutes the central objective of this book.

We presently lack a theoretical framework for understanding the strategic responses of democracies confronting threats from parties on the fringes. What matters most when shaping strategy toward pariah parties? How are concerns for principle balanced against the drive for power? How do the size and polarization of the party system influence outcomes? Similarly, does state structure (e.g., unitary/federal as well as parliamentary/presidential forms) play a determinative role? How far do democratic systems go to protect themselves against political parties bent on destroying democracy (or at least depriving select groups from enjoying democratic rights)? Indeed, when is democracy itself compromised by efforts to contain and curtail putatively undemocratic forces? These questions are salient for even the most well-established democratic systems, and they also speak directly to party systems in nascent democracies across the globe.

This book argues an approach that privileges the explanatory power of three factors—namely, historical context, institutional setting, and competing visions of democracy. *History* can cast a long shadow, and it may fundamentally define the magnitude of threat posed by a pariah party. Perceptions of risk and threat could, in turn, be determinative in shaping strategic responses by traditional parties and state authorities to new or resurgent extremist parties. Yet, “history” is much maligned by some contemporary comparative politics scholars, casting it as a residual variable that helps only to account for whatever “noise” may remain in a given dataset. The power of the past to explain the present is, then, contested. Alternatively, we

can gauge the impact of different *institutional arrangements* (e.g., electoral rules, territorial division of power, size, and polarization of party system) on the choices made by those responding to pariahs. The institutional approach appeals to many because it facilitates prescriptions—change this rule, alter that institution and the threat is contained. Explanatory power thus becomes the ability to render change. However, detractors contend that overreliance on structure as the source of explanation smacks of a determinism that fails to account for changes over time within the same institutional setting. The relative analytical weight of institutional arrangements, like that of history, is therefore uncertain. Finally, the book juxtaposes two *competing visions of democracy*—procedural and substantive—to acknowledge that rival expectations may lead to different outcomes. If the dominant view of democracy is one in which institutional arrangements and the framework of decision-making cannot prescribe the content of decisions (i.e., procedural democracy), then the tolerance of intolerance may be greater than if the dominant view is one wherein repressive force by the state in the name of democracy is encouraged (i.e., substantive democracy). Individual-level perceptions, preferences, and choices are then important complements to context and structure. The theoretical goal of *Political Extremism in Democracies: Combating Intolerance* is to bring these three classes of variables together in a meaningful and complementary fashion.

The book's empirical focus is broadly comparative, but it draws first and most widely on Europe. There the historical legacy of party-based extremism casts a particularly long shadow, with twentieth-century lessons from the rise of fascist national socialism still remarkably salient. Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland are among those countries where this central paradox of democracy—whether and how to tolerate the intolerant—still animates contemporary politics. So, too, in the Netherlands, where a June 2010 parliamentary election saw dramatic gains for the Freedom Party and its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim message. Likewise in the “new” Europe at the continent's center and east, discontent has manifested as successful party-based extremism. From Slovakia to Hungary and the Balkans, we find examples of parties that propagate mistrust of democracy combined with the electorally potent mix of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. Few if any existing works provide comparative assessments of the outcomes of strategies designed to combat pariah

parties, and as such this book stands to make a significant empirical contribution.

This introductory chapter presents the book's core questions, with the overarching puzzle being the issue of how democratic political systems respond to organized and successful extremist parties that operate within the rules of the democratic system to achieve what may seem to be less-than-democratic objectives. The subsidiary questions taken up are then detailed: How does a democratic political establishment seek to understand the sources of support for extremism? How does it use the tools available to it (electoral rules, legal restrictions, education, media, and economic incentives) to try and counter, contain, and roll back extremist parties? Does the relationship between democracy and extremism vary in meaningfully consistent ways across countries? Finally, how big and pressing a threat is party-based extremism to democracy (in both established and nascent state forms)? In presenting these questions, this opening chapter also establishes the core working definitions of *(in)tolerance*, *extremism*, and *pariah party*.

Research Questions in Context

We can best illustrate the salience of the research puzzles driving this book by briefly highlighting four contemporary cases. We look first at the banning of a small and electorally unsuccessful far-right party in the Czech Republic. A second example is provided by Belgium, which demonstrates the difficulties of isolating a large and widely popular far-right party through a *cordon sanitaire*. Nick Griffin and the British National Party (BNP) supply a third case, suggesting important questions about the intervening influence of electoral system type on the “defensiveness” of democracy's response to party-based intolerance. Finally, we draw attention to controversial allegations that Norway's tradition of tolerating a party with rejectionist tendencies helped foster an environment of hate that at least in some indirect fashion led to the disastrous acts of domestic terrorism in July 2011.

Czech Mate? Workers' Party Banned in 2010

In February 2010, the Czech Republic's Supreme Administrative Court took one of the most dramatic—and risky—steps available to any democratic polity by issuing a 120-page ruling that outlawed