ANTI-SYSTEM PARTIES

A CONCEPTUAL REASSESSMENT

Giovanni Capoccia

ABSTRACT

Many years after its emergence in the vocabulary of comparative politics, the label of 'anti-system' is still one of the most used to describe a party or group that exerts a radical form of opposition. However, the term has been used in an increasingly idiosyncratic manner, which makes it inappropriate for comparative research. The origins of the concept reside in the writings of Sartori on party systems in the 1960s and 1970s, where it mainly referred to the totalitarian parties of the inter-war and post-war decades. Since its inception, however, the concept of an anti-system party has not only been used in party system analysis, but also in the context of empirical studies of various aspects of the life of democratic regimes, to indicate challenges to its stability, legitimacy or, more recently, consolidation. This article reconstructs the concept of 'anti-systemness' by disentangling its different empirical referents in party system theory and in the empirical analysis of democracy, and proposes a more refined typology of 'anti-system parties'.

KEY WORDS ● anti-system parties ● conceptual analysis ● democracy ● party systems

Introduction

This article seeks to clarify the concept of the anti-system party and to address the question of whether and how it can be usefully employed for the comparative analysis of party systems and democratic regimes. Although the concept, by its very nature, does not lend itself to clear-cut operationalization, I argue that its utility is evident. The category of 'anti-systemness' will be analyzed in the light of the logical rules for conceptual formation and reconstruction, with the aim of clarifying its meaning and precision, and so enhancing its applicability within comparative analyses (Sartori, 1970a, 1984a, 1991; Sartori et al., 1975; Collier and Mahon, 1993). Anti-systemness,

in fact, is a concept that has suffered from considerable 'stretching' (Sartori, 1970a), not least because of its undifferentiated application across two distinct fields of analysis: the study of party systems, on the one hand, and the empirical analysis of broader aspects of the life of democratic regimes, on the other. I argue that the concept of anti-systemness when applied to parties refers to different if partially overlapping realities in both fields. In party system analysis, the concept points to the ideological *difference* of one or more parties from the others in the system, while within the more general analysis of democratic regimes the primary reference is to a party's inherent ideological *character*.[1]

The concept of an anti-system party is an essential element of Sartori's theory of party systems (Sartori, 1966, 1970b, 1976, 1982; see also Sartori, 1997: 67). Prima facie, the definitions of 'anti-systemness' given by Sartori also included the objective element of a party's ideological *character*. However, in the context of Sartori's theory, the definitional attribute of anti-systemness is relational, being given by the ideological *difference* between one or more parties and the other parties of the system. Thus, in party system theory, the dimension of comparison of 'party anti-systemness' is the *ideological distance* of one party from the others in respect to issues of crucial importance for the regime in which these parties operate. In the literature, however, the property of 'anti-systemness' has often been assigned to a party (or group) on the exclusive basis of the objective content of its ideology, without referring to either its 'distance' from the other parties in the system or to the effects on the mechanics of that party system that the presence of such a party is likely to exert. In these cases, an 'anti-system party' is simply seen as a threat to that regime, and often as a threat to democracy tout court (e.g. Nettl, 1968: 571).

In this article, I therefore elaborate a separate conceptual reconstruction of 'anti-systemness' in party system theory and in empirical democratic theory, disentangling the two different meanings and empirical referents that are involved. By analyzing the 'literature' of the concept (Sartori, 1984a: 46), that is, its origins in Sartori's work on party systems, and its subsequent use by other authors, I distinguish between 'relational' anti-systemness, which is relevant for party system analysis, and 'ideological' anti-systemness, which is relevant for the empirical analysis of democracies, whether this

---

1. The analysis focuses on anti-systemness in democratic systems, even though the concept, per se, could be applied to all regimes (Sartori, 1982; see also, e.g. Saich, 1990; Lewis, 1997). Moreover, whilst in party system theory the attribute necessarily refers to a party, in broader analyses of democracy it can include non-party actors. In this latter respect, the reference to parties in the text is for the sake of simplicity.

involves the analysis of democratic legitimacy, stability, consolidation or whatever. It is important to emphasize that, when applied to parties, these two forms of anti-systemness need not be present at the same time, which has a great importance for comparative studies in the field. In fact, although the combination of meanings was characteristic of the 'totalitarian parties' of the 1920s and 1930s, the waning of anti-democratic ideologies in the contemporary world has effected a much sharper separation between the two. As will be shown later, this distinction is therefore of particular importance for the analysis of contemporary extremist parties.

The Conceptual Reconstruction of 'Anti-systemness': General Observations

The term 'anti-system party' appeared in the modern political science literature in the early 1960s.[2] It was then used, at the same time as other analogous labels,[3] in order to refer to particular kinds of parties (primarily fascist, nazi and communist) which, in Daalder's (1966b: 64) telling phrase, 'participated in order to destroy', thereby forcing the collapse of a number of European democracies during the inter-war period and endangering yet others during the post-war years. More recently, with the political evolution of western democracies, and with the spread of democratic regimes in the non-western world, we have witnessed a proliferation of 'anti' labels in the literature[4] and, at the same time, a considerable stretching of the concept of the anti-system

---

2. The first formulation of the concept can be found, to the best of my knowledge, in a chapter by Sartori in an edited volume published in 1963 (Sartori, 1963). Its first use as a tool for comparative analysis, however, is dated 1966, and can be found in an essay about polarized multi-party systems (Sartori, 1966). As Hans Daalder (personal communication) reports, however, the term need not be an invention of Sartori, as it was already of common usage among the scholars (who included Sartori) participating at the meetings of the project on comparative oppositions in the early 1960s, whose proceedings later came together in the seminal volume edited by R. A. Dahl (Dahl, 1966). Establishing who the inventor of the label is, at any rate, has a limited importance. What Daalder's testimony shows is that the concept was used indifferently in both party system theory and empirical analyses of democracy from its very inception.

3. The reference here is to the concepts of 'major structural opposition', introduced by Dahl (1966), and of 'opposition of principle', coined by Kirchheimer (1966a, b). Also the concept of 'disloyal opposition' (Linz, 1978), first used a dozen of years later, referred essentially to the same reality.

4. Schedler (1996: 292) lists about 15 of such labels used in the literature to describe the attitudes of political parties. His list is not exhaustive: for example, one could add the 'anti-structure' parties (Dewachter, 1987: 289), or the 'anti-party system' parties (Katz, 1996: 133).

party itself.[5] More generally, the label anti-system has been used for a party
or a group with non-democratic ideals (Daalder, 1966a, b; Budge and
Herman, 1978; von Beyme, 1985; Ferraresi, 1988);[6] or whose supporters or
members engage in unconventional, illegal or violent behavior (Zimmer-
mann, 1989); or which is more or less 'isolated' by the other political
actors (Pulzer, 1987; Bille, 1990).[7] Indeed, so pervasive is its use that some
authors have cast doubt on its analytical power, preferring to discard the
concept altogether as of almost negligible value (e.g. Pridham, 1987; Smith,
1987).

　Nonetheless, there are a number of reasons to argue that the concept still
retains a valuable classificatory power, and that its abandonment would ulti-
mately lead to an impoverishment of our understanding of political realities.
In party system analysis, for example, one of the main innovations of
Sartori's approach was to provide a solid analytical basis on which to distin-
guish between 'limited and moderate' and 'extreme and polarized' cases of
pluripartism, which, until then, had tended to be lumped together as
simple 'multi-party systems'. The absence or presence of anti-system parties
as an indicator of ideological polarization is precisely one of the key defining
traits of these different types of party systems (Sartori, 1976: 132–4). To dis-
card the concept of the anti-system party could therefore force us back to

---

　5. The concept of anti-system party has shown a considerable resilience in both displacing its
old 'relatives', and in resisting the assault of the many new analogous terms more recently coined
or adopted to describe a certain form of 'radical' opposition of a party or group. A computerized
search in several databases ('International Political Science Abstracts', 'International Bibliogra-
phy of the Social Sciences', 'Sociological Abstracts 1986–1999'), on articles of political sciences
published in the last 10–12 years, showed that the label 'anti-system' is still more used than terms
such as 'anti-establishment' or 'anti-party' in a rough proportion respectively of one to three and
one to five. The full expression 'anti-system party' recurred in about half of the cases in which the
adjective was used. The search also showed that the terms of '(major) structural opposition',
'opposition of principle' and 'disloyal opposition' have virtually disappeared from the language
of political analysis.

　6. While criticizing the applicability of the label of 'anti-system parties' to the extremists of the
left and of the right (apart from historical cases), Smith maintains that secessionist parties and
movements present unequivocal characteristics of anti-systemness (Smith, 1987: 62; see also
Montero, 1995). In principle, the characteristic of ideological anti-systemness as defined in the
present article can be applied to secessionist parties too. In the text, I focus on anti-democratic
parties for the sake of simplicity.

　7. The 'behavioural' set of attributes is the least referred to, also because in the last decades
practically all parties, even extreme ones, have adopted parliamentary means (Smith, 1987).
Behavioural characteristics, however, emerge in several analyses in which the concept of 'anti-
system' is used (Muller et al., 1982; Welzel, 1995; Oropeza, 1998). In the same respect, it is
interesting to notice that sometimes the label has been referred to terrorist groups (Pollack
and Gruegel, 1987), and even to guerrilla movements (Stavenhagen, 1991). The 'relational' char-
acteristics have also been used *a contrario*, to deny the appropriateness of the label for certain
parties, given their 'non-isolation' (Pulzer, 1987: 20).

relying on the crude and essentially unhelpful distinction between two- and multi-party systems.

In empirical analyses of democracy, the term anti-system has an obvious historical referent, distinguishing those parties that have played the democratic game with the objective of destroying democracy itself. A similar threat to democracy can be still identified nowadays among the most radical of the Islamic fundamentalist parties and groups that are now active in a number of new democratic regimes. Needless to say, the differences between these and the older European 'totalitarian parties' (Duverger, 1951) are immediately apparent. However, an important similarity consists exactly in their opposition to pluralist democracy, which is seen as incompatible with their ideological referents. This circumstance highlights the fact that the label of anti-system, or an analogous one, corresponds to a fundamental *logical* necessity, in democracies. To put it very simply: since democratic systems are based on the institutionalization of political dissent, which is an essential part of the political process (Ionescu and de Madariaga, 1968), there can be, in abstract, no a priori limitation on the degree of dissent that an opposition can voice. As a result, there may well be a party or group that dissents on the basic principles or institutions of democracy itself (including the very right to dissent), thereby giving rise to a qualitatively distinct kind of opposition that needs a distinct label (Tosi, 1966; Nettl, 1968).

Applications in the Analysis of Party Systems: 'Relational' Anti-systemness

In his seminal analysis of party systems Sartori (1976) offers two definitions of an anti-system party, one broad and one narrow. The broad definition[8] is conceived as encompassing all the possible variations in time and space of the attitudes of such parties and their electorates, ranging 'from alienation to

---

8.

> Furthermore, not all the anti-system parties are such in the same sense: The negation covers, or may cover, a wide span of different attitudes ranging from 'alienation' and total refusal to 'protest'. Now, clearly alienation and protest are different in kind, not merely in degree . . . Yet the distinction cannot be easily applied on empirical grounds, because large electorates cover all these sentiments, or attitudes. Voters can be protesters, while the party activists can be alienated: Likewise, the party leadership can be ideologically motivated, whereas the rank and file may simply lack bread.

This definition encompasses 'all the refusal-to-protest parties' (Sartori, 1976: 132–3).

protest' (Sartori, 1976: 132). The various elements brought within this definition have as a minimum common core the *delegitimizing impact* on the regime of the party's propaganda and actions. The narrow definition, by contrast, focuses on the ideological characteristics of the party: 'an anti-system party would not change – if it could – the government but the very system of government. Its opposition is . . . an "opposition of principle"' (Sartori, 1976: 133). Although here the focus seems to be on the ideological *character* of a party, the relational aspect of the definition soon becomes clear when Sartori elaborates the point:

> The hard core of the concept is singled out by noting that an anti-system opposition abides by a belief system that does not share the values of the political order *within which it operates*. According to the strict definition, then, anti-system parties represent an extraneous ideology – thereby indicating a polity confronted with a maximal *ideological distance*. (Sartori, 1976: 133, emphasis added.)

Sartori's concept of the anti-system party is thus 'relational' in a twofold sense: first, it involves the ideological distance of a party *from the others* along the political (left–right) space of electoral competition; second, it refers to the delegitimizing impact of the party's actions and propaganda *on the regime in which it operates*. Let us address these two related aspects in turn.

Ideological Distance and Basic Values

What is important to recognize here is that the content of its ideology as such does not render a party anti-system; what matters instead is when such content is considered in relation to the basic values of the regime within which the party operates. Such fundamental values can coincide with the basic democratic values (of any democracy), as in the cases in which a polarized mechanics was triggered by fascist and communist parties, or can consist of values and issues that are basic to a specific democratic regime in a specific phase, and which therefore are shared by all other (pro-system) relevant parties. Such issues are so salient that they constitute an important element of the ideological space of electoral competition (Sartori, 1976: 334–42). As such, the thrust of the definition is, in fact, given by the relation of a party's ideology to the fundamental values of the specific regime in which it operates, rather than by the objective content of the party's ideology per se, and the political objects that it opposes.

The two characteristics of ideological distance from other parties and opposition to basic values of that specific regime are reflections of the same reality, that of a relationally anti-system party. The logical connection

Table 1. Attributes of Relational Anti-systemness and Consequences
on the Party System Mechanics

Attribute of a Party's Relational Anti-systemness	Systemic Consequence
1. Distant spatial location of its electorate from that of neighboring parties	Unequal spacing between parties (or space disjunction)
2. Low coalition potential	Multi-polarity
3. Outbidding propaganda tactics/delegitimizing messages	Centrifugality and increase in polarization (process)

between these two properties is that an anti-system party will oppose some fundamental value of the regime, which, for its very salience, is shared by all other parties and constitutes a major basis for electoral competition. This puts the anti-system party at one remove on the ideological space with respect to the others, and this, in turn, encourages the party to pursue coalition and propaganda strategies that have the effect of pushing the party system towards a 'polarized' mechanics.

The Consequences for Party System Mechanics

The principal characteristics of a polarized mechanics may be summarized as multi-polarity, space stretching (or disjunction), and centrifugal competition (Di Palma, 1977). Although several factors may determine the development of these systemic characteristics, their relationship to the attributes of an anti-system party in particular are summarized in Table 1. This threefold distinction is, of course, analytical: in any given party system the three characteristics may work together and prove mutually reinforcing (Sartori, 1976: 140).

The most important characteristic of the anti-system party is that associated with spatial distance (Sani and Sartori, 1983; Sartori, 1984b). This has likely consequences at the level of coalition formation, resulting in a low coalition potential, with the anti-system party's radical opposition on important issues serving to isolate the party from the others in the system. 'Multi-polarity' highlights a further characteristic of polarized party systems, with at least three (left–center–right) poles or cluster of parties, and with a mechanics that is not based on competition between two coalitions (bi-polarity), but on a center that governs against bilateral oppositions (Sartori, 1976). Among the factors promoting the centrifugal electoral competition characteristic of polarized systems are also the delegitimizing messages and

the outbidding tactics typical of the political propaganda of anti-system parties.[9] Excluded from government coalitions, and ideologically opposed to the regime in which they operate, anti-system parties develop the potentially rewarding tactic of delegitimizing the 'system' (attacking some of its basic values in their propaganda), and distorting the political market. The latter is accomplished by what Sartori refers to as the politics of 'outbidding' or 'over-promising', the practice of 'irresponsible opposition' (Sartori, 1976: 139–40), which itself discourages any centripetal tendencies. In brief, anti-system parties feel they can promise anything in the knowledge that they will never be called upon to make good on their pledges. Their delegitimizing approach serves to sustain centrifugal competition and this, in turn, increases the polarization of the system, that is, the overall ideological distance.[10] Outbidding tactics act in the same way, attracting votes from the electors of the pro-system parties and thus emptying the political center (Daalder, 1984: 99, 103).

Relational Anti-systemness

At this stage, the meaning of relational anti-systemness as a dimension along which parties can be compared in party system analysis becomes clearer. The relational anti-systemness of a party consists of the three characteristics listed in the left-hand column of Table 1. It is important to notice that these are characteristics of the party per se, although defined *in relation to* other entities. Such characteristics are relevant to party system analysis insofar as they contribute to or even trigger the three systemic consequences indicated in the right-hand column of the table. The most crucial point here, however, is that these characteristics do not necessarily require an opposition of the party to values that are fundamental in *all* democracies. In Sartori's own words, '[t]he system [polarized pluripartism] is characterized by an anti-system opposition – especially of the Fascist or Communist variety, *but also of other varieties*' (Sartori, 1976: 132; emphasis added). As a consequence, the true dimension of comparison is not given by the political objectives with which the party's ideology is incompatible, but by the importance of such objectives for that particular regime, and therefore also for the other parties. This may be illustrated by reference to a number of cases which might

---

9. Another major factor determining centrifugal pushes in the competition is given by the very structure of competition of polarized systems, which is (at least) tri-polar. This means that the metric center of the system is occupied, which makes centripetal competition unrewarding. However, central parties capitalize on the fear of extremists, and therefore maintain their electoral strength.

10. On polarization as a state and as a process, see Sartori (1982: 304–5).

not normally be seen to fall within the anti-system category, being all ostensibly democratic oppositions, yet which, in relational terms, clearly do meet the relevant criteria.

One such example is that of the Fianna Fáil party in Ireland in the period from 1926 to 1932, a party which Mair (1979) defines as anti-system not on the basis of any opposition to the fundamental values of democracy, but rather on the basis of its principled stance against the 1921 treaty with the UK, which had partitioned Ireland into north and south, and which had granted the south a Canadian-style dominion status, under the nominal authority of the British monarchy. Applying Sartori's framework in his analysis of the development of the Irish party system,[11] Mair (1979: 448) suggests that 'two overlapping oppositions, the constitutional and the economic, resulted in the development of a sharply polarized system'. A similar example is offered by the Danish case, in which the Progress Party (*Fremskridtpartiet*) is considered by Bille (1990: 49) as anti-system, since it 'attacked vigorously the dominant ideology of the welfare state system, as it was formed, developed and implemented by the ''old parties'' over the previous decades'. The Progress Party was one of two bilateral oppositions – the other one was the Communist Party – that emerged in the Danish party system after 1973, and which brought Denmark increasingly close to a system of polarized pluralism, in which, despite a bourgeois majority in the Folketing following the elections of 1975, the Progress Party 'blocked the formation of a bourgeois government for the rest of the decade' (Bille, 1990: 51). But while the Danish party system may well have experienced the mechanics of polarized pluralism through to the mid-1980s, it would be misleading to consider Danish democracy as having subject to challenge in this same period. Finally, Sartori's own inclusion of the French Fourth Republic among the category of polarized systems also illustrates the point. Although the qualification of the Gaullist Rassémblement pour la France (RPF) as an anti-democratic party can be challenged – while anti-democratic elements were certainly active in the party, the RPF also included strongly anti-fascist elements among its membership and leadership (e.g. Williams, 1971: 230–9) – it did nevertheless embody a genuine political-constitutional opposition to the assembly regime of the Fourth Republic. Indeed, in this case, with the creation of the Fifth Republic, we also have the post-factual evidence of the kind of regime that would have met the demands of the Gaullists during the earlier postwar years. In this case, then, though not opposed to democracy as such, the RPF can reasonably be considered as relationally anti-system in its rejection of the legitimacy of the regime in which it then

---

11. As Sartori makes clear, 'the model [polarized pluralism] includes any type of [ideological] distance' (Sartori, 1982: 294; translation by the author).

operated. Moreover, this anti-system opposition had an evident impact on mechanics of the party system in those earlier years.[12]

In short, the concept of relational anti-systemness may be used to indicate a party's ideological difference, which, in spatial terms, amounts to a high ideological distance, from the other parties operating in a particular regime. Being at a remove on the ideological space normally leads the party to have a very low coalition potential, and to use outbidding and delegitimizing tactics in electoral competition. Parties can thus be defined as relationally pro- or anti-system in relation to these characteristics and can be compared on that basis. Moreover, the presence of relevant parties with such characteristics is likely to trigger a polarized mechanics in the party system. If, however, the objective content of a party's ideology as such is taken as the defining element of a party's anti-systemness, then, as I will argue in the following section, a different path of conceptual reconstruction must be followed.

The Concept in the Empirical Analysis of Democratic Political Systems: 'Ideological' Anti-systemness

In this section, I first deal with some logical implications of the narrow definition of the anti-system party, and then with the problems connected to the conceptual reconstruction of a negative term ('anti-system') through a positive one ('system'). After arguing that 'anti-system' tends to be used as a synonym for 'anti-democratic', I outline an example of a conceptual reconstruction of ideological anti-systemness based on widely accepted definitions of democracy, treated it first as a classical and then as a radial category (Collier and Mahon, 1993).

Following Sartori's narrow definition of an anti-system party – 'a party that would change, if it could, not the government, but the system of government' – it is evident that while anti-system parties direct their actions towards a radical change of the political system, their goal is, as yet, unrealized. Unlike the relational anti-systemness of a party and its systemic consequences, which are best assessed retrospectively, ideological anti-systemness can therefore only be assessed by way of speculation as to its future intentions. In other words, future (ex post) consequences are postulated on

---

12. In MacRae's words: 'The leaders' [of the governing parties] opposition to De Gaulle in 1947–1953 revealed the identification they made between the "system" and the "Republic"' (MacRae, 1967: 315).

the basis of a contemporary (ex ante) assessment.[13] At the conceptual level, the main problem arising here emerges when the ideological characteristics of a relationally anti-system party in a given polity are not used to analyze the functioning of the party system, but rather to indicate a challenge to the legitimacy, stability or consolidation of the system of democracy as such. In fact, the literature is replete with examples of parties being characterized as anti-system on the basis of their intrinsic ideological character (e.g. Daalder 1966a; Pollack and Gruegel, 1987; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Fennema, 1997; Pace, 1997; Hanson, 1998; Lieberman, 1998; Keren, 2000) and which, at the same time, make no real reference to how the party differs from others in the system, and hence how its presence is likely to impact on the mechanics of the party system. As such, if anti-systemness is seen as an objective opposition to a given system, then in order to use the concept for comparative analysis it is first necessary to derive an equally objective definition of what that system is. This definition may be anchored in a specific case, thereby overlapping with the notion of the 'regime in which the party operates' and hence with relational anti-systemness. However, if the concept is to travel, then this will clearly depend on it acquiring a degree of generality.

In the literature that focuses on the ideology of a party as the basis for its classification as anti-system, the 'system' itself implicitly refers to some conception of democracy. The anti-system label is therefore synonymous with anti-democratic (and ideological anti-systemness with anti-democraticness). While it would be advisable to use the labels of 'anti-democratic' for this kind of party, most authors persist in using 'anti-system' or, less frequently, one of the other 'anti-' labels. A possible explanation for this is that this strategy avoids, at the same time, the value-ladenness and the contestedness of the label of 'anti-democratic'. Whatever the reason, the definition of ideological anti-systemness necessarily implies establishing what precisely democracy entails – a task that poses severe conceptual difficulties (e.g. Collier and Adcock, 1999).

For purposes of illustration, and to avoid a major detour into the varying definitions of democracy, let us look at the so-called 'expanded minimal procedural' definition reported by Collier and Levitsky (1997: 433–4), and which identifies a regime as democratic if it includes the following characteristics: (a) fully contested elections; (b) full suffrage and an absence of massive fraud; (c) effective guarantees of civil liberties; and (d) elected governments

---

13. In historical cases – for example, the NSDAP in Weimar Germany – the assessment of a party's 'ideological anti-systemness' is based exclusively on an ex post judgement. The ex post judgement would, however, be insufficient to analyze contemporary cases, as well as unsuccessful historical cases, of 'ideologically' anti-system parties, and must therefore be integrated by an ex ante judgement.

that have the capacity to govern.[14] Given this definition, how then can we specify what is entailed by ideological anti-systemness?

It is necessary to underline here that ideological anti-systemness, by its very nature, is a negative phenomenon – it concerns the question of whether a party is *against* a certain political object. This has two important consequences for our conceptual reconstruction. To begin with, a party need not oppose all of the characteristics of the system in question to qualify as being anti-system: opposing only one of them is sufficient. Second, reconstructing a negative term through its positive referents involves different units of analysis. Thus while the positive term system refers to *polities*, the negative term 'anti-system' refers to *parties* (or groups) operating within such polities. This is important because the inverse relation between intension and extension typical of the 'ladder of abstraction' (Sartori, 1970a, 1984a) or 'ladder of generality' (Collier and Mahon, 1993) only regards the positive term (system), and not the negative term (anti-system). Conventionally, the number of cases (extension) to which the concept of system is applied will be reduced as the number of defining characteristics (intension) expands. In the case of this negative definition, however, and since it is enough to be against only one of the characteristics of the system to be anti-system, new cases of anti-system parties that were not included before can be included at lower levels of generality, while other cases could be excluded even though they were included at some higher level of abstraction. All this has consequences for the use of the concept in comparative analyses, since the number of cases seized by the definition of the positive term also determines the scope of applicability of the negative term.

This can be further clarified if we note that the positive term can be defined at lower levels of abstraction by enriching the minimal procedural definition of democracy with further characteristics, such as the need to respect human rights (beyond the civil and political rights of the citizenry necessarily implied in procedural definitions). While such a concept would hardly be applicable to many of the recent third-wave democracies, it would certainly reflect the legitimate normative aspirations associated with many older democracies. Human rights can further be specified as economic and social rights or cultural rights (e.g. Beetham, 1999), with the inclusion of such rights as a necessary part of the definition of democracy itself obviously reducing the traveling capacity of the concept. At the same time, however, such an expanded definition of democracy would clearly increase the potential number of ideological anti-system parties. To give a simple example, a

14. For alternative 'minimal definitions' of democracy, see Sartori (1957: 120), Linz (1978: 5), Dahl (1982: 11), Di Palma (1990: 28), Huntington (1991: 9), Schmitter and Karl (1991), Schmitter (2000). For a systematic comparison of definitions and theories of democracy, see Schmidt (1997).

party opposing the extension of social and economic rights embedded in a very advanced form of welfare state will be anti-system in the ideological sense in those systems responding to a definition of democracy encompassing such rights, but not in others. Thus the Norwegian Progress Party (Fremskrittpartiet) in the 1980s would be regarded as ideologically anti-system (that is, as anti-democratic) under this expanded definition of democracy.[15] Conversely, it would not be possible to regard a party with a similar ideological profile as being ideologically anti-system, say, in the American context, since the US case would not in itself meet the criteria of the expanded definition. In a similar way, a more abstract and less connotative definition of democracy would include more countries, but at the same time would thereby reduce the number of parties capable of being classified as ideological anti-system.

In sum, the ideological conception of anti-systemness is also necessarily related to a system, but to a different system, and in a different way, than is the case with relational anti-systemness. This difference is crucial when the concept of anti-system party is used in comparative analyses, since the two meanings should be disentangled, and then used for the purpose that they best serve. Relational anti-systemness is relevant when it comes to the comparative analysis of the functioning of party systems. Ideological anti-systemness, standing for opposition to democracy, is an important conceptual tool to analyze the challenges faced by particular types of democracy. But before moving to consider how this conceptual reconstruction of the two forms of anti-systemness can fruitfully be employed in comparative analyses, it is necessary to explore the consequences for this analysis of a strategy in which the concept of democracy is treated as a radial type.

Ideological Anti-systemness and Democracy as a Radial Concept

Drawing on recent developments in linguistic theory, Collier and Mahon have recently highlighted how 'non-classical' models of categories (a term

---

15. Ignazi summarizes the party's ideology as follows:

> (a) neo-liberist Thatcherian-like economic policy, while keeping high-standard social services thanks to a reduction of the bureaucracy; b) less aid to the Third World, restriction to access for immigrants, and their forced repatriation (in this the party must confront the opposition of the youth organization); c) consensus to entry in the EEC . . .; d) hostility to feminism, without being favorable to a traditional morality (so much that the youth organization is in favor of a de-penalization of drugs); e) more law and order.

A few lines later, Ignazi maintains that the party in question should be labelled as 'anti-system' (Ignazi, 1994: 88–9).

that they use as synonym of 'concept' – see also Gerring, 1999: 381) have challenged the 'classical' rules of conceptual reconstruction. In particular, they emphasize how the very concept of democracy tends to be increasingly used as a 'radial' concept, rather than a classical category. For radial concepts, the relationship between intension and extension is different from that of classical categories (Collier and Mahon, 1993: especially 851–2; more in detail on radial categories, see Lakoff, 1987: 77–114).[16] Building on that analysis, Collier and Levitsky (1997) have analyzed the strategy of constructing 'diminished subtypes' of democracy, recently adopted by many scholars as a way to increase differentiation while at the same time avoiding conceptual stretching. If democracy is treated as a radial concept, a qualifying adjective would emphasize the lack of one of the characteristics of democracy as defined in minimal terms. Thus, the diminished subtype 'illiberal democracy', for example, highlights that a particular set of cases lacks the attribute of 'protection of civil liberties' of the minimal definition of democracy. Approaching democracy as a classical category, by contrast, a qualifying adjective would add a characteristic to those included in the minimal definition. Thus, the classical subtype of 'parliamentary democracy' denotes the addition of the particular characteristic to those of the minimal definition of democracy that could be described as 'the executive depends on the confidence of the legislature'. In other words, while the classical subtypes identify a subset of cases of the true type, diminished subtypes encompass an entirely different set of cases than those seized by the definition of the root concept (Collier and Levitsky, 1997: 437–42).

This advance in conceptual analysis is particularly relevant to classify the often less-than-perfect forms of democratic rule recently established in various areas of the world. It also cannot be ignored in the present analysis, especially given the radical opposition forces that operate in several of those recently established democracies, which can often be best classified as a particular diminished subtype of democracy. What then are the particular consequences for the traveling capacity of the concept of 'anti-system' party if the concept of democracy, and therefore that of 'system', is treated as a radial category?

As previously argued, a party qualifies as anti-system if it opposes any one of the attributes of the system at the level of abstraction at which the latter

---

16. In radial concepts, the meaning is anchored in a 'central subcategory', or 'root concept', which corresponds to the prototype of the category, and is defined by a certain set of characteristics. From the central subcategory, non-central categories, or 'diminished subtypes', emerge when *subsets* of those characteristics are used to define a given object. A simple example is that of 'mother' as a central category as opposed to 'stepmother' or 'genetic mother', subcategories defined by subsets of the characteristics of those defining 'mother' (Collier and Mahon, 1993: 848; Lakoff, 1987: 79–90).

concept is reconstructed. Parties that oppose at least one of the characteristics of democracy as present in the subtypes are as anti-system as parties that oppose the same characteristics in 'true' democracies. To give an example, the goals of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front in 1991 were no less incompatible with democracy, and the movement therefore no less anti-democratic, because Algeria at that time could not be classified as fully democratic (e.g. Roberts, 1992). In this sense, an analysis of anti-system parties, whereby the democratic system is interpreted as a radial concept, need not be different from that of anti-system parties in a democratic system that is understood as a classical category. Therefore, anti-system parties opposing a particular attribute of the political system in diminished subtypes of democracy can, in principle, also be analyzed comparatively, either across different versions of diminished subtypes or in comparison with anti-system parties in fully democratic systems, which meet all the requirements of the minimal definition.

While comparative analysis across different types of democracy need not pose any problems if the units of comparisons are the anti-system parties in themselves, in practice, comparisons of anti-system parties generally also touch upon some aspect of their relationship with the political system. More specifically, the presence of anti-systemic forces is often taken as an indicator of the lack of stability or legitimacy of the democratic regime, or its degree of democratic consolidation (e.g. Linz and Stepan, 1996). In such cases, a comparative use of the concept of anti-system parties across different types of democracy is more problematic. In fact, in all likelihood, and all other things being equal, it can be expected that the role of ideological anti-system parties in undermining the legitimacy, stability or consolidation of a fully democratic regime is different from that in a particular diminished subtype of democracy, where precisely the absence of some of the attributes of a minimal democracy is also likely to exert a major influence in the same direction. Keeping in mind that the optimal criteria for case selection will depend on the specific goals of the research, if the relationship between the presence of ideologically anti-system parties and attributes of the political regime, such as legitimacy or consolidation, is at the core of the analysis, it would therefore be advisable to use the concept of anti-system party comparatively only *within* and not *across* each of the different types of system, be it 'true types' or 'diminished subtypes'.

Anti-system Parties: A Typology

In this analysis, two distinct forms of anti-systemness have been distinguished. On the one hand, a party's *relational anti-systemness* consists in its high distance from the other parties on the ideological space, and its

adoption of 'isolationist' coalition strategies and centrifugal propaganda tactics. Both the party's refusal to enter coalitions – or its being rejected by its potential partners – and the prevalence of outbidding and delegitimizing messages in its electoral propaganda, tend to isolate the party from the others and to increase polarization in the party system. A party's *ideological anti-systemness*, on the other hand, consists in the incompatibility of its ideological referents, and therefore its political goals, with democracy. The definition of this latter concept at different levels of abstraction has important consequences for the traveling capacity of the concept of anti-system party in the ideological sense.

Any consideration on the utility of this conceptual analysis must take the lead from the preliminary observation that both forms of anti-systemness are not normally studied per se, but in relation to a system. The previous sections have highlighted that ideological and relational anti-systemness have different 'systems' of reference, and relate to them in different ways. The ideological anti-systemness of parties or groups is important in relation to the *democratic system* as a whole, as it is likely to have an impact – by opposing one or more of its fundamental characteristics – on the latter's stability, legitimacy, or consolidation, in the examples mentioned earlier. The relational anti-systemness of parties, however, is important for the *party system*, as it is likely to have an impact on the latter's mechanics, by pushing it towards increased polarization and centrifugality. In other words, the observations on the anti-systemness of a party are normally carried out in order to acquire knowledge on a different, and higher, unit of analysis. The typology in Figure 1 highlights the impact of the two forms of parties' anti-systemness on the political and the party systems, and identifies different types of parties.

For the purpose of illustrating the typology, the assessment of relational anti-systemness is based on a general evaluation of a party's coalition and

		Relational Anti-systemness	
		Yes	No
Ideological Anti-systemness	Yes	*Typical Anti-system parties*	*Irrelevant ASPs*
			Accommodating ASPs
	No	*Polarizing Parties*	*Typical Pro-system Parties*

Figure 1. Typology of Political Parties According to Their Anti-systemness

propaganda strategies, rather than on its location on the ideological space – although all examples made here share the common property of being located at one extreme of the competitive space.[17] Thus, a party would be classified in the left-hand cells of the typology if it adopts 'isolationist' strategies, tending to build a separate 'pole' of the system and to refuse to enter coalitions (at the national level), and resorts to outbidding propaganda tactics, systematically opposing and discrediting some founding values of the regime, on which all other parties agree.

This is not belittling the importance of ideological distance in Sartori's framework. On the contrary, a high ideological distance between the parties – a likely consequence of a high number of relevant parties competing on the same ideological space – remains a very important explanatory factor for the emergence of a polarized party system mechanics. As previously specified, however, the typology of Figure 1 aims to classify parties in relation to their impact on the 'system' (in the case of relational anti-systemness, the party system). Towards this aim, focusing on the coalition and propaganda strategies not only offers a more immediate indicator than ideological distance but it is also particularly appropriate. In fact, according to Sartori, the reason why a high ideological distance is often at the basis of a polarized mechanics is that it renders 'centrifugal' tactics *electorally rewarding* for the parties. Sartori makes clear that his model is not deterministic: the parties can counteract the systemic propensities – the only prediction of the theory is that, in this case, they are likely to lose votes (e.g. Sartori, 1982: 206–7, 305–6). In other words, Sartori's framework allows for the possibility that party elites, possibly for different incentives than the electoral ones, might restrain from adopting 'polarizing' coalition and propaganda strategies even in the presence of ideological incentives to do so, and vice versa, and thereby have an independent impact on the working of the party system.[18]

---

17. A more fine-grained operationalization and measurement of relational anti-systemness would involve several methodological and practical problems, including, for example, the sampling and coding of propaganda sources, the discussion of which would exceed the limits of this article. The nature of the concept would obviously render different measures acceptable and valid, depending on the specific aim and setting of the research.

18. The current situation of the Austrian party system provides an interesting example in this respect: while the extreme-right Austrian Liberal Party (FPÖ) certainly contributed to the overall polarization of the system while in opposition, it is much less so now that the party is in government. To give a further example, Daalder emphasizes the possibility of the prevalence of centripetal competition also in a system with a relatively high number of parties, as it happened in The Netherlands. While the absence of sizeable extremists certainly constituted an important element in explaining the absence of polarization and the prevalence of centripetal tendencies in the competition in the Dutch party system, Daalder maintains that the Dutch parties 'learned' to compete centripetally and thereby gave an important contribution towards depolarization (Daalder, 1984: 103).

The assessment of a party's ideological anti-systemness depends on the definition of democracy adopted in the analysis.[19] In the examples below, I have chosen a minimal-procedural definition of democracy, which allows quite broad comparisons, and have treated democracy as a 'classical' category. As explained before, however, different strategies of conceptual reconstruction are possible. Thus, a party is 'ideologically' anti-system when it opposes any of the characteristics of the minimal definition of democracy (full contestability in elections, full inclusiveness; fairness of vote; civil liberties; actual power to elected officials).[20]

The parties included in the upper-left and lower-right cells of the typology do not pose particular problems. The lower-right cell includes the pure *pro-system parties*, those that do not challenge democracy, nor have any polarizing effect on the party system mechanics. The upper-left cell contains the *typical anti-system parties*, which both challenge democracy and have polarizing effects on the party system functioning. The lower-left cell includes the *polarizing parties*, which do not display any ideological characteristics of anti-systemness but which do, however, encourage a polarized mechanics in the party system on a minimally durable basis, practicing outbidding in the electoral competition, and being non-coalitionable or disloyal in coalitions. A caveat is in order here, though: it is important to emphasize that such parties would be considered fully anti-system if Sartori's theoretical framework were used in a comparative analysis of party systems, since they are endowed with relational anti-systemness, which is the crucial characteristic in that kind of analysis. While relabeling them in the typology as 'polarizing parties' should not conceal this fact, this partial departure from Sartori's original meaning seems to be advisable for two reasons. First, the explicit and correct use of Sartori's framework for the analysis of party systems' mechanics is comparably much less frequent than analyses of democratic regimes in

---

19. Similar to relational anti-systemness, also a more fine-grained measurement of ideological anti-systemness, although well possible, would entail the discussion of problems that would be strongly related to the actual research setting. Besides the problems of definition necessarily entailed by an 'essentially contested concept' such as democracy (Gallie, 1956), a sophisticated operationalization of the concept of ideological anti-systemness must also confront, for example, the arduous task of finding a valid and reliable measure of the ideological character of a complex entity such as a political party or group. For a discussion of the methodological problems entailed in this operation, see Gerring (1998: 51–4 and 287–98), while reflections on the same topic in direct connection to comparative research on extremist parties are in Mudde (2000: 19–24).

20. These criteria are, to a certain extent, time-bound, as they refer to a *contemporary* minimal definition of democracy. If one wants to expand the comparison to earlier periods, in which minimal democracy was generally conceived as being compatible, for example, with less-than-full levels of inclusiveness, then a possible strategy is that of anchoring the criterion of inclusiveness to its actual conception in different periods.

which the term anti-system is used in its 'ideological' meaning. Second, after the waning of totalitarian ideologies, the empirical overlap between the two forms of anti-systemness is much less frequent than in the previous decades.

Coming to the parties in the other cells of Figure 1, both types in the upper-right cell of the typology do not have any significant polarizing effects on the party system mechanics and yet pose a threat to democracy. The analysis of the parties with these characteristics calls for a preliminary discussion of the problem of the thresholds of relevance of a party in the party system and the political system as a whole. In Sartori's words, an anti-system party is relevant for the functioning of the party system if it influences the direction of competition and makes centrifugal pushes prevail in it. An indicator of this characteristic is the de facto veto power that the party in question can exert on legislation (Sartori, 1976: 124). In the context of this analysis, the criterion of relevance of a relational anti-system party can be reformulated as a function of the party's size and duration.[21] Therefore, a relationally anti-system party is relevant when it can hinder, or make more difficult, the formation of 'bipolar' coalitions that would otherwise have been formed – as in the case, mentioned before, of the Danish Progress Party. The same applies when a party supports such 'isolationist' strategies by focusing its propaganda on the party's radical diversity in respect to the moderate 'neighboring' parties – as in the case, for example, of the Italian Communist Refoundation Party in the 1990s, on which see later. To the contrary, if a party is too small, or reaches a remarkable size but lasts too short a time, then its coalition strategies and propaganda will not hinder the formation of bipolar coalitions, and the party would be irrelevant for the overall functioning of the party system and, as such, not worth considering in comparative analyses of party systems.

Yet, such a small or ephemeral party would not necessarily have to be discarded from comparative studies of the degree of legitimacy, stability or consolidation in different democratic systems. In the context of the political system as a whole, a small party might be important because it has organic contacts with more sizeable anti-system groups or even with terrorist movements, for example. In other words, the analytical relevance of ideologically anti-system parties depends on the actual problem studied. Thus, a party

---

21. This is a less demanding criterion than Sartori's, and as such it can account for the more recent developments in many party systems, sometimes displaying not a fully polarized mechanics, but neither possessing all the characteristics of *moderate* (non-polarized) pluralism, often because of the presence of relationally anti-system parties that however do not have a sufficient strength to exert a de facto veto power on legislation. Although in some cases a party's relevance will be difficult to assess univocally (as it would also be with Sartori's original criterion, at any rate), the criteria adopted here also make possible to account for transitional phases of party systems, which may prelude either to a fully fledged polarization of the system, or to a complete integration of the anti-system party.

may be irrelevant for the party system mechanics and, at the same time, be very important for the study of specific aspects of the political system.

Thus, *irrelevant anti-system parties* are either too small or last too short a time to have any significant impact on the party system mechanics. Their 'relational' status is simply irrelevant: the party system works independently of their strategies. In contrast, *accommodating anti-system parties* have a sufficient size and/or duration to potentially influence the party system mechanics, but do not have polarizing effects on it. That is, despite their ideological anti-systemness, accommodating anti-system parties are coalitionable and loyal in coalitions – thereby not encouraging multi-polarity – and practice limited, if any, outbidding – thereby not fostering centrifugal competition. Accommodating anti-system parties may adopt such strategies for various reasons: pragmatic adaptation, to which ideological change has not yet followed suit, or simply for tactics, with the aim of achieving the really important political goals through non-confrontational means or at a later stage.

There are several examples of *typical anti-system parties*; without necessarily going back to the totalitarian parties of the inter-war years, one could mention the French, Finnish and Italian Communist Parties of the first decades of the Cold War, the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), some cases of religious fundamentalist formations in more recent years. Examples of *irrelevant anti-system parties* are the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ), and the Belgian Communist Party (PCB), active – and certainly displaying ideological anti-systemness – for a long time, but always too small to have a significant influence on the party system mechanics. Cases of irrelevant anti-system parties having strong links with anti-system *groups* are the Sinn Fein in the UK and Herri Batasuna in Spain in the last decades, linked respectively to the terrorist formations of IRA and ETA. The national party systems of their respective countries have been virtually unaffected in their mechanics by the emergence and the strategies of such parties, yet it can hardly be maintained that the parties in question are not relevant for the life of the British and Spanish democratic systems. The German extreme right-wing National Democratic German Party (NPD) in the 1960s, and in particular between 1966 and 1969, had a limited influence on the party system mechanics despite its considerable electoral strength. Yet the party is all but irrelevant for the studies on extreme right-wing threats to democracy in Germany. Analogous considerations can be made for the extreme right-wing parties of the Republikaner and the German People's Union (DVU) in later decades, certainly more relevant for their ramifications and contacts with anti-system groups than for their sheer electoral strength.

As examples of *accommodating anti-system parties* can be mentioned the communist parties that in several countries entered coalitions at various levels, while keeping orthodox ideological positions. This happened, for

instance, during the second half of the 1930s, with the Popular Front govern-
ment coalitions in France and Spain. The French Communist Party (PCF)
can be considered as an accommodating anti-system party also in the
Eighties, when it entered a left-wing government coalition (Mair, 1996: 93).
The same label can be applied to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the
second half of the 1970s, when it pursued the strategy of entering a coalition
with the governing Christian Democrats. Although this strategy, labeled
as 'historical compromise', only concretized in the Communists' external
support to the government, the change in the coalition strategies of the
PCI was considered by Farneti as having a major influence on the function-
ing of the Italian party system, determining its change from 'polarized' to
'centripetal' pluralism (Farneti, 1983).[22] As examples of the same kind the
Finnish and Icelandic Communist Parties, which entered government co-
alitions in the 1960s and 1970s can be mentioned. While each of these
cases has obviously some peculiarities, they all share one trait: the ideological
commitment to democracy of these parties was very doubtful, but their
coalitional and propaganda strategies did not contribute, in those phases,
to the polarization of the party system (Pulzer, 1987: 20).

As far as *polarizing parties* are concerned, apart from the cases mentioned
before of the Irish Fianna Fáil before 1932, the Danish Progress Party in the
1970s and the French Gaullists in the Fourth Republic, other examples
can be found. The Italian Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), which
emerged in 1991 from a split in the Communist Party, can hardly be con-
sidered as ideologically anti-system. Yet, the party has, in general, been dis-
loyal in coalitions, has not renounced its extremist propaganda and has put
the center-left government in difficulty on several occasions, so that it can,
with reason, be perceived as a separate 'pole' in the Italian party system.
Roughly the same can be said of the German Party of Democratic Socialism
(PDS), which, although constantly excluded from the national government,
can no longer be considered as a transient element of the German party
system, after three elections in which it has increasingly consolidated its elec-
toral support. Its share of seats in the Bundestag (approximately 5 percent),
in fact, makes left-of-the-center parliamentary coalitions more difficult and
the concentration of its support in the poorer eastern regions (where it
obtains about one-quarter of the votes) certainly reinforces its blackmail
potential vis-à-vis the parties of the moderate left. Moreover, if one adopts
a minimal definition of democracy, the Norwegian Progress Party qualifies
as a polarizing party, analogously to its Danish twin.

---

22. He makes explicit reference to the 'progressive demystification' of propagandistic over-
promising in the same years (Farneti, 1983: 239).

Conclusions

The main goal of this analysis has been to reconstruct the concept of 'anti-systemness' particularly in reference to political parties. The concept of 'anti-system' party continues to show considerable importance for the analysis of both party systems and democratic regimes. The concept was coined in a political conjuncture in which parties that encouraged centrifugal drives in the electoral competition, and exerted irresponsible opposition (Sartori, 1976: 140) were also principled opponents of democratic rule tout court. The waning of the major anti-democratic ideologies, however, has not eliminated per se the existence of polarized party systems: other forms of 'principled opposition' have in fact emerged, which, although not abiding by any clear-cut anti-democratic ideology, have in fact a marked polarizing effect on the party systems of their countries. Moreover, the recent diffusion of democratic rule throughout the world has enormously diversified the reality of democratic regimes, such that certain ideological positions are liable to give incentives to polarizing strategies in certain types of democratic polities while not in others. Faced with these developments, the implications of the concept of anti-systemness needed to be clarified, in order not to lose the analytical benefits of the concept itself.

   The cornerstone of the conceptual reconstruction carried out in this article consists of the disentanglement of the two basic forms of 'relational' and 'ideological' anti-systemness and the clarification of their importance for comparative analysis of party systems and democratic regimes respectively. On the basis of this reconstruction, the following three points can be underlined: first, a party's 'relational' anti-systemness is not given per se by its ideological character, but rather by its ideological *difference* from the other parties in the system. Thus, parties that would not qualify as 'anti-democratic' on the basis of a given definition of democracy can also have polarizing effects on party system mechanics and can therefore be relationally anti-system. The concept of 'relational anti-systemness' can be used to compare the coalition and propaganda strategies of parties across (party) systems, as well as their effects on party system mechanics. It is important to highlight that, as a consequence, the existence of polarization and centrifugal propensities in a country's party system does not mean per se that the democratic nature itself of the regime is in danger. The party system may simply include polarizing parties which themselves might well adhere to the requirements of the minimal definition of democracy.

   Conversely, and this is the second important point to emphasize, the *absence* of polarization and centrifugal systemic propensities in a party system is not in itself a sufficient condition to consider that democracy as being without threats. The concepts of 'irrelevant' and 'accommodating'

anti-system parties point exactly to a situation in which relatively big and durable ideologically anti-system parties can adopt centripetal tactics, or small and 'flash' ideological anti-system parties which are incapable of causing polarization, can still constitute a relevant threat to democracy.

Furthermore, the conceptual reconstruction of ideological anti-systemness draws attention to the fact that the possibility of a comparative usage of the label in question depends on the level of generality at which the concept of 'system' is reconstructed. In particular, the reconstruction of 'system' at lower levels of abstraction, based on more-than-minimal definitions of democracy, allows in principle a higher number of parties to be considered as ideologically anti-system than would be the case if the concept of system were reconstructed at higher levels of abstraction. However, such enriched definitions of system automatically confine the scope of the comparison to a lower number of countries. In comparative analyses, therefore, the concept of ideological anti-systemness should only be referred to those parties active in the polities seized by a certain definition of 'system', which sets the boundaries of the comparison. This strategy enables the pitfall of conceptual stretching to be avoided.

The distinction between the two forms of anti-systemness, and the different types of anti-system parties, can be used in several ways in comparative analysis. The typology of Figure 1. can serve as a 'conceptual map' for synchronic comparisons of the anti-systemic impact of specific families of parties, such as those of 'post-communist parties' and 'new extreme right-wing parties', which have recently drawn the attention of many comparativists (e.g. Ignazi, 1992, 1994; Bull and Heywood, 1994; Mudde, 1995, 1996, 2000; Bozoki, 1997; Ishiyama, 1997; see also von Beyme, 1988). The preliminary clarification of a specific definition of democracy would have to set the spatial–temporal boundaries of the comparison, and would allow the classification of the various parties according to their ideological character, while their impact on party system mechanics could also be charted at the same time. The typology can also be used in diachronic comparisons, with the aim of monitoring the evolution of parties located at the extremes of a particular political space in one or more countries over a given period. Changes towards an acceptance of democratic values in the ideology of these extreme parties will cause them to 'move' from the upper to the lower row in the typology. When all parties in a given spatial unit have abandoned their ideological anti-systemness, this could be an indication that democracy has become 'the only game in town' and can be seen as a sign of democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 6) or government stability (Taylor and Herman, 1971), for example. Analogously, the stable adoption of centripetal strategies will cause a party to 'move' from the right- to the left-hand column of the typology. A generalized movement of

this kind would be at the basis of the 'overcrowding' of the type of moderate pluralism in Sartori's typology of party systems, which Mair has recently underlined (Mair, 1996: 88).

In conclusion, the recent and increasing diffusion and differentiation of democratic systems calls for the adoption of more refined concepts that can be used in comparisons across different settings and periods. In the attempt to conceptualize the changes that radical forms of opposition in democracies have undergone recently, the strategy most commonly followed by scholars has been that of creating new 'anti-' terms, often ad hoc and without specifying the logical consequences of their application to different cases. Instead of running the risk of 'adding, at best, profusion to confusion' (Sartori, 1984a: 50), this article has followed a different and hopefully more fruitful way of proceeding: that of reconstructing the 'old' concept of anti-system party, instead of simply renaming it, and of clarifying its implications and the possibilities of its comparative usage after the newer developments, in order not to lose its important benefits for the analysis of democratic political systems.

REFERENCES

Beetham, David (1999) *Democracy and Human Rights*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Bille, Lars (1990) 'Denmark: The Oscillating Party System', in Peter Mair and Gordon Smith (eds) *Understanding Party System Change in Western Europe*, pp. 42–58. London: Frank Cass.

Bozoki, Andras (1997) 'The Ideology of Modernization and the Policy of Materialism: The Day after for the Socialists', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13: 56–102.

Budge, Ian and Valentine Herman (1978) 'Coalitions and Government Formation: An Empirically Relevant Theory', *British Journal of Political Science* 8: 459–77.

Bull, M.J. and P. Heywood (eds) (1994) *West European Communist Parties after the Revolutions of 1989*. London: Macmillan.

Collier, David and Robert Adcock (1999) 'Democracy and Dichotomies. A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts', *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 537–65.

Collier, David and James E. Mahon Jr (1993) 'Conceptual "Stretching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review* 87: 845–55.

Collier, David and Steven Levitsky (1997) 'Democracy with Adjectives. Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research', *World Politics* 49: 430–51.

Daalder, Hans (1966a) 'Parties, Elites and Political Developments in Western Europe', in Joseph G. La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds) *Political Parties and Political Development*, pp. 43–78. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Daalder, Hans (1966b) 'The Netherlands: Opposition in a Segmented Society', in Robert A. Dahl (ed.) *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, pp. 188–236. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Daalder, Hans (1984) 'In Search for the Center of European Party Systems', *American Political Science Review* 78: 92–109.

Dahl, Robert A. (ed.) (1966) *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dahl, Robert A. (1982) *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy. Autonomy vs. Control*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Dewachter, Wilfried (1987) 'Changes in a Particratie: The Belgian Party System from 1944 to 1986', in Hans Daalder (ed.) *Party Systems in Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and Belgium*, pp. 285–364. London: Pinter.

Di Palma, Giuseppe (1977) *Surviving Without Governing. The Italian Parties in Parliament*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Di Palma, Giuseppe (1990) *To Craft Democracies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Duverger, Maurice (1951) *Les partis politiques*. Paris: Colin.

Farneti, Paolo (1983) *Il sistema dei partiti in Italia 1946–1979*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Fennema, Meindert (1997) 'Some Conceptual Issues and Problems in the Comparisons of Anti-immigrant Parties in Western Europe', *Party Politics* 3: 473–92.

Ferraresi, Franco (1988) 'The Radical Right in Postwar Italy', *Politics and Society* 16: 71–119.

Gallie, W.G. (1956) 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56: 167–98.

Gerring, John (1998) *Party Ideologies in America 1828–1996*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Gerring, John (1999) 'What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences', *Polity* 3: 357–93.

Hanson, Stephen E. (1998) 'Ideology, Uncertainty and the Rise of Anti-system Parties in Post-Communist Russia', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 14: 98–127.

Huntington, Samuel P. (1991) *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Ignazi, Piero (1992) 'The Silent Counterrevolution – Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe', *European Journal of Political Research* 22: 3–34.

Ignazi, Piero (1994) *L' estrema destra in Europa*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Ionescu, Ghita and Isabel de Madariaga (1968) *Opposition. Past and Present of a Political Institution*. London: Watts.

Ishiyama, John T. (1997) 'The Sickle or the Rose? Previous Regime Types and the Evolution of the Ex-Communist Parties in Post-Communist Polities', *Comparative Political Studies* 30: 299–330.

Katz, Richard (1996) 'Party Organization and Finance', in Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Neimi and Pippa Norris (eds) *Comparing Democracies*, pp. 107–33. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Keren, Michael (2000) 'Political Perfectionism and the "Anti-system" Party', *Party Politics* 6: 107–16.

Kirchheimer, Otto (1966a) 'Germany: The Vanishing Opposition', in Robert A. Dahl (ed.) *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, pp. 237–59. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Kirchheimer, Otto (1966b) 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds) *Political Parties and Political Development*, pp. 177–200. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lakoff, George (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, Paul G. (1997) 'The Repositioning of Opposition in East-Central Europe', *Government and Opposition* 32: 614–30.

Lieberman, Ben (1998) 'The Meanings and Function of Anti-system Ideology in the Weimar Republic ', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59: 355–76.

Linz, Juan J. (1978) 'Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration', in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, pp. 3–124. Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Linz, Juan J. and Alfred Stepan (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins.

MacRae, Duncan (1967) *Parliament, Parties and Society in France 1946–1958*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Mair, Peter (1979) 'The Autonomy of the Political: The Development of the Irish Party System', *Comparative Politics* 11: 445–66.

Mair, Peter (1996) 'Party Systems and Structures of Competition', in Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Neimi and Pippa Norris (eds) *Comparing Democracies*, pp. 83–105. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Montero, Juan R. (1995) 'Sobre las preferencias electorales en España. Fragmentación y polarización (1977–1993)', in Pilar del Castillo (ed.) *Comportamiento político y electoral*, pp. 51–124. Madrid: CIS.

Mudde, Cas (1995) 'Right-Wing Extremism Analyzed – A Comparative-Analysis of the Ideologies of Three Alleged Right-Wing Extremist Parties (Npd, Ndp, Cp86)', *European Journal of Political Research* 27: 203–24.

Mudde, Cas (1996) 'The War of Words. Defining the Extreme Right Party Family', *West European Politics* 19: 225–48.

Mudde, Cas (2000) *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Muller, Edward N., Thomas O. Jukam and Mitchell A. Seligson (1982) 'Diffuse Political Support and Antisystem Political Behavior: A Comparative Analysis', *American Journal of Political Science* 26: 240–64.

Nettl, John P. (1968) 'The State as a Conceptual Variable', *World Politics* 16: 559–92.

Oropeza, Angel M. (1998) 'El "confidence gap": un insumo psico-politico para la estabilidad del sistema democratico venezolano', *Cuestiones politicas* 20: 41–68.

Pace, Alessandro (1997) 'Los procesos constituyentes italianos (1996–1997)', *Cuadernos constitucionales* 20–21: 5–25.

Pollack, Benny and Jean Gruegel (1987) 'Opposition in Contemporary Spain: Tradition against Modernity', in Eva Kolinsky (ed.) *Opposition in Western Europe*, pp. 234–63. London: Croom Helm.

Pridham, Geoffrey (1987) 'Opposition in Italy: From Polarized Pluralism to Centripetal Pluralism', in Eva Kolinsky (ed.) *Opposition in Western Europe*, pp. 169–211. London: Croom Helm.

Pulzer, Peter (1987) 'Is There Life after Dahl?', in Eva Kolinsky (ed.) *Opposition in Western Europe*, pp. 10–30. London: Croom Helm.

Roberts, Hugh (1992) 'The Algerian State and the Challenge of Democracy', *Government and Opposition*, 4: 433–54.

Saich, Tony (1990) 'The Chinese Communist Party and the Future', *China Information* 4: 15–30.

Sani, Giacomo and Giovanni Sartori (1983) 'Polarization, Fragmentation and Competition in Western Democracies', in Hans Daalder and Peter Mair (eds) *Western European party systems. Continuity and Change*, pp. 307–40. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Sartori, Giovanni (1957) *Democrazia e definizioni*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Sartori, Giovanni (1963) 'Dove va il Parlamento?', in Giovanni Sartori et al. (eds) *Il Parlamento Italiano 1946–1963*. Naples: ESI.

Sartori, Giovanni (1966) 'European Political Parties: The Case of Polarized Pluralism', in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds) *Political Parties and Political Development*, pp. 137–76. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1970a) 'Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics', *American Political Science Review* 64: 1033–53.

Sartori, Giovanni (1970b) 'The Typology of Party Systems – Proposals for Improvement', in Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan (eds) *Mass Politics. Studies in Political Sociology*, pp. 322–52. New York and London, Free Press & Collier-Macmillan.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976) *Parties and Party Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1982) *Teoria dei partiti e caso italiano*. Milan: SugarCo.

Sartori, Giovanni (1984a) 'Guidelines for Concept Analysis', in Giovanni Sartori (ed.) *Social Science Concepts*, pp. 15–88. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage.

Sartori, Giovanni (1984b) 'Pluralismo polarizzato e interpretazioni imperfette', *Il Mulino* 33: 674–80.

Sartori, Giovanni (1991) 'Comparing and Miscomparing', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 3: 243–57.

Sartori, Giovanni (1997) *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*. London: Macmillan.

Sartori, Giovanni, Fred W. Riggs and Henry Teune (1975) *Tower of Babel. On the Definition and Analysis of Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Pittsburgh, PA: International Studies Association.

Schedler, Andreas (1996) 'Anti-political Establishment Parties', *Party Politics* 2: 291–312.

Schmidt, Manfred G. (1997) *Demokratietheorien. Eine Einführung*. Opladen: Leske & Budrich.

Schmitter, Philippe (2000) 'Essaying the Consolidation of Democracy', Mimeo, European University Institute, Florence.

Schmitter, Philippe and Terry L. Karl (1991) 'What Democracy Is . . . and What Is Not', *Journal of Democracy* 2: 75–88.

Smith, Gordon (1987) 'Party and Protest: The Two Faces of Opposition in Western Europe', in Eva Kolinsky (ed.) *Opposition in Western Europe*, pp. 52–76. London: Croom Helm.

Stavenhagen, Rodolfo (1991) 'Human Rights, Democracy and Development in Latin America', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 12: 31–41.

Taylor, Michael and Valentine Herman (1971) 'Party Systems and Government Stability', *American Political Science Review* 65: 28–37.

Tosi, Silvano (1966) 'Italy: Anti-system Opposition Within the System', *Government and Opposition* 1: 49–62.

von Beyme Klaus (1985) *Political Parties in Western Democracies*. Aldershot: Gower.

von Beyme, Klaus (ed.) (1988) *Right-Wing Extremism in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass.

Welzel, Christian (1995) 'Der Umbruch des SED-Regimes im Lichte genereller Transitionsmechanismen', *Politische Vierteljahresschriften* 36: 67–90.

Williams, Philip M. (1971) *La vie politique sous la 4eme Republique*. Paris: Colin.

Zimmermann, Ekkart (1989) 'Political Unrest in Europe: Trends and Prospects', *West European Politics* 12: 179–96.

GIOVANNI CAPOCCIA is Fellow in Politics at Magdelen College and a lecturer in politics and International relations at the University of Oxford. His publications include *La Germania: a unita fra Continuità e rinnovamento. Systemo elettorale e sistems Partitica nel Processo di riunificazione tedesco* (Rome 1995) and several articles. His main research interests are in comparative European politics and the methodology of comparative research. ADDRESS: Magdelen College, Oxford OX1 4AU, UK [email: giovanni.capoccia@magd.ox.ac.uk]