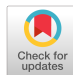

Contemporary European History (2023), page 1 of 16
doi:10.1017/S0960777323000474

ARTICLE

Arming Upstanding Citizens: Dynamics of Civilian Disarmament and Rearmament in Restoration Spain

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This article examines the state's actions to arm and disarm the civilian population in Spain during the convulsive final years of the Bourbon Restoration period (1917–23). While this topic has received little attention in the abundant literature on the crisis of the liberal regime in Spain, it is crucial to fully understanding the inherent causes and nature of the high levels of political violence which characterised this period. By analysing the 'selective rearmament' of part of the population by both legal and illegal means, this article considers the relationship between dynamics of civilian disarmament and rearmament and the evolution of the alleged state monopoly on violence in Spain.

In early March 1919, the strike at Barcelona Traction, Light and Power, better known as *La Canadiense*, came to an end. It achieved key gains for Spanish workers, the most important being the eight-hour workday. However, due to the government's refusal to free all prisoners once the conflict was over, another strike began soon afterwards, and, on 24 March, a state of war was once again declared throughout the province of Barcelona. This allowed the captain general of Catalonia, Joaquín Milans del Bosch, to order the military repression of the conflict and authorise the deployment of the *Somatén*, a citizen militia, in the streets of Barcelona, despite the absence of major violence in the city. The *Somatén* acted as an auxiliary public order force in rural Catalonia and, over time, increasingly became an 'anti-worker militia'.[1] Ramon Pla i Armengol, a leading Catalan doctor and a socialist, recalled years later how he had confronted a member of the group, reproaching him for going out with a weapon when all was calm in the city. The member of the *Somatén* replied that things had changed and that at long last they had weapons. In clear reference to the prerogatives that had apparently been granted to members of the militia regarding their actions against striking workers, the doctor countered that 'you have always been able to have a weapon; what you have now is impunity'.[2] At the same time, in late March, Spain's Interior Ministry (*Ministerio de la Gobernación*) asked the civil governors of all provinces to authorise 'responsible' residents in each city and town to use weapons. These citizens were charged with keeping order in the absence of the Civil Guard.[3] The following

[1] The expression '*milicia antiobrera*' is taken from Eduardo González Calleja, 'De guardia rural a milicia antiobrera: la trayectoria histórica del Somatén catalán durante la Restauración (1875–1923)', in *Actes del Congrés Internacional Catalunya i la Restauració* (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 1992), 51–60. The *Somatén* played a prominent role in smothering conflicts and strikes in various parts of Catalonia, including Barcelona, starting at the end of the nineteenth century. See also Matteo Millan, 'Milizie civiche prima della Grande Guerra: violenza politica e crisi dello Stato in Italia e Spagna (1900–15)', *Storica*, 58 (2014), 49–84 and Eduardo González Calleja and Fernando Del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada contra la revolución. Una historia de las guardias cívicas en la España del siglo XX* (Madrid: CSIC, 1995).

[2] Ramon Pla i Armengol, 'Segundo día. La guardia blanca', in *Impresiones de la Huelga General de Barcelona del 24 marzo–7 abril 1919. Artículos (1920–1929)* (Barcelona: Imprenta Victoria, 1930), 21–2.

[3] Notice to all governors, 26 Mar. 1919, Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), FC–M° Interior A, 57, Exp. 6. This was to be accomplished by having each governor ask for the assistance of those mayors whom he 'trusted'.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

autumn, executives at multiple companies applied to the civil government of Barcelona for gun licences for trusted workers. These companies included Ebro Irrigation and Power and *Energía Eléctrica de Cataluña*; the former was a subsidiary of *La Canadiense*, which was a shareholder in the latter. In some cases, more than fifty licences were requested. All of the applications were approved.[4] These occurrences are evidence of the progressive arming of private citizens with the authorisation of the state and its various institutions at a particularly sensitive time of social conflict. Meanwhile, the violent clashes in Barcelona between members of the *Sindicatos Únicos*[5] of the National Confederation of Labour (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*; CNT) and groups linked to the Federation of Employers was escalating. These clashes, in which a total of approximately 1,000 people were involved between 1917 and 1923, left more than 200 dead in the Catalan capital alone, making Spain one of the hotspots of violence in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.[6]

This article aims to shed light on one of the least-studied topics in the abundant historiography on political violence in Spain: the circulation of guns among the civilian population during the Restoration period (1874–1923) and the state's actions in this area.[7] It focuses on the last years of the Bourbon Restoration, from 1917 until the coup d'état led by the general Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923. As was the case elsewhere in Europe at this time, the public sphere in Spain was increasingly inundated with guns, which had become widely available starting in the late nineteenth century. Social unrest and clashes between political factions commonly involved the use of a large number of firearms.[8] A key explanation for this development lies in the efficacy of gun control measures and the presumed tolerance exhibited by authorities and the police with regard to the circulation of guns. Indeed, illegal possession of a firearm did not become a criminal offence in Spain until 1923. This might seem surprising in a country that experienced multiple magnicides and attempted assassinations at gunpoint starting in the 1870s, but Spain was by no means an outlier in Europe. In many other European countries, gun licences and permits were not introduced until the late 1920s and early 1930s, as governments sought to maintain a delicate balance between safeguarding supposed personal liberties and strengthening the principle of authority.[9]

4 Archivo Histórico de la Delegación del Gobierno en Cataluña (AHDGC), Fondos Antiguos, Leg. 265.

5 In summer 1918, the Catalan Regional Federation of the CNT adopted the *Sindicato Único* organisational model, in which all workers employed in a given industrial sector belonged to the same trade union. This provided a greater degree of unity for actions against employers. This model was accepted by the CNT's second national congress in Dec. 1919.

6 Albert Balcells gives the figures of 267 dead, 583 wounded and 131 people who were involved in the fighting, but emerged unscathed, from 1917 to 1923. The period starting in 1920 was the bloodiest. In: 'Violencia y terrorismo en la lucha de clases en Barcelona de 1913 a 1923', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 42–43 (1987), 37–79. The literature on these events is abundant. In addition to Balcells's work, notable publications include Maria Amàlia Pradas Baena, *L'anarquisme i les lluites socials a Barcelona 1918–1923: la repressió obrera i la violència* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2003); Soledad Bengoechea, *Organització patronal i conflictivitat social a Catalunya* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1994); Fernando Del Rey Reguillo, 'Frente a la violencia y la subversión. El protagonismo patronal', in *Propietarios y patronos. La política de las organizaciones económicas en la España de la Restauración (1914–1923)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1992).

7 No specific studies exist on this topic, though the most valuable contributions can be found in Eduardo González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio. Orden público, subversión y violencia política en la crisis de la Restauración (1917–1931)* (Madrid: CSIC, 1999) and Del Rey Reguillo, *Propietarios*.

8 Matteo Millan, 'Belle Epoque in Arms? Armed Associations and Processes of Democratization in Pre-1914 Europe', *The Journal of Modern History*, 93, 3 (2021), 599–635. The author writes of the 'accessibility and glamorization of guns' (610). On the increase in the use and carrying of weapons in different European societies beginning in the late nineteenth century, see also Dominique Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang: Récits de crimes et société à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Dagmar Ellerbrock, 'Old Games – New Meanings? Understanding Modern Gun Violence in the Light of Nineteenth Century Habits', *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica*, 15, 2 (2014), 56–70; and Dagmar Ellerbrock, 'Gun Violence and Control in Germany, 1880–1911: Scandalizing Gun Violence and Changing Perceptions as Preconditions for Firearm Control', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt et al., eds., *Control of Violence: Historical and International Perspectives on Violence in Modern Societies* (New York: Springer, 2011), 185–212; Emelyn Godfrey, 'Urban Heroes versus Folk Devils: Civilian Self-Defence in London (1880–1914)', *Crime, histoire & sociétés*, 14, 2 (2010), 5–30; Eric Fournier, *La critique des armes. Une histoire d'objets révolutionnaires sous la III République* (Paris: Libertalia, 2019).

9 Millan, 'Belle Epoque', 608–10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A study of civilian gun ownership and gun control measures offers several important insights into the explosion of political violence in the interwar years. In the early 1990s, George L. Mosse popularised the theory of 'brutalisation', which holds that the experience of fighting on the frontlines during the First World War (1914–18) was responsible for the high levels of political violence seen in the ensuing period.[10] More recent scholarly work has revised and in part moved beyond this theory's premises regarding violence.[11] However, the paramilitarism and high levels of violence of the period after 1918 have hardly ever been tied to the diffusion of firearms. There is a dearth of research on the availability of guns and their role in sustaining violence. There has likewise been little consideration of the relationship between state control and the circulation of guns. This may be because existing studies have linked the violence of the period after the First World War to the collapse of the state. As a result, neither the state nor its actions have been taken into account, not even in the case of countries that emerged victorious from the conflict. Spain, which paradoxically experienced a violent post-war period despite not having participated in the war, represents a clearly contrasting case. The high levels of violence seen during this period cannot be attributed to the effects of defeat nor to the collapse of the state (the same might be said of other western and southern European countries, including Italy, Portugal, France and the United Kingdom). Nor can it be explained by the proliferation of guns as a result of the war. It is therefore reasonable to consider other, long-term factors.[12]

One such factor is the distribution, availability, and control of firearms. While distribution networks and the volume of gun sales will be considered as secondary topics in this article, the main focus is the role of authorities in disarming civilians and in what I call the 'selective rearmament' of part of the population, which was always done in the interest of maintaining 'public order'. Selective rearmament refers to the state's use of both legal and illegal means to arm a particular segment of the population in the context of the social and political conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I will first analyse policies to disarm citizens and control the circulation of guns during the final years of the Restoration (1917–23). In order to do so, it will be necessary to briefly examine earlier events. I will consider why no laws in this area had been enacted in the preceding half-century and identify certain dynamics which were to continue up until the period of the final crisis of the Restoration regime. Second, I will discuss the selective rearmament of part of Spain's population with the occasional complicity or tolerance of various authorities during the final period of the Restoration, which also saw the enactment of more restrictive gun laws in the early 1920s. In the conclusion, I will discuss the relationship between these dynamics of selective rearmament and the evolution of the alleged state monopoly on violence in Spain and other European countries.

[10] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[11] See Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London: Penguin, 2016); Jochen Böhler, 'Enduring Violence: The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917–21', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 1 (2015), 58–77; Peter Gatrell, 'War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–1923', in John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 558–75.

[12] For critiques of the concept of 'brutalisation' and reflexions on its inadequacy to explain the case of Spain, see Eduardo González Calleja, 'La cultura de guerra como propuesta historiográfica. Una reflexión general desde el contemporaneísmo español', *Historia Social*, 61 (2008), 69–87; Ángel Alcalde, 'La tesis de la brutalización (George L. Mosse) y sus críticos: un debate historiográfico', *Pasado y Memoria*, 15 (2016), 17–42; Giulia Albanese, 'Political Violence and Institutional Crisis in Interwar Southern Europe', in António Costa Pinto, ed., *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 186–96. On the repeated omission of Spain in studies on political violence after the First World War and how it relates to the 'essential nexus that the historiography has established between paramilitary violence and the Great War', see Millan, 'Milizie civiche', 58. On France and the United Kingdom as counterexamples with regard to the emergence of paramilitarism in post-war Europe, see John Horne, 'Defending Victory: Paramilitary Politics in France, 1918–1926. A Counter-example', in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). On the limited applicability of the concept of brutalisation in these two countries and the relationship between post-war violence and long-standing factors which cannot be attributed only to the war, see also Chris Millington, *Fighting for France: Violence in Interwar French Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 557–89.

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Policies to Disarm Citizens and Control the Circulation of Guns

The gun laws that were in force prior to the 1920s dated back a half-century to the eve of the Restoration and the regime's first years. These laws were intended primarily to neutralise the corps of armed citizens that had emerged as a result of nineteenth-century conflicts, and particularly the *Voluntarios de la Libertad* (1868) and the *Voluntarios de la República* (1873) – both of which had initially been formed to defend the achievements of the revolution of September 1868 – as well as the various citizen forces that had been created at the local level.[13] In 1874, the government established a state monopoly on importing weapons and ammunition. However, after the wars between liberals and absolutists came to a definitive end with the conclusion of the Third Carlist War (1872–6), the apparent pacification of the political situation in Spain led to new laws on the circulation of weapons. In June 1876, the government importation monopoly was abolished, and in August 1876 a ban on using weapons without a licence was instated. Licences were to be issued by provincial civil governors, and six licence categories were created for different types of weapons and uses. This law was to define the legal framework in this area until 1923, even if its implementation was not very effective in practice.[14]

The period that immediately preceded the Restoration and the first years of the regime are relevant to the subsequent evolution of disarmament policies in Spain because already in this period general provisions to disarm the civilian population were accompanied by dynamics of selective rearmament. The state endeavoured to bring groups of armed volunteers under its control, capitalising on their activities, selecting their members and endowing them with regulations.[15] While this involved neutralising armed groups by occasionally disarming their members, it also meant that the state absorbed these members, which allowed it to have armed contingents in place to maintain public order and control the demobilisation process.[16] Authorities allowed some groups – free corps (*cuerpos francos*), volunteer militias, local citizen forces – to remain in existence on an extra-legal basis, largely to protect against an undefined 'threat'. These groups were primarily engaged in persecuting political adversaries and the first workers' movement, which was organised under the banner of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) – not only in major cities but also in smaller cities and towns that had citizen corps. These groups were generally made up of local property owners because, as was sometimes noted, it was 'upstanding and good patricians . . . who must take up arms'.[17]

There was an additional reason for the use of volunteer corps that persisted throughout the Restoration period. That police forces were seemingly insufficient for keeping public order had two separate consequences. Firstly, it heightened military involvement in law enforcement, one of the

[13] See Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón, *Milicia Nacional y revolución burguesa. El prototipo madrileño* (Madrid: CSIC, 1978); Eduardo González Calleja, *La razón de la fuerza. Orden público, subversión y violencia en la España de la Restauración (1875–1917)* (Madrid: CSIC, 1998); Assumpta Castillo Cañiz, 'Ciudadanos en armas. Violencia política y construcción del Estado en España y Portugal (1867–1914)', PhD Thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2021.

[14] *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 177, 25 June 1876, 785; n. 226, 13 Aug. 1876, 427–8; n. 227, 14 Aug. 1876, 437.

[15] 'Decreto orgánico de la fuerza ciudadana de los Voluntarios de la Libertad', *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 323, 18 Nov. 1868, 1–3; *Ordenanzas y Reglamento para la formación, régimen, constitución y Servicio de la Milicia Nacional* (Madrid: Imp. Pedro Abienzo, 1873).

[16] On this absorption process, see *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 187, 5 July 1876, 33.

[17] For instance, in June 1871, during the reign of Amadeo I, Eusebi Pascual i Casas, a republican member of the *Cortes* for Barcelona, denounced the 'perfectly illegal' existence of a free corps battalion in Barcelona. The interior minister, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, replied – referring to the IWA – that it had come to a point where 'the work of a certain association increased such that it has frightened respectable men'. Because of this, 'the authorities of Barcelona need to take a somewhat heavy-handed approach and be vigilant for the sake of Barcelona's liberty and prosperity'. *Diario de las Sesiones de Cortes. Congreso de los Diputados*, 3 June 1871, 1394, 1409–18. There are other examples. In late 1874, a 'volunteer militia in defence of order' was founded with the government's complicity, heir to the most conservative segment of the former *Voluntarios de la Libertad*. It was ironically known as the *Voluntarios de la Propiedad*. See González Calleja, *La razón*, 29. The quotation about armed property owners is from Barbastro in northern Aragon and can be found in the municipal archives. Archivo Municipal de Barbastro (AMB), Estantería B, 65.

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defining characteristics of Spain's public order system.[18] Secondly, it was said to oblige citizens to do their part. The latter was reflected in a process of civilian disarmament that was neither one-way nor complete. Already in the years prior to the establishment of the Restoration regime, this process was disrupted on more than one occasion to rearm part of the population, as occurred in 1867, 1869 and also 1874, when some local authorities successfully requested that weapons be returned to 'upstanding citizens' ('*buenos ciudadanos*') so that they could defend themselves.[19] The Restoration regime operated on the basis of this rearmament of the 'loyal classes' and continued the same policy of selective armament, mainly entrusting control over the circulation of weapons and the concession of licences to the discretion of local and regional elites who acted as a filter, arming citizens as suited their interests. Under the abovementioned August 1876 law, licences were granted by civil governors. Article 10 stipulated that mayors could, after notifying the civil governor of the province, authorise the use of any type of weapon under certain circumstances. These included the formation of *somatenes* [groups of armed men], the pursuit of criminals, and prisoner transport.

At the turn of the century, and particularly during the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a steep rise in the number of firearms in the hands of property owners and businessmen, who were increasingly turning to private security. This was reinforced by the state's partial delegation of responsibilities in the realm of security, as seen in the controversial Rural Police Law of 1898 and the creation of Landowning and Tenant Farmers' Communities (*Comunidades de Labradradores*), which had armed guards who were vested with law enforcement authority (as were members of the *Somatén* beginning in 1905).[20] The same occurred with private police forces and the security forces of various businesses, which carried out enforcement duties on company premises. A significant number of these companies had foreign owners and investors. Many businesses, from mining companies like the British-owned Rio Tinto Company Limited to electric companies like *La Canadiense*, chose to adopt this security model, though they continued to call on public police forces in moments of unrest.[21] In addition, organisations whose principal aim was to defend 'public safety' ('*seguridad ciudadana*') were founded, such as the *Liga de Defensa* in Barcelona, founded in 1907, and the *Centro de Defensa Social*, founded in 1903 (which became the *Comité de Defensa Social* in 1908).[22] Subsequently, during the period of maximum social conflict from 1918 to 1920, the institution of the *Somatén* was replicated in other places outside Catalonia, new citizen defence groups were founded in provincial capitals and large leaseholders and new property owners in agricultural areas amassed veritable home arsenals, in some cases creating *somatenes* and irregular militias.[23] These citizen groups were in fact part of a broader phenomenon in Europe, the foundations for which had begun to be laid at the turn of the century.[24] In the post-1917 period, the spectre of the general strike and fears of potential revolutionary contagion decisively encouraged the development of a counterrevolutionary paramilitarism based on two premises: the need for citizen defence and growing dissatisfaction with the liberal system, whose use of coercive powers was deemed insufficient.[25]

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18 On the militarisation of public order, see Manuel Ballbé, *Orden público y militarismo en la España constitucional (1812–1983)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1983).

19 Archivo General Militar de Segovia (AGMSg), 2ª División, 1ª Sección, Leg. 95; AGMSg, 2ª División, 1ª Sección, Leg. 81; AMB, Estantería B, 65; Estantería B, 66. It is also telling that the provisions to disarm civilians were declared not to apply in Spain's overseas territories, where policing the enslaved population in the sugar-producing region had been left to the private sector and volunteer forces had existed since 1855. AGMSg, 2ª División, 1ª Sección, Leg. 95.

20 Law collected in José Llagaría Ballester, *Comunidades de Labradores (Policía Rural, Ley de 8 de julio de 1898)* (València: García y Suay, 1903). On granting *Somatén* members law enforcement authority, see *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de la Guerra*, n. 209, 22 Sept. 1905, 1.

21 This was denounced, for instance, in 'Necesidad que se impone', *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 Jan. 1919, 1.

22 On the *Liga*, see *La Publicidad*, 23 Feb. 1907 and González Calleja, *La razón*, 393; on the *Centro* and the *Comité*, see González Calleja and Del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada*, 126.

23 González Calleja, *El máuser*, 42.

24 For a comprehensive discussion of this armed mobilisation in the years prior to the First World War, see Millan, 'Belle Epoque'.

25 González Calleja and Del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada*, 20–42.

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Concerns about the quantity of guns in circulation increased only at the turn of the century, leading to the adoption of some preventative measures. In the first decade of the twentieth century, there were calls for the Spanish government to increase penalties for the unauthorised carrying and use of weapons, establish a system for monitoring gun manufacturers, make it difficult to obtain new licences and reinforce measures to curb the manufacture and sale of banned weapons (which was so common as to be deemed 'scandalous' in 1907).[26] Still, no changes were made to penalties. As late as early 1914, the General Directorate of Security reaffirmed the regulations that were in force on the sale and use of all categories of weapons, considering that these existing provisions sufficed. Authorities needed only to 'monitor the implementation of what has already been ordered'.[27] Nevertheless, gun shops and dealers were asked to hand over firearms when authorities believed unrest might be imminent, and starting in the mid-1910s there was increased surveillance and investigation into the place of manufacture and intended recipients of guns found in the hands of certain individuals. Authorities likewise increasingly inquired as to whether dealers in various cities were in possession of firearms, and if so in what quantities.[28] Communications between the Interior Ministry and provincial governors also reflected the perceived need to enact specific legislation and, as occurred in late 1918, to implement temporary preventative measures 'until a special provision on the circulation of guns is enacted'.[29]

It was the Conservative government led by Manuel Allendesalazar (December 1919–May 1921) that acted to strengthen legislative measures to control the circulation of weapons, but no specific law was passed. Instead, the tax reform law of 29 April 1920 established compulsory paperwork to demonstrate that weapons were legally owned or possessed. In addition to the licence requirement, it created a special 'ownership certificate' ('*guía de pertenencia*'), which was to list the type of weapon, the factory where it had been manufactured, its serial number and any other information that might be needed to distinguish it from similar weapons. The law included another equally important provision: the aforementioned certificate had to be endorsed by the Civil Guard.[30] In mid-September, the Spanish government issued a Royal Decree to regulate state intervention in the manufacture, importation and circulation of weapons and bring other applicable provisions on gun licences together in a single piece of legislation. These regulations, introduced by the last government under prime minister Eduardo Dato, appeared to be aimed at stopping the trafficking of handguns, which was spurring *pistolerismo* (armed conflict between anarcho-syndicalists, on the one hand, and conservative trade unionists and other pro-employer groups, on the other), particularly on the streets of Barcelona.[31] Dato was himself assassinated with a firearm in early March 1921, thus joining the list of victims of magnicides that had taken place in Spain since the late nineteenth century. At any rate, the new decree failed to have the desired effect of standardising legislation in this area. Subsequent Royal Orders and ministerial instructions on how to interpret the new legislation created a situation of 'great confusion', as the onslaught of communications from civil governors to the Interior Ministry

[26] The need to more severely penalise the unauthorised use of weapons, with particular reference to them being carried by 'evildoers and fickle persons' ('*malhechores y las gentes ligeras*'), in *Memoria elevada al Gobierno de S. M. en 16 de septiembre de 1901 por el Fiscal del Tribunal Supremo D. Juan Montilla y Adán* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Revista de Legislación, 1901). The need for '*vigilancia especial e interna*' at arms factories in an undated turn-of-the-century report, AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 63 (1), Exp. 11. The scandalous manufacture and sale of firearms and the increased efficacy of compulsory measures 'the more obstacles are placed in the way of the concession of licences to use weapons' in a confidential Interior Ministry reported dated 29 Sept. 1907, AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 63, Exp. 25. In 1905, the sale of standard-issue firearm models used by the Civil Guard, the police and the military to private citizens was halted. AGMSg, 2ª División, 1ª Sección, Leg. 83.

[27] *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 59, 2 Feb. 1914, 525.

[28] Files found in AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 1 y Exp. 2 contain examples of firearms confiscation in Oviedo in Nov. 1918 and the verification of the existence of weapons in the possession of dealers in the city of Badajoz.

[29] Official telegram from the Interior Ministry to the civil governor of Ourense, 19 Dec. 1918, AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 1.

[30] *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 121, 30 Apr. 1920, 330–69. Spain's Civil Guard is a gendarmerie force.

[31] Eduardo González Calleja, 'La política de orden público en la Restauración', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 20 (2008), 118. The regulations were published in the *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 260, 16 Sept. 1920, 1024–6.

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asking for clarification regarding particular aspects of the law and its practical effects would appear to confirm.[32]

Judging by the contents of some of these communications and the successive regulations that were issued thereafter, the provisions found in the September 1920 legislation fell far short of providing a satisfactory solution. Some governors placed special emphasis on the number of guns in the hands of trade unionists, which had been purchased without a licence from businesses engaged in this form of clandestine commerce, including businesses that sold foodstuffs. This is what the governor of the province of Cádiz (Andalusia) worriedly reported in January 1921, noting that a large number of Browning pistols were circulating among local trade unionists. Moreover, this coincided with an alleged campaign of anonymous threats sent to various employers. The governor bitterly criticised 'the lack of zeal of local authorities and the Civil Guard, despite not only recent but also earlier provisions and repeated warnings about the purchase and sale of weapons'. He added that this 'amply explains why the terrorists of Spain so easily find the means to carry out their crimes'.[33] A contrasting view was expressed by the civil governor of Oviedo (Asturias), who was elated at the results of the measure approved in September, deeming it a 'colossal' success in his province. He added that crime had fallen significantly after authorities collected firearms as a result of the enactment of the law. The governor claimed that the measure had been unanimously applauded by members of all social classes because 'they all say: THIS IS A MEASURE WHICH OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED A LONG TIME AGO'.[34]

Indeed, evidence on the number of weapons seized in the months after the decree of September 1920 went into effect suggests that the volume of circulation up until that point had been substantial. However, the true extent of weapons in circulation was at times difficult to determine. As some civil governors pointed out, prior to the new decree security employees had been accountable to municipal courts, making it difficult to track this information.[35] With regard to the widespread circulation of handguns without a licence, it is certainly worth noting that the fines imposed in some provinces in accordance with the decree referred to the constant discovery of such weapons in rural areas and small towns.[36]

Additional key aspects must be taken into account in relation to the notable spread and circulation of weapons in Spain. Firstly, the country was home to a significant number of weapons manufacturers, as became apparent on occasions such as the attempt to create a sort of gun manufacturing monopoly in 1924. Numerous voices were raised in opposition to this proposal and in defence of 'private manufacturers'.[37] Secondly, gun shops could be found throughout Spain. In January 1921, a number of Basque manufacturers requested that they be authorised to dispatch handguns not only to dealers in Madrid and provincial capitals, but also to shopkeepers in small cities and towns who had

[32] In this regard, see the communications found in AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2.

[33] Official telegram from the civil governor of Cádiz to the Interior Ministry, 31 Jan. 1921, AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2.

[34] Undated telegram, AHN, FC–M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2, capital letters in the original.

[35] It is also telling that, in some cases, when information was requested about firearms, the response was that it could not be provided because they had already left the factory when the decree went into effect, meaning it was impossible to know to whom they had been sent. One such case is the investigation that was conducted after a trade unionist's gun was confiscated in Salamanca in Aug. 1921. An identical case had occurred in Málaga two months earlier. From the moment the decree went into effect and until the end of 1920, the civil government of Málaga reported a total of 237 intercepted firearms in the provincial capital alone. Communications to the Interior Ministry from the civil governor of Salamanca, 10 Aug. 1921, and from the civil governor of Málaga, 9 and 10 June 1921, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2.

[36] The available data from A Coruña, in Galicia, are significant. Each month from Jan. to Aug. 1921 some fifteen fines were issued and some fifteen people were imprisoned for two weeks (and these numbers are significantly lower than the actual total, given that no data is available for many days). Furthermore, the names of some groups that were active in the areas surrounding towns with no more than 4000 inhabitants are rather telling. For instance, an armed group active near Sariñena, in the province of Huesca, was known as '*Los de la Browning*' ('the Browning pistol men'). Book of criminal sentences, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Huesca (AHPH), J2575.

[37] Letter to the undersecretary of the Interior Ministry, 13 June 1924, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

previously sold them. The manufacturers noted that the volume of sales in such shops was 'extraordinarily important'.[38] The third aspect that must be taken into account is the active domestic arms trade. There were many investigations into sizeable shipments of handguns to different parts of Spain. In some cases, orders were even given to temporarily halt shipments.[39] This active domestic trade generated fraudulent practices, which is a fourth aspect to consider. Sales were carried out without meeting legal requirements and authorities uncovered large numbers of unbranded weapons with no serial number, pistols that had not been declared or had repeated serial numbers and shipments of guns that had been declared as ironmongery products, machines or foodstuffs. In addition, the theft of guns before they reached their destination was a worrying and increasingly common phenomenon.[40]

Another illegal means of bringing guns into Spain that contributed to the overall supply was cross-border smuggling, especially from France. In the 1880s, authorities in both Spain and France were already concerned by news of clandestine caches, seized ammunition, the discovery of arsenals and the smuggling of guns through border crossing points.[41] Smuggling continued in the early twentieth century and increased at certain times – starting in 1909. By the early 1920s, there were recurrent reports that hundreds of pistols, presumably intended for Barcelona trade unionists, had entered the country. The governor of the province stated in early March 1923 that the majority of unionised workers were armed with pistols which had been smuggled across the border and were 'mostly domestically manufactured'.[42] Maritime routes were also used to bring firearms to Spain. In 1922, authorities expressed concern about the arrival of guns on German ships, whose crews were allegedly transporting pistols which they then sold in Spanish ports. Nevertheless, the governor of the province of Barcelona informed the Interior Ministry that it was impossible to police such shipments to the extent that might have been desirable due to insufficient means. Authorities in the Canary Islands, another hotspot for gun trafficking, said the same in May 1922.[43]

It appears that Barcelona was at the vanguard in the application of measures which subsequently served as the basis for Spain-wide legislation on carrying, using, selling and transporting guns. A month before the decree of September 1920, in early August, the province's civil governor issued a proclamation containing provisions to make it more difficult to acquire firearms and ammunition. The contents of this proclamation are illustrative of the ease with which existing arms legislation could be flouted. It noted that 'the prohibition on weapons being sold to those who are not in possession of the required licence is not working effectively enough in Barcelona' and indicated that 'a

[38] It is worth noting that in 1901 such a minor town as the abovementioned Barbastro was home to four gun shops, whose stock was indeed not limited to hunting rifles. AMB, Estantería B, 129.

[39] AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 1. Examples include guns shipped to Bousés, located on the border with Portugal in the Galician province of Ourense, and the shipment of fifty pistols and sixteen revolvers to a citizen in Osuna, in the province of Seville.

[40] For example, in May 1921, the general directorate of the Civil Guard in Eibar reported more than 1500 'clandestinely produced' revolvers, and there are numerous references to stolen guns in the file from that same year. AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2.

[41] On this cross-border trafficking, see the abundant information in González Calleja, *La razón*. There is also documentation on gun trafficking between Spanish Carlists and supporters of the recently deposed Portuguese monarchy in 1912 in AHN, Diversos, Archivo Carlista, 103, Exp. 3. On the lucrative arms trade on a global scale in the context of the emergence of industrial capitalism, see Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[42] Telegram from the general director of security to the civil governor of Barcelona relaying information about 200 pistols at the French border in the province of Girona that were to be sent to trade unionists in the city of Barcelona. AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2; the quotation from Mar. 1923 in AHN FC, M. Interior, A, 58, Exp. 13.

[43] Telegram from the Interior Ministry to the governor of Barcelona, 18 May 1922, and telegram from the acting governor to the General Director of Public Order, 26 Oct. 1922; encrypted telegram from the government delegate in the Canary Islands to the Interior Ministry, 19 May 1922, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 3. As was acknowledged in subsequent communications between authorities, the exportation of weapons via the port of Barcelona had also been used to distribute all sorts of weapons in the city. Undated confidential memo, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 5.

criminal need only be in possession of a licence, acquired anywhere at all with deceit or stolen, to equip an entire gang with them'.[44]

It was in the summer of 1923 that a bill on the possession of handguns was finally debated in the *Cortes*. It was passed in early August. The new law contained only six articles and two additional articles. It was a temporary law, which was to remain in effect for no more than two years and apply only in certain parts of Spain, to be determined by the government. The same day, the Ministry of Grace and Justice issued a Royal Decree specifying that the law would apply only in the provinces of Barcelona, Biscay, Valencia and Zaragoza, which shows that the new provisions were mainly aimed at disarming the organised labour movement.[45] This law was the most comprehensive specific regulation enacted since the beginning of the Restoration, after a more than fifty-year absence of legislation in this area. The combination of the phenomenon of *pistolerismo* and awareness that handguns were widely available and that there was a problem with fraudulent practices in manufacturing and selling them convinced the Spanish government that such a move was necessary. Overall, this amounted to a reestablishment of centralised control, but these policies were simultaneously accompanied by certain practices of selective rearmament.

Arming 'the Best Classes of Citizens'

Claudio López Bru, 2nd Marquess of Comillas, who financed and organised the *Somatén* in Barcelona and Madrid, stated during the revolutionary general strike of the summer of 1917 that 'upstanding citizens ought to act as policemen at certain moments'.[46] López Bru was in fact restating an idea which had repeatedly been put forth in the Catalan *Somatén*'s official bulletin since the late nineteenth century: the solution to the supposed scarcity of public police forces was to 'arm property [owners]'.[47] It is possible to identify numerous actions taken by the state which were aimed at arming property owners and protecting them and their assets. These ranged from facilitating the entry from abroad of weapons intended for certain members of the nobility and politicians, to urgently arming certain segments of society, even if this sometimes meant disregarding existing regulations, as in the case of bank employees.[48] Perhaps even more telling is the data on the concession of gun licences. In the case of Barcelona in late 1919 and 1920, which was mentioned in the introduction to this article, the many applications presented by employers on behalf of numerous groups of employees stand out. For instance, Juan Miró y Trepat, one of the leading figures in the Federation of Employers,[49] applied for licences for thirty-four of his employees in late September 1919, citing the prevailing 'exceptional circumstances'. Other employers made similar applications, such as the heads of the *Fabra y Coats* textile factory, who requested licences for some fifteen employees whom they considered 'worthy of obtaining the necessary permit'. Several of these employees were foreign nationals. Another noteworthy case, which was also mentioned at the beginning of this article, is that of *La Canadiense*'s subsidiary, Ebro Irrigation and Power, which applied for as many as fifty-one licences between December 1919 and June 1920. It was half-owned by *Energía Eléctrica de Cataluña*, which itself applied for some twenty licences in October. In addition to these applications, it is significant that the governor ordered a total of forty-five people, including eminent figures such as four members of the Conde y Gómez del

[44] *D. FEDERICO CARLOS BAS, Gobernador civil de la provincia. Hago saber* (Barcelona: Imp. Casa de Caridad, 2 Aug. 1920).

[45] *Gaceta de Madrid*, n. 217, 5 Aug. 1923, 546, 549 (slight correction in n. 219, 7 Aug. 1923, 562).

[46] Juan José Castillo, *El sindicalismo amarillo en España. Aportación al estudio del catolicismo social español (1912–1923)* (Madrid: Cuadernos para el diálogo, 1977), 10.

[47] *Paz y Tregua*, May 1890, 1.

[48] Examples are cited in AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exps. 1, 2, 3, 4. Furthermore, royal orders dated 29 Sept. 1920 and 7 Dec. 1920 reserved the right for members of the Civil Guard to possess weapons in addition to their standard-issue firearms. Civil guards became a market of interest for the arms industry.

[49] Miró y Trepat belonged to the most intransigent segment of employers and was linked to the gangs of gunmen led by the former policeman Bravo Portillo and the man known as the Baron of Köening, both of which enjoyed the protection of the military. For more information on these groups, see Del Rey Reguillo, *Propietarios y patronos*, 477–522.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Olmo family, be urgently granted provisional permits to carry weapons. In many cases, political and military figures provided endorsements for the prompt issuance of gun licences to other people. Such recommendations were given by the captain-general of the region, Civil Guard officials, the mayor of Barcelona, and members, leaders and financial backers of the *Somatén*. The latter included the Count of Güell and the Count of Montseny, a financier and member of the *Cortes* who belonged to the National Monarchist Union (*Unión Monárquica Nacional*) party.[50]

This evidence points to a sort of selective rearmament of private citizens, also by means of the development of the state's own legal mechanisms – the concession of licences. The figure of the armed citizen was thus tied to the existing relationship between the defence of public order, on the one hand, and personal defence and the defence of private property, on the other. The question is to what extent arming citizens to defend order was also, or primarily, a way of ensuring their personal safety and protecting their belongings. Conversely, and paradoxically, the cases in which there was open talk of 'differentiating between [weapons] which are for the defence of non-suspicious persons and those who may have them in order to carry out attacks', with no mention of whether the people in question were in possession of a licence, provide a picture of a rearmament that adhered not to legal measures but to ideological and organisational criteria.[51] At any rate, again with regard to the concession of licences, it is likely no minor detail that notices from the Interior Ministry primarily emphasised 'applicants' ideas', as was indicated in March 1923.[52]

In the case of Barcelona, this 'rearmament' evidently took on notably different dimensions. In the midst of escalating violence linked to the phenomenon of *pistolerismo*, one observer, referring to members of the *Somatén*, resolutely affirmed that 'not only the police and the army, but also the best classes of citizens are taking an active part in the fight'. These citizens were 'armed and doing exercises in military formation'. The same observer spoke of these groups' 'unlimited authority to use weapons', noting that citizens who had previously not participated in episodes of social conflict had taken an active part in these armed drills: 'even the rector of the University of Barcelona, a dignified and elderly gentleman . . . who, under normal circumstances, would not have hurt a fly, armed himself to the teeth and took command of a company of elegantly dressed youths carrying brand new rifles'.[53] Following the deployment of the *Somatén* in Barcelona during the 1919 strike, sectors linked to Carlist ultraconservatism created the *Sindicatos Libres*. Subsequently, *Defensa Ciudadana* – which later became the Madrid *Somatén* – the Zaragoza *Somatén* and *Unión Ciudadana* in Madrid were founded. The following year, *Acción Ciudadana de Barcelona* was formed in the Catalan capital in response to – according to its instigators – the 'nearly complete lack of effective police and security services'.[54] Meanwhile, the *Requeté*, an armed faction of the Carlist absolutist movement, remained active.[55]

[50] AHDGC, Fondos Antiguos, Leg. 265. At the same time, there was news of the arrival of firearms for Barcelona industrialists. See *La Publicidad*, 4 Sept. 1920, 6, which reported that in the past few days 'several shipments for this city's industrialists' had arrived.

[51] This occurred when shots were fired from a car in Los Corrales (pop. 3500, province of Santander) on 2 July 1921, after which police forces were ordered to investigate who was in possession of firearms in neighbouring villages and at the local nail factory. AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2. On the delicate matter of armed individuals who organised themselves into groups and associations, see Millan, 'Belle Epoque', 610–3; Eric Fournier, *La critique des armes: Une histoire d'objets révolutionnaires sous la IIIe République* (Montreuil: Libertalia, 2019).

[52] AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4.

[53] González Calleja, *El máuser*, 83.

[54] Joaquín Durán Ventosa, *Conferencia leída en el Salón de Ciento de las Casas Consistoriales el día 30 de diciembre de 1920 para dar a conocer el proyecto de constitución de la entidad popular Acción Ciudadana de Barcelona iniciado por Don Joaquín Durán Ventura* (Barcelona: El Protector, 1921).

[55] For more information about these groups, see González Calleja and Del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada*. On the *Requeté*, see also Eduardo González Calleja, 'Paramilitarització i violència política a l'Espanya de primer terç de segle: el requeté tradicionalista (1900–1936)', *Revista de Girona*, 147 (1991), 69–76. On the *Sindicatos Libres* in Barcelona, see the recent article by Juan Cristóbal Marinello Bonnefoy and Arturo Zoffmann Rodríguez, 'A Proletarian Turf War: The Rise and Fall of Barcelona's Sindicatos Libres, 1919–1923', *International Review of Social History*, 66, 2 (2021), 243–71.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Because these citizen organisations acted as containment groups, they were frequently positively received by authorities. This had already occurred in the past. Fernando Soldevilla had said as much in his 1915 political yearbook, writing that the Carlist *Requeté* had been 'viewed sympathetically since it was created, because it contained and reduced the audacity of radicals and separatists'.[56] The organisation's members likewise claimed that this had been their role since its creation:

> with our might we were guarantors of elections . . . in cases of social disturbance and revolutionary threat we stood as zealous custodians of order willing to give our lives to prevent another week like that of July 1909, ah! We *Jaimistas* were the first, the only to receive praise.[57]

There were frequent references to firearms and advertisements in the press linked to these groups, which even held raffles for handguns, as the Carlist weekly *La Trinchera* had been doing since 1912.[58] By this point – and not without reason – radical republicans were already denouncing members of the *Requeté* for their tendency to 'under authorities' noses . . . patrol in uniform, practice target shooting, distribute and raffle off Browning pistols and plan killings'.[59] Soldevilla also noted in his yearbook that members of the *Requeté* had at times 'caused concern due to their violent interventions in public events'. Despite efforts to hide the extent to which these groups were linked to those in power, their members' own words provide evidence that they continued to be instrumentalised by authorities and other political factions.[60]

In June 1920, one of the topics discussed at the 14th Congress of the General Union of Workers (*Unión General de Trabajadores*; UGT) in Madrid was precisely the armed activities of groups like the *Somatén* and the recently created *Unión Ciudadana*. Participants resolved to demand that the Spanish government dissolve these organisations, which they called 'extra-legal and honorary gendarmerie[s]', within a month. If this failed to happen, the UGT would provide its members with 'the guns and means of defence which the government allows *Unión Ciudadana* and the *somatenes*' so that they could fight off attacks.[61] In early September, the CNT and the UGT issued a joint statement in which they denounced the actions of the government and the bourgeoisie, claiming that authorities had 'legalised the bourgeoisie's weapons and given it special rights which amount to clear impunity for crime'.[62] Spanish authorities' concerns about and response to complaints about the 'civic guards' (*guardias civícas*) offer plenty of evidence of outright bias. In 1921, for instance, the foreign minister informed the interior minister of the activities of the Spanish ambassador to Switzerland. The ambassador had an infiltrated agent who was to attend the Socialist Congress in Lucerne in September with the principal mission of preventing Spanish socialists' motion that 'action be taken in their favour and in opposition to Spanish civic guards' from being discussed.[63]

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the interests of these groups and those of state authorities sometimes converged or that there was overt complicity between them. This includes legal prac-

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56 Fernando Soldevilla, *El año político. 1915* (Madrid: Imprenta de Ricardo F. de Rojas, 1916), 337–8.

57 '¡Jaimistas, en pie!', *La Trinchera*, 21 July 1912, 2. Carlists were known as *Jaimistas* during this period because the Carlist claimant to the Spanish throne from 1909 to 1931 was Jaime de Borbón y de Borbón-Parma. The quotation also refers to the so-called 'Tragic Week' of late July 1909 in Barcelona.

58 See the editions dated 7, 14, 21 and 25 July 1912; 3, 11 and 25 Aug. 1912; 1, 8, 15 and 22 Sept. 1912 and 4 Jan. 1914. The handgun was given away with the corresponding licence (in the 11 Aug. 1912 edition it was mentioned that in order to obtain a raffle number it was necessary to provide proof of membership in a Carlist organisation). On shooting competitions organised by *requetés* (to which 'Veterans', among other groups, were invited), see the 26 Dec. 1915 and 9 and 23 Jan. 1916 editions. This weekly was the voice of the most radical traditionalist sector in Barcelona.

59 Quoted in Soldevilla, *El año político*, 337.

60 'Con que a derechas ¿eh?', *La Trinchera*, 20 Mar. 1920, 3.

61 'Contra las agresiones de los somatenes y la Unión Ciudadana', *El Socialista*, 29 June 1920, 2.

62 *A todos los trabajadores españoles y a la opinión pública*, Madrid, 3 Sept. 1920, in Javier Aisa and Víctor M. Arbeloa, *Historia de la UGT* (Madrid: Zero, 1975), 178–9.

63 AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tices (the concession of licences and privileges to carry guns) and illegal practices (licences were granted to certain citizens and groups of citizens fraudulently and without legal obstacles, and authorities failed to act in cases of illicit possession or use of a weapon). The most paradigmatic example of this connivance remains the work of the duo made up of Miguel Arlegui, the head of the Barcelona police, and Severiano Martínez Anido, who served as the province's civil governor from November 1920 to October 1922 and whose appointment had the active support of the Federation of Employers.[64] There were other examples, too. When the *Sindicato Libre* in the city of Reus was founded in December 1920, the interim civil governor of the province of Tarragona, in southern Catalonia, sent the group's promotional leaflet to Millán de Priego, head of the public order section at the Interior Ministry, along with an explanation in writing of 'the method used to do away with the *Sindicato Único*'.[65] By contrast, in early April 1923, the interior minister expressed concern upon receiving information suggesting that the police in cities such as Manresa were indirectly involved in attacks.[66] There otherwise appears to have been a great degree of institutional complicity that extended to the judicial system, as can be seen in the distrust that the actions of the courts elicited among authorities in 1923. With efforts to try to pacify Barcelona in full swing, the interior minister told the province's governor in early April to inform him immediately 'if judges refuse to prosecute and to issue arrest warrants without bail'. He added in no uncertain terms that it was imperative that 'the arrests of these gangs of gunmen *begin* as soon as possible', a demand which was to be repeated over the course of the following months.[67]

In any case, policies to manage public order also depended largely on who was in charge of law enforcement. The declaration of a state of war handed power to military authorities. This was compounded by the army's eagerness to intervene in matters of public order. This created friction between civilian and military authority. In February 1920, the captain general of Catalonia, Milans del Bosch, was forced to resign for acting independently of the government and fully aligning himself with employers. However, the appointment of Martínez Anido, then serving as Barcelona's military governor, as the province's civil governor in November 1920 meant that civilian authority was again clearly inhibited. Martínez Anido continued the counterrevolutionary policy deployed by military authorities. Milans del Bosch's successors as captain general did not interfere with the new civil governor's activities. General Primo de Rivera was named captain general of Catalonia in March 1922, further facilitating these activities and continuing them.[68]

Primary sources appear to confirm that these groups had access to a significant number of firearms. In mid-August 1923, two Catalan men showed up at a factory in Eibar asking to purchase nearly a thousand automatic rifles in cash without complying with legal requirements. After the manufacturer refused, they declared that they could 'obtain as many weapons as they want from France, of which they already had an arsenal'. In early October, a nearly identical purchase again set off alarm bells. In what appeared to be an attempt to obtain favourable treatment, the buyer, who had been involved in the fraudulent weapons trade for some time, told the police that he had ties to Ramon Sales, former president of the *Sindicato Libre* (and also a former member of the *Requeté*), and Oliver, leader of the Carlist youth organisation *Juventud Jaimista*.[69] At the same time, authorities were forced to

[64] See Del Rey Reguillo, *Propietarios y patronos*, 524–53; González Calleja, *El máuser*, 181–9.

[65] The governor added that one of the *Sindicato Único* members mentioned in the leaflet was 'the one from whom the Star pistol I gave you was seized'. Letter dated 2 Dec. 1920, AHN, FC, M. Interior, A, 58, Exp. 7.

[66] Telegram from the interior minister to the civil governor of Barcelona, 8 Apr. 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 58, Exp. 13.

[67] Telegram from the interior minister to the civil governor of Barcelona, 6 Apr. 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 58, Exp. 13. Italics mine.

[68] See Xavier Casals Meseguer, 'Auge y declive del "partido militar" de Barcelona (1898–1936)', *Iberic@l*, 4 (2013), 163–80; Francisco Romero Salvadó, *The Foundations of Civil War: Revolution, Social Conflict and Reaction in Liberal Spain, 1916–1923*, London: Routledge, 2008); by the same author, *Political Comedy and Social Tragedy: Spain, a Laboratory of Social Conflict, 1892–1921* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2020).

[69] Folder entitled 'Telegramas referentes a denuncia de que por dos catalanes se pretendió adquirir en la fábrica de Gárate y Anitua, de Eibar, unos mil rifles de repetición', AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4.

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acknowledge that, despite being illegal gambling, gun raffles continued to take place.[70] Meanwhile, the number of weapons in the hands of *Somatén* members increased significantly from 1918 onwards, especially in the province of Barcelona.[71]

In spring 1923, the conflictive situation on the streets of Barcelona worsened to the point that there was a significant risk of a return to the levels of violence seen in earlier periods. Heavily armed groups could not be controlled by authorities. These circumstances caused the Spanish government led by Manuel García Prieto to take action.[72] In communications sent to the civil governor of Barcelona, the interior minister called for equanimity and strongly insisted on the need to pacify the situation. He referred to the problem of gunmen without making distinctions between different sides and presented himself as a mediator between groups. In late March, he stated that it was 'essential that an active campaign against the gunmen be *initiated* as soon as possible, because if action is not taken quickly, we will find that this ends extraordinarily badly'. In a telegram sent immediately thereafter, he insisted on the 'need to proceed with utmost urgency with the arrests of the gunmen. . . . it is necessary to *begin* to carry them out'.[73] In mid-May, he argued that it was 'necessary to carry out the general disarmament of the *Sindicatos*', referring to both the anarcho-syndicalist *Sindicato Único* and the conservative *Sindicato Libre.* He further indicated the need to monitor establishments that sold guns. This meant strengthening institutional intervention, which by this point appeared extremely difficult, as the governor noted in July, lamenting that 'the violence of trade unionism, White and Red, that of the *Requeté*, that of separatism, are becoming exacerbated and increasing, while not a single voice is being raised in support of official interventions . . . life in Barcelona must be brought under government control'.[74]

It was difficult to find a balance, particularly given that up until this point the benefits of the conflict and the tolerance of authorities had been on the side of the Federation of Employers and those who had fought against anarcho-syndicalism in the streets. But a telegram from the interior minister to the civil governor of Barcelona in early June 1923 suggested that the tide was turning. Stressing that he wanted to establish the principle of authority, the minister stated that he was certain that 'the working class and the class which leads trade unions will appreciate the search for gunmen'. For this reason, he thought the governor ought to, 'in the way you think most advisable, *give the impression that this is being done*'.[75] Shortly thereafter, the governor revealed authorities' complicity with anti-anarchist *pistolerismo* when he stated that all licences issued up until that point had to be declared expired because information had been received that 'more than 80 gunmen are in possession of guns, having not been asked for their police records, and there is no record of them at Police Headquarters, where many other licences signed in blank have been found'. Still, the governor was adamant that disarming part of the population was not a good idea because, 'given the prevailing unrest in Barcelona, it does not seem at all wise to prevent citizens who only want to defend themselves and who might be more or less under threat from using this handgun'.[76]

[70] Telegram from the civil governor of Barcelona to the interior minister, 3 Mar. 1923, AHN FC, M. Interior, A, 58, Exp. 13.

[71] Del Rey Reguillo, *Propietarios y patronos*, 638–40. In addition, the type of firearms changed, with an increase in military weapons and a decrease in hunting weapons. It should be also noted that in many cases the same men belonged to the *Somatén* and the *Sindicato Libre*, precisely because membership in the former made it easy for them to obtain guns.

[72] According to Del Rey Reguillo, there was a 'stronger than ever' resurgence in violence between trade unionists, *Propietarios y patronos*, 600.

[73] Italics are mine in both quotations.

[74] Telegrams from the interior minister to the civil governor of Barcelona, 31 Mar. 1923, 1 Apr. 1923 and 20 May 1923; telegram from the governor to the minister, 1 July 1923. AHN, FC M° Interior A, 58, Exp. 13. On this question, see also, under different historical circumstances, the dynamics of civilian disarmament in Italy following the Second World War in Marco Maria Aterrano, 'Civilian Disarmament: Public Order and the Restoration of State Authority in Italy's Postwar Transition', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56, 2 (2021), 386–410. The author states that 'disarmament was instrumental in reshaping Italian institutions in accordance with the imperative of regaining control over liberated territories', 390.

[75] Telegram from the interior minister to the civil governor of Barcelona, 6 June 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4. The italics are mine.

[76] Telegram from the civil governor of Barcelona to the interior minister, 18 July 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Spanish government likewise expressed its misgivings about a complete disarmament. Only three hours after the civil governor of Barcelona sent this telegram, the interior minister sent him an urgent encrypted reply informing him that the socialist minority in the *Cortes* was proposing that all gun licences be declared expired and no new licences be granted in the areas of Spain where the new gun bill was to apply. The socialists' proposal aimed to make possible the implementation of the new legislation (which was finally passed in early August), given the high number of guns in circulation. The minister expressed his fears regarding this proposal:

> . . . what they want is, as long as the law remains in effect in Catalonia, not only to prohibit the issuance of licences, declaring them expired, to the *sindicato único*, but also to at the same time extend this measure to the *Sindicato Libre*, *requetés* and *somatenes*, who will only be able to use long guns.

He added, 'as this is a delicate matter, the government wishes to know your opinion . . . and the advantages and disadvantages'.[77]

It seems that the measures introduced did have an impact on how many people could carry weapons. Evidence that points in this direction includes a notice that the civil governor of Barcelona intended to publish in the press in mid-August 1923, advising citizens to use alarm whistles like those used by bank employees and tax collectors. The reason given for this advice was that 'the entry into effect of the new law on handguns will greatly reduce the number of people who can use them'.[78] On 15 September 1923, just two days after the military coup led by Miguel Primo de Rivera that ushered in the dictatorship of 1923–30, a piece published in *El Eco Patronal* complained of the alleged situation of defencelessness into which 'upstanding citizens' had been plunged: 'the government's key measures for dealing with the problem have consisted in searching honourable persons and preventing them from carrying guns'. The author of the piece added: 'If I were a minister, I would make it compulsory for respectable people to use a gun'.[79]

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have explored the dynamics of selective rearmament in Spain, a state which initially had scant financial resources, experienced serious difficulties in founding and developing a national police force, and acknowledged that many guns were in circulation – some of which were unlicensed. Because these dynamics were accompanied by a gradual process by which the state's administrative and repressive apparatus was expanded, it would be incorrect to speak simply of a weak state or one incapable of managing a high volume of gun circulation. While it is true that concerns were repeatedly expressed about this issue, it is also true that guns were not initially seen as a threat to the Restoration regime's stability. This was largely due to the absence of a clear parallel power in competition with the state, be it the private sector or any of the political movements which defied authorities. Indeed, the wide circulation of guns was to some extent the result of a selective rearmament of part of the population, which at times served to strengthen the state's ability to protect the 'citizenry' and private property. Alongside a growing tendency to delegate policing to private actors, these processes amounted to something of a state monopoly on the use of force by other means.

The problem was that rearmament eventually become a clear threat to public order, a problem which was exacerbated by an increase in gun possession among the working class, as occurred throughout Europe. Faced with this situation, the state opted for general disarmament and acted to

[77] Urgent encrypted telegram from the interior minister, 18 July 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4.

[78] Notice intended for distribution to the press, cited in a telegram from the civil governor of Barcelona to the interior minister, 13 Aug. 1923, AHN, FC M° Interior A, 3, Exp. 4.

[79] Quoted in Del Rey Reguillo, *Propietarios y patronos*, 617. According to González Calleja, *El máuser*, 91n, the role of the newspaper *El Eco Patronal* in the foundation of *Defensa Ciuadadana* and the *Somatén* in Madrid should not be overlooked.

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centralise and claim exclusive jurisdiction over public order. While previously there had been something of an equilibrium – the fact that 'everyone' was armed did not necessarily mean an increase in violence – this equilibrium was shattered by the direct action of Barcelona trade unionists, particularly at the end of the 1910s. It was then that the state truly tried to curb gun possession, albeit while continuing to exhibit a clear class bias, particularly in the case of certain authorities at the local and provincial levels. The actions of militias, *somatenes*, *requetés*, *Sindicatos Libres* and even hired gunmen had previously been considered an occasionally valid means of countering trade unionist 'terror'. But, by the early 1920s, the violence committed by these groups came to represent an unsustainable threat to public order. Their actions were perceived as potentially subversive, rather than complicit with the deployment of legal and extra-legal means of maintaining public order. This change led to both increased legislative restrictions and stricter and more impartial law enforcement, which aimed to position the state on a middle ground between the organised labour movement, the *Sindicatos Libres* and employers, though this equilibrium always leaned towards the demands of the most belligerent segment of the latter. Starting in 1920, a series of gun control provisions were enacted, each more restrictive than the last. This was the result of the widespread availability of guns, revolutionary movements better equipped (and more motivated) to put their ideas into action, the emergence of the *Sindicatos Libres*, employers' organisations that presented a more united front – which increased their defensive and offensive aggressiveness – and the state's efforts to regain a central role that was difficult to attain.

The study of what occurred in Spain, which experienced high levels of gun violence in the interwar period, provides valuable insight into gun control policies in this period more generally. One particularity of the Spanish case was the existence of more structured forms of gun control than in other European countries prior to the First World War, at least formally speaking. This legal framework, which was comparatively ahead of its time, did not necessarily pose an obstacle to the diffusion of guns. Rather, it was the instrument that made possible the disarmament and selective rearmament of the population using both legal and illegal means. The introduction of more restrictive measures in the 1920s made these policies apparent and highlighted their contradictions at a time of heightened social instability, when there was a high volume of guns in circulation – mostly domestically manufactured – and revolutionary alternatives had become more established.

It should be stressed that the levels of violence seen in Spain cannot be explained by the collapse of the state so much as by changes resulting from a process of constitutional normalisation and the questioning of existing equilibriums by a reinvigorated labour movement. The result of these processes, in addition to the widespread violence between trade unions and the escalation of the conflict between revolutionary trade unionism and the *Sindicatos Libres*, led the state to gradually transition from a sort of 'shared' monopoly on violence to a Weberian model. This process culminated in the September 1923 coup d'état led by the captain-general of Catalonia, the general Primo de Rivera, who became the head of the new dictatorial regime. Primo de Rivera's actions were supported and applauded by the Federation of Employers.

In post-1918 Europe, the growth of an increasingly well-organised workers' movement, and particularly widely supported strikes, was seen as a pre-revolutionary situation by specific social sectors. This decisively contributed to the growth of strikebreaking groups, civic guards and auxiliary police, movements encouraged by the increasing importance of conflicts between capital and labour worldwide. Given these circumstances, cooperation between legal authorities and 'honourable citizens' was common throughout Europe. This can be seen in France in the citizen response centred around the *Unions Civiques* in the context of the major strikes of 1919 and 1920; in Italy, in the emergence during the unrest of 1919 and 1920 of groups of 'loyal citizens' in which the government gradually came to place its trust; and, in Germany, in the emergence of defence organisations and auxiliary militias in the context of the quasi-revolutionary circumstances of 1919. This involved the deployment as paramilitary forces of the Citizens' Defence (*Einwohnerwehren*) and the Technical Emergency Corps (*Technische Nothilfe*), the latter under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence. The actions of citizen militias and the *Sindicatos Libres* in Spain, which had remained neutral during the war, were part

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of this global impulse and constituted an important precedent for the phenomenon of fascism in Spain.[80]

However, the impact of these developments varied greatly, even among victorious countries. In France, citizen forces, whose scope of action was limited, did not undermine the strength of a cohesive and victorious state. In Italy, where the legitimacy of the governing liberal elite was being questioned and the state gradually turned power over to citizen forces, this encouraged anti-government attitudes and created a favourable environment for fascist mobilisation. In Germany, defeat in the war and the collapse of the imperial regime, as well as the establishment of a democratic regime with high levels of social unrest, fostered the emergence of anti-government paramilitary forces.[81] In Spain, high levels of social unrest and the increasing predominance of military authority – which was in collusion with employers – over civilian authority, as well as the attempt to restore constitutional normality in spring and summer 1923, led to the military coup. There is every indication that, despite the gradual application of more restrictive gun control policies at the beginning of the 1920s, many European countries continued to experience high levels of violence.[82] This is a reminder that gun control legislation did not automatically bring down levels of political violence, particularly in contexts where the legitimacy of the state was in question or in places where there was a high level of social conflict. To make matters worse, gun control legislation could in some cases go hand-in-hand with selective rearmament – a policy convergence that could have deadly consequences.

Acknowledgements. Research for this article received funding from the project 'A Fragile Monopoly? Firearms, Self-defence, Gun Licence and the State Monopoly of Legitimate Violence in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom (1860–1960) – FRAGMON', financed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research, Italian Government (MIUR) – Framework for Attracting and Strengthening Research Excellence in Research in Italy (FARE).

[80] See, for events in Spain, Castillo, *El sindicalismo*; González Calleja and Del Rey Reguillo, *La defensa armada* y Marinello Bonnefoy and Zoffmann Rodríguez, 'A Proletarian'; in Italy, Matteo Millan, 'From "State Protection" to "Private Defence": Strikebreaking, Civilian Armed Mobilisation and the Rise of Italian Fascism', in Matteo Millan and Alessandro Saluppo, eds., *Corporate Policing, Yellow Unionism, and Strikebreaking, 1890–1930: In Defence of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2021), 242–58; for France, Horne, 'Defending Victory'; Arnaud-Dominique Houte, 'Policiers de bonne volonté? L'impossible constitution d'une garde civile en France (1913–1920)', *Vingtième Siècle*, 118 (2013), 159–70; Andrea Azzarelli, '"Les irréductibles antagonistes de la guerre civile": Police Forces and (Counter)revolutionary Strikebreaking Associations in Third Republic France (1899–1918)', presented at the 'Polices (et) révolutionnaires en Europe, des années 1780 à la fin des années 1980. Pratiques, acteurs et représentations' symposium, Université de Caen-Normandie, 31 Mar. 2022; Millington, *Fighting for France*; and, for Germany, Amerigo Caruso, 'Joining Forces against "Strike Terrorism": The Public-Private Interplay in Policing Strikes in Imperial Germany, 1890–1914', *European History Quarterly*, 49, 4 (2019), 597–624; by the same author, *'Blut und Eisen auch im Innern': Soziale Konflikte, Massenpolitik und Gewalt in Deutschland vor 1914* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2021); Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009).

[81] On the differences between these countries, see Horne, 'Defending Victory', Millan, 'From "State Protection"' and Matteo Millan and Alessandro Saluppo, 'Introduction: Strikebreaking and Industrial Vigilantism as a Historical Problem', in Millan and Saluppo, eds., *Corporate Policing, Yellow Unionism*.

[82] With the exception of France, where gun licences were not introduced until 1939.

Cite this article: Castillo Cañiz A (2023). Arming Upstanding Citizens: Dynamics of Civilian Disarmament and Rearmament in Restoration Spain. *Contemporary European History* 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000474 Published online by Cambridge University Press