

CARL SCHMITT: A NEVER-FORGOTTEN THINKER AMONG ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND POLITICAL FRAGILITIES

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Abstract

One hundred years after Carl Schmitt published *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, we find ourselves in a period in which the tensions between the sense of the State, economic development, and the support of democracy are still under debate. In this work, we analyze how Schmitt contributed to this debate at the time, but how, despite his political choices, his thought has been revisited and even gained special attention. Schmitt's controversial personality, the consistency of his arguments but also the fragility of his choices contributed to Schmitt's thinking being able to bring many arguments to the current debates around the strength of the State and the challenges of democratic designs.

Keywords

Carl Schmitt, Democracy, Economic Development, Dictatorship.

Resumo

Cem anos após Carl Schmitt ter publicado **Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form**, encontramos-nos num período em que as tensões entre o sentido do Estado, o desenvolvimento económico e o apoio à democracia continuam a ser objeto de debate. Neste trabalho, analisamos como Schmitt contribuiu para esse debate na época, mas também como, apesar das suas escolhas políticas, o seu pensamento tem sido revisitado e até ganhado especial atenção. A personalidade controversa de Schmitt, a consistência dos seus argumentos, mas também a fragilidade das suas escolhas, contribuíram para que o pensamento de Schmitt pudesse trazer muitos argumentos para os debates atuais em torno da força do Estado e dos desafios dos projetos democráticos.

Palavras-chave

Carl Schmitt, Democracia, Desenvolvimento Económico, Ditadura.

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Introduction, Research Question, Objectives and Methods

To revisit the work of Carl Schmitt today is to confront a set of tensions that remain central to contemporary political life: the fragility of democratic institutions, the pressure for effective state action, and the enduring appeal of strong sovereign authority. One hundred years after *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* and nearly a century after *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt's ideas continue to provoke debate—both because of their analytical sharpness and because of their association with one of the darkest chapters of the twentieth century. Yet the persistence of crises in the political, economic, and social spheres has generated a renewed interest in his conceptual vocabulary, particularly in moments where liberal democracies appear unable to respond rapidly or coherently to emerging challenges. Therefore, our Research Question now is “Why has Carl Schmitt's political thought gained renewed relevance in the 21st century, and how do his concepts help interpret the contemporary challenges faced by liberal democracies?”

This renewed attention is not merely anecdotal. Bibliometric evidence reveals a consistent and growing presence of Schmitt's work across languages and academic fields, confirming that his thought remains a reference point for scholars seeking to understand the tensions between sovereignty, democracy, and political identity. Such continuity of interest suggests that Schmitt's categories—decisionism, political theology, the friend/enemy distinction, and critiques of parliamentarism—retain explanatory power in a world characterized by polarization, economic dislocation, populist mobilizations, and crises of global governance.

The present study seeks to understand why Schmitt's thought has gained new relevance in the 21st century and how his conceptual framework can illuminate contemporary political dynamics. To do so, it is essential to situate his work within the historical circumstances that shaped it—most notably the economic collapse and political fragmentation of the Weimar Republic—and to trace the ways these ideas re-emerge today in debates about national sovereignty, constitutional resilience, and executive



power. Recent developments across Europe, the Americas, and Eurasia—ranging from Brexit to populist movements, from renewed geopolitical antagonisms to the governance dilemmas exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic—demonstrate striking parallels with Schmittian themes.

This article therefore pursues a dual ambition. First, it provides an empirical and historical account of the sustained interest in Schmitt's work through a bibliometric analysis of books, online search behavior, and academic publications. Second, it offers a critical examination of the philosophical and political foundations of his thought in light of contemporary democratic challenges. By combining these lenses, we aim to clarify both the analytical utility and the normative dangers of Schmitt's legacy, distinguishing the aspects that can help diagnose current political dilemmas from those that have historically been misused to justify authoritarian projects.

In sum, this article asks: Why has Carl Schmitt's political thought gained renewed relevance in the 21st century, and how do his concepts help interpret the contemporary challenges faced by liberal democracies? Addressing this question requires a re-engagement with Schmitt not as a prescriptive model for political action, but as a demanding and provocative interlocutor whose work continues to illuminate the fault lines of modern politics.

The general objective of this paper is to investigate the philosophical, historical, economic, and political reasons that explain the contemporary revival of interest in Carl Schmitt, and to assess the usefulness and risks of applying his concepts to current political dynamics.

This general objective is structured by five specific objectives: i) To perform a bibliometric analysis of the academic and public interest in Carl Schmitt using tools such as Google NGram Viewer, Google Trends, and the Scopus database; ii) To identify and systematize the main philosophical-political pillars of Schmitt's thought, including sovereignty, decisionism, the friend/enemy distinction, political theology, and critiques of parliamentarism; iii) To contextualize Schmitt's ideas within the economic and political crises of the Weimar Republic, evaluating how hyperinflation, unemployment, and instability shaped his theoretical formulations; iv) To examine parallels between Schmittian concepts and contemporary political phenomena, such as: the rise of populist movements in Europe and the Americas, Brexit, Russia's geopolitical posture, democratic erosion in Hungary and Poland, state responses to the Covid-19 pandemic; and v) To assess critically the analytical value and the normative dangers of Schmitt's ideas for contemporary democracies, distinguishing between their explanatory power and the risks of authoritarian appropriation.

This study employs a mixed qualitative–quantitative methodological approach designed to understand both the historical foundations of Carl Schmitt's thought and the reasons for its renewed relevance in contemporary political analysis. The methodological strategy is structured around three complementary components: a bibliometric analysis, a contextual–genealogical examination of Schmitt's work, and an interpretive comparison between Schmittian concepts and current political phenomena.

To assess the historical evolution of academic and public interest in Carl Schmitt, we conducted a descriptive bibliometric analysis drawing on three major data sources also incorporated in the empirical section of this paper: i) Google NGram Viewer, used to trace



the relative frequency of the bigram “Carl Schmitt” in book corpora across five languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish) over the last century. This allowed us to observe long-term trends in Schmitt’s presence in published literature; ii) Google Trends, used to measure global search interest in “Carl Schmitt” from 2004 to 2022, enabling an assessment of public curiosity and its temporal variations; iii) Scopus, used to identify the volume, type, and disciplinary distribution of peer-reviewed academic publications dedicated to Schmitt from 1998 to 2022. This provided an overview of the fields most engaged with Schmitt’s work and the trajectory of scholarly attention over time.

To understand the intellectual foundations of Schmitt’s political theory, we conducted a genealogical analysis grounded in the historical conditions of early-20th-century Europe and, more specifically, the political and economic crises of the Weimar Republic. This involved three stages: i) Examining primary works by Carl Schmitt (e.g., *The Concept of the Political*, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, *The Dictatorship*) in order to reconstruct the central pillars of his thought.; ii) Contextualising these works within contemporaneous events such as hyperinflation, deflationary policies, mass unemployment, and the political instability that culminated in the collapse of Weimar democracy; and iii) Interpreting how Schmitt’s concepts—sovereignty, decisionism, political theology, and the friend/enemy distinction—emerged as responses to perceived failures of liberal parliamentarism and constitutional normativism. The goal of this component is not to offer a strictly historical reconstruction, but rather to elucidate the conceptual architecture of Schmitt’s thought as it relates to moments of crisis.

In the third methodological step, we apply Schmitt’s concepts to selected contemporary political developments in order to identify possible parallels between his theoretical framework and current democratic tensions. This interpretive analysis focuses on: The rise of populist and nationalist movements in Europe and the Americas, Brexit and debates over sovereignty, Russia’s geopolitical posture and the re-emergence of antagonistic friend/enemy narratives, Constitutional tensions in Hungary and Poland, and the role of the “state of exception” during the Covid-19 pandemic. These examples were chosen based on their visibility in current scholarly debates and their relevance to themes explicitly addressed by Schmitt. This approach does not claim that contemporary actors intentionally adopt Schmittian ideas; rather, it examines how his concepts offer analytical tools for understanding present political dynamics.

The structure of this article is as follows. In Section 2, we show that Schmitt’s thought has always resonated within Western democracies, even during periods of lesser attention such as the 1980s. In Section 3, we show how his ideas reflected many of the dynamics of the economic and social crises he experienced, particularly during the two world wars. We conclude the paper in Section 4 by revealing how, in Schmitt’s interpretation, the refuge in a strong sovereign helps us understand many contemporary societies that, while not applauding the actions of governments and presidents, still end up voting for them.



Review of Literature

Carl Schmitt and the genealogical foundation of his thought: The five philosophical-political pillars

To the broader concept of international relations, the establishment of the “Westphalian Peace” brought the most robust meaning of what we now call the “modern state” (Moreira, p. 84-87, 2010). With Westphalia came the setback of the mediating vein played by the Catholic Church, which had already denoted the weaknesses expressed in the resolutions of the 100 Years’ and Thirty Years’ Wars; on the other hand, this new interstate contractualism also extended the affirmation of Locke’s liberal ideas to religious dissident accommodation within Christianity (Locke, 2018). The emergence of Benthamian concerns of the “man is wolf to man”, advocated in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, introduced the public road to a new model of state, based on the order and security necessary for the state of law to supplant the “State of Nature” (Hobbes, 2010).

These two axes—law and nature—would influence Schmitt’s thinking: the first, resulting from a progressive secularization of a power conceptualized by the Catholic Church, by this time threaded into the web of international relations; the second, because the idea of establishing order through the monopoly of force was exclusively addressed to the sovereignty of the modern state.

Rasch (2019) also interprets Carl Schmitt through a historically expansive lens, arguing that Schmitt’s political theology and critique of liberalism must be understood in relation to long-standing intellectual traditions reaching back to medieval theology and nineteenth-century social theory. In “Carl Schmitt: State and Society”, Rasch (2019) neither defends nor condemns Schmitt; instead, he highlights the enduring tension Schmitt identifies between “society,” defined by private rights and individual pursuits, and the “state,” conceived as a guardian of the common good. Rasch sees Schmitt’s work as raising persistent questions about sovereignty, the structure of political authority, and the limits of liberal dogma—issues that remain as relevant today as they were in the Weimar era.

Let us note specifically what Schmitt writes regarding the ordering of church power and the transposition of the formula to the secularized model of the state. He writes that democracy must revoke all differentiations and dispositions typical of the 19th century, namely the religious (confessional) as being opposed to political (Schmitt, p. 47, 2020). Schmitt also calls for a strong sovereign in this model of the state. Alternatively, the “total State of parties” would not be a total state, due to its weakness and its inability to defend itself against the assault of parties, whereby it would fail to cover all areas of social life (Schmitt, p. 18, 2020).

In short, the Westphalian Peace led to a concept of *Silte theologi in munere alieno*—that theologians remain silent on matters that do not concern them. There also arose a factual concentration of power in the state, which constituted itself as supremely sovereign.

Fundamentally, the first two ideas of Schmittian thought are:

1- The modern state concentrated the organizational and managerial sovereignty of political action elevated to the maximum power: war (Schmitt, p. 10, 2020).



2- The modern state—purging religious power from the scene—adopted religious “governance”, in a theological secularization of politics (Schmitt, p. 16, 2020).

Certainly, these two initial ideas—which led Schmitt to conclude that through the modern state, putative religious conflicts were curbed—were not enough to end the competitiveness of countries, nor the eagerness to impose oneself on the others that would transform the much-desired and Kantian Perpetual Peace (Kant, 2022). Maritain later discusses how the purge of religious power from the scene enabled the appearance of populist dictatorships in Europe (Mourao and Miranda, 2020).

As a consequence, the “Diktat” notarized in Paris (Treaty of Versailles, 1919) appeared to be leonine for the newly-named Republic of Weimar, formed after the Armistice of the First World War. Let us look at the latent socio-economic consequences in some detail.

Schmitt in Weimar: A critical reading of economics

The period of 1919–1932 was in economic terms a period of complex analysis, and there is no vision in current economic history that can be identified as a dominant vision for this period in Germany, in Europe, or globally. As Niveau (1966) claims, one of Germany’s main partner countries before 1914 was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was dissolved in 1918, leading to the emergence of countries such as Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia that shared the characteristic of coming from a war that deeply affected their demographic and economic structures. These countries created an incipient free trade zone and, in the early 1920s, the economic results revealed the worst-case scenario: significant public and external deficits in Austria, a significant devaluation of currencies in the foreign exchange markets, and a rush to appeal for foreign aid (notably from the League of Nations).

At the same time, whether as a factor or as a consequence in the crisis in these countries, inflation raised prices to levels very different from those reported in 1914: on average, the same good cost 14,000 times more in Austria, 23,000 times more in Hungary, and 2.5 million times more in Poland in 1920. Germany, however, is the record-holder of this period: between 1914 and 1923, the price of goods in Germany rose 1000 million times—a classic case of hyperinflation. The German mark was removed from most international transactions and was seen as only an internal currency. Thus, it is no wonder that the Versailles Peace Treaty was unpopular with the Germans (and even many voices on the winning side were uncomfortable with it).

This controversy stemmed from four fundamental articles:

- a) Article 45. Exploitation of Coal Mines by France, in a clear concession by Germany.
- b) Article 119. Renunciation of the overseas colonies in favor of the Allies; with this, they lost the raw materials that would feed the industrial development.
- c) Article 171. The end of war industry, with the widespread idea in Germany that its defense would be impossible.
- d) Article 232. Total reparation for the damages inflicted on the Allied powers, in a clear sense of “non-forgiveness”.



To counteract the course of events, from 1923 onward, Schacht outlined a set of measures that included the creation of a banking stabilization mechanism (the 'Rentenbank') and the appearance of a monetary revaluation unit (the 'Rentenmark'). With the first signs of monetary stabilization, foreign capital inflows arrived between 1924 and 1925, mainly from English and North American investors. However, devastated France (supported by other economies) claimed from the Commission of Reparations the effective amounts for its own reconstruction, reaching an agreement (the Dawes Loan) that would oblige Germany to pay every year and without term, amounting to around GBP 100 million. Therefore, although Schacht tried to stabilize the German economy, the reparation agreements cancelled out the efforts he undertook.

These developments were aggravated by the internationalization of an economic crisis that began in the United States of America in October 1929. North American investments and then British investments significantly retracted in Germany; consequently, German industrial production halved between 1929 and 1932. Several authors argue that the all-consuming fight against hyperinflation in the early 1920s led to an obsession with deflation, which accelerated the economic depression in Germany. Protectionist policies were then adopted all over the world, which led to the London Economic Conference in 1933. Faced with the devaluation of the sterling pound, which generated some positive impact on British external accounts, Germany adopted clearly protectionist policies: quotas of imports, control of the flow of capital, and revision of bilateral agreements.

In the year 1933, the Nazi government clearly took on the fight against unemployment as an economic ideal. In the 24 months between January 1933 and December 1934, Germany reduced the number of unemployed workers from 6 million to 2.6 million—a number that declined more sharply after 1935, with state subsidies to private companies as well as with the dynamics of the armament industry. Wages were fixed, unions were suppressed, and basic goods were rationed.

Carl Schmitt reflected on this economic environment with a detailed discussion. It was a dark period holding enormous difficulties for the population, which was capitalized on by the German government. As Niveau (1966) summarizes: "*L'hyperinflation de 1923 a été l'une des causes de la politique déflationniste de 1931-1932. Les conséquences sociales de cette déflation ont créé des conditions favorable à l'avènement du nazisme. Jamais une mauvaise politique économique n'aura coûté si cher au monde entier*" (p.244).

The "Pax Romana", under the management aegis of the League of Nations, could be seen as part of the latter's failure in the context of future international relations. It is this imposing "yoke" resulting from the amalgamation agreed between the winners (which Schmitt calls "*jus publicum Europaeum*") that would structure another of his thoughts: the inability of mutual recognition between winners and losers, generating in the latter such a sanctioned culpability and inferiority that it unbalances the understanding of hitherto-consensual concepts such as peace, law, justice, and humanity itself. This was sufficiently detailed in his writings *The Status Quo and Peace* and *The Central Question of League of Nations*.

This supreme appropriation of concepts in favor of the moral superiority of the winners is what makes obvious in his work *The Concept of the Political* the formulation of the "friend/enemy" archetype—although with a different orientation between its writing in



1927 and its final draft in 1932, namely in the matrix pillar of this conjecture. Concretely, we are talking about his definition of the state.

Nowadays, the state may appear consensual and as José Fontes describes it, “a territory, a people and a political power” (Fontes, p.22, 2009); for Schmitt, in 1927, it was based predominantly on the people, as a unit, defining policies of paradigmatic principles and values consistent with the almost Aquinian precept of “civil friendship” (Schmitt, pp. 41-42, 2020). His evolution to 1932 allocates to political power the interpretative discretion of the “mystical” foundations associated with the unity and political protection of the state’s identity (Schmitt, pp. 161-162, 2020). This decision-making infallibility that Schmitt conditions to the sovereign only parallels with the dogmatism of the Roman Catholic infallibility of His Holiness the Pope, whomever he may be (Schmitt, 2013).

This absolutist idea is reinforced by the democratic inaction of the Weimar Republic in the face of what Schmitt and some German elites considered the denigration resulting from Versailles. In fact, the representative and federal semi-presidentialism of the Weimar Republic always contained moderating rituals of a certain vindictive popular drive—a counterweight, if you like, that still exists in the constitutional spectrum of Western democracies.

Weimar, like the modern state, weakened in the polarization of “common things”, neglecting the essential—or, better said, the existential—and bringing it closer to what Schmitt calls the “Total State”, colonized by current party interests and without regard for the metapolitical. Now, his anti-parliamentarism became more manifest, since circumstances were considered exceptional and relevant. It required an effective discernment that the ubiquity of treatment given by the parties to all issues did not place the prominent ones at the top of the agenda (Schmitt, p.18, 2020).

This is the motto that Agamben (2018) later classifies as a “State of Exception”, clarifying a concept addressed by interpretations of the jurist Schmitt, who in *The Guardian of the Constitution* argues that legal-constitutional normativism is insufficient to construe the best interests of the state in circumstances of absolute tension; instead, this domain should be attached to political power. This line of reasoning was based on the recovery of the prestige of the state and would be verified in Weimar with Hitler’s to power.

We have, then, two more ideas of Schmittian thought to add to the two previously stated:

3- The “friend/enemy” concept, as a passive identity reserved for the defeated people of the First World War, as a reaction to the moral superiority imposed by the winners that limited the mutual and balanced recognition of nations (Schmitt, p. 14, 2020).

4- The state, genealogically based on the idea of a people, can only defend its interests through reinforced political powers of an anti-parliamentary nature, due to the ubiquitous weaknesses of the “total party state”—in other words, a concentrationist state of power must emerge (Schmitt, p. 17, 2020).

Here, as a product of what has already been described in German history and the subsequent rise to power of the Nazi Party (which Schmitt joins), comes his last argument: Decisionism.

This formulation results from the idea that, for the state to establish public order, legal normativism is insufficient when we are faced with abnormal situations. In other words,



there is a pre-constitutional metapolitics that, in order to establish normality, paradoxically suspends the current normativism. This attributes to the sovereign (the highest decision-maker) total discretion over the political-managerial options to be taken. This is a clear contrast to the republican maxim that suggests that what concerns everyone should be decided by everyone.

In an eminently political analysis, when that normality has been broken (a circumstance invoked in Weimar, in which the Reichstag fire of 1933 was only the final motive), mechanisms must be created that allow the sovereign to decide without the usual procedures of the modern state—that is, undemocratically (Schmitt, pp.166-167, 2020).

In practice, there is a suspension of representative civil rights and the decision passes to the interpretation of the incumbent sovereign, who defends the restoration of the civil rights that are being adulterated by the abnormality of the current circumstances.

Despite the original Schmittian formulation, it is in practice an establishment of a centralist, authoritarian, and personalized governance embodied in a strong leadership. It is here where we can trace a genealogical path of his thought, based on his educational roots that were also perceptible in his work.

Schmitt's decisionism

Let us first consolidate the concept of decisionism through the decomposition of the "puzzle" into three pieces that, set against one another, fit together in a logical way.

The first piece is a theological invocation for a secularized society. The second piece is centralism in the decision—in a direct interpretation of absolute natural law—as Jean Bodin had developed. The third piece is the exclusivist interpretation of the will of the people by the sovereign, or as it is antithetically referred to in current times, an "illiberal democracy"—i.e., the execution of the popular will via the ritualistic suspension of the representative modern state.

As "decisionism" is one of the central ideas of Schmittian thought, which offers highly relevant historical reflections and spans various historical periods, we must examine it in some additional detail. Let us start with the element that connects the theological to the secular.

When Schmitt evokes the "Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations", he critically examines what he considers a spiritual evolution in European society that created a certain space for liberal thought (Schmitt, pp. 141-2, 2020). He details these transformations in four steps that we must discuss. The first step occurred in the 16th century, when the theological component was more marked. Subsequently, the 17th century saw a certain metaphysical maturation to a more "moralistic-Kantian" nature in the 18th century. After the 18th century, European western societies entered the economism and the glorification of technique (Schmitt, pp.143-149, 2020).

The glorification of reason from Kantian rigorism gave way to the "political romanticism" brought by liberalism. As Schmitt saw it, this liberalism sought to make technique an axial value to neutralize and depoliticize the symbolic elements that justify a state's political culture. The exemplary invocation of the positivist Comte to deny the historical-evolutionary character of the theological to the metaphysical (and finally to positivism)



was made exclusively to stress that technique is an instrumental means and not an end in itself (Schmitt, pp.150-153, 2020): it could serve both liberal and more conservative ideas, depending on who treated them. The point here is that, according to Schmitt, the secularization intended by liberal ideas only tended to take away the cultural and spiritual nerve of different communities, dissolving the political-identity role for economic glorification—and of course, with obvious prejudice against the exploited or defeated peoples in the world order that came from Versailles (Schmitt, pp.154-157, 2020).

In terms of the second element, from Schmitt's 1927 writing to his 1932 version, there is an evolution that we deductively reason is due to the Bodian concentrationist element of decisionism. The sovereign, as Bodin wrote, directly adjusts "accounts" with the divine, since he has factual power to do what he understands has to be done (Freitas do Amaral, pp.159-166, 2012). Schmitt's secularization, without the religious element, leads to the same idea: the sovereign holds decision-making primacy. By complementary automatism, this is based on the third element: a strong sovereign making the decisions of state affairs as a collective organization of the people.

Thus, finally, we have the fifth idea of Schmittian thought:

5- "Decisionism" as a form of governance, which, incidentally, was "perfectly" applied in the Third Reich (Matos & Milan, 2013).

Analysis of Schmitt's relevance through a bibliometric exercise of Carl Schmitt's work and reasons for current attention to it

The proof of Schmitt's presence in western debates by a bibliometric analysis

Although Schmitt's thinking has gained recent increasing attention, we will prove that Schmitt's work has been read and discussed over the decades since the 1940s. To prove this, we engage in a descriptive bibliometric analysis, which will follow the steps proposed by Mourao and Popescu (2022). Thus, we will observe the values indicated in the Google Ngram Viewer, the values reported by Google Trends, and, subsequently, the information provided by the Scopus database.

The algorithm underlying the NGram Viewer application enables the identification of "phrases [which] have occurred in a corpus of books (e.g., "British English", "English Fiction", "French") over the selected years." In our case, it highlights the relative frequency with which the name "Carl Schmitt" appears in the bibliographic collection catalogued in the database. The algorithm considers a set of two words—such as "Carl Schmitt"—a 'bigram'. It is possible to verify the percentage occupied by this particular bigram considering all the bigrams identified in the catalogued books. Finally, more important than the value of relative frequency—which is found on the vertical axis—is the trend observed over time, demonstrating a growing importance if there is a trend of growing values seen on the vertical axis or a descending importance if a reverse trend is seen. Additional details are provided on the algorithm's official website (<https://books.google.com/ngrams/info#>).

We also note that we considered it relevant to differentiate the values by language of publication (English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish). As will be seen, different



lines of observation were found. Let us start with books in English (Figure 1): there is a small moment of attention around 1940, then stabilizing at insignificant values until 1980, after which the trend has been clearly increasing to the present day.

Figure 1. NGram Viewer for "Carl Schmitt" in English-language books

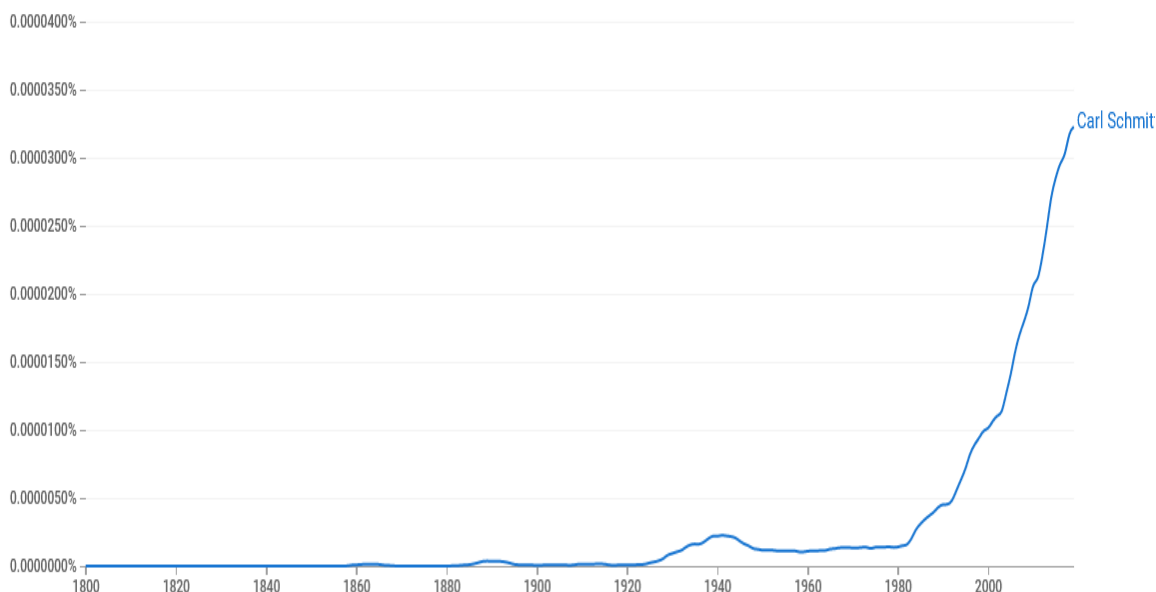
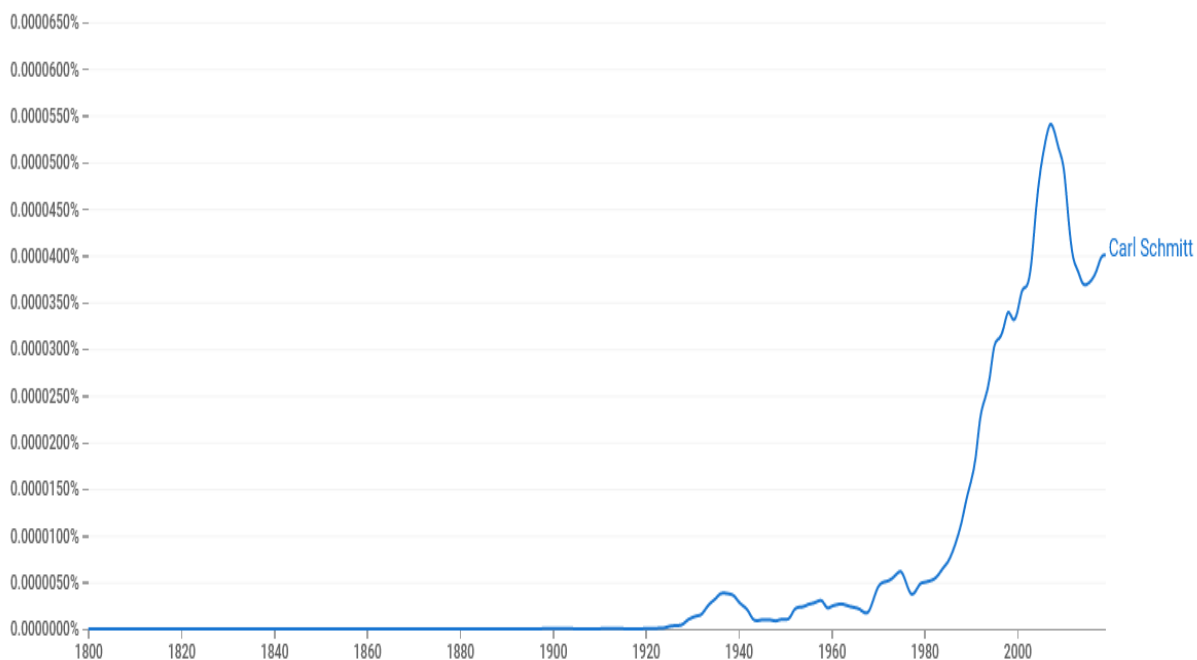


Figure 2. NGram Viewer for "Carl Schmitt" in French-language books





Looking now at the editions in French, we see that there was also an initial interest in “Carl Schmitt” around 1940, followed by a sharp increase between 1960 and 2010, and then a slight decrease after 2010.

Figure 3. NGram Viewer for “Carl Schmitt” in German-language books



As an author originally published in German, Carl Schmitt presents an interesting reading in Figure 3, where we see that attention is paid to Carl Schmitt in German books as early as 1920, which grows until the beginning of World War II, then decreases significantly until 1945. From then on, the graph in Figure 3 indicates an increasing trend in the relative frequency of the bigram “Carl Schmitt”, which reaches a peak around the year 2000. Interestingly, in the identified German-language books, the bigram in question decreases in the most recent two decades.

Figure 4 shows the evolution of the relative frequency of this bigram in Italian-language books. Once again, the figure presents a small peak around 1940, with a significant growth from 1970 until the year 2000, when it gained a new growth stimulus.

Finally, Figure 5 shows the evolution of the relative frequency of the bigram in Spanish. This also depicts interesting behavior. The bigram’s frequency in Spanish-language books became prominent around 1925 and grew until 1965, after which it decreased slightly until 1980. From then on, the popularity of Carl Schmitt has grown to the present day.

We now turn from our bibliometric analysis to the analysis of the results returned by the Google Trends algorithm. Unlike NGram Viewer, which is focused on books, this algorithm is focused on searches made on Google’s website. Thus, in line with the interpretations of Mourao and Popescu (2022), Google Trends shows a global curiosity about a given name, phenomenon, or set of words, since the beginning of the company’s file in 2004.



Figure 4. NGram Viewer for “Carl Schmitt” in Italian-language books

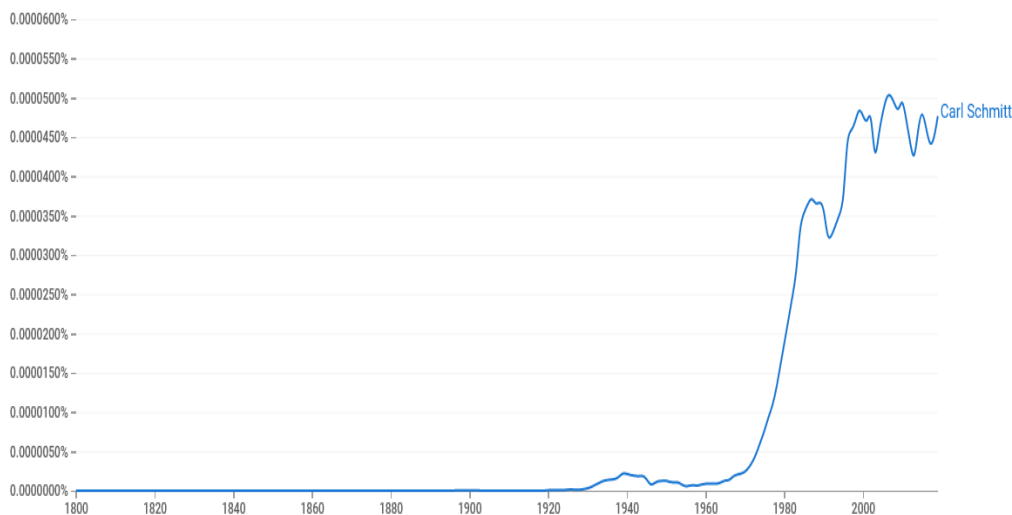


Figure 5. NGram Viewer for “Carl Schmitt” in Spanish-language books

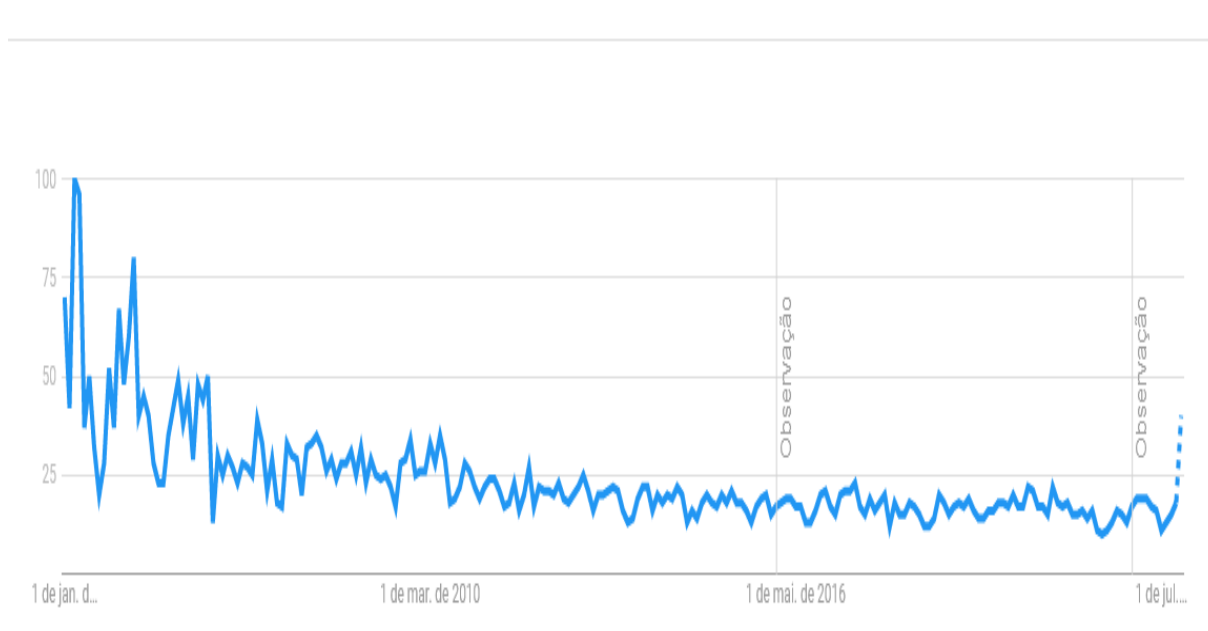


It should be noted that the vertical axis, associated with interest in the searched lexical set, varies across an interval of 0–100, with 100 being the value associated with the maximal popularity in the period in question. According to the algorithm’s official information (Google Trends, 2022), “A line trending downward means that a search term’s relative popularity is decreasing—not necessarily that the total number of searches for that term is decreasing, but that its popularity compared to other searches is shrinking”.

When we searched for “Carl Schmitt”, we obtained the results seen in Figure 6. In searches on Google’s site, the term’s maximal popularity occurred in March 2005, with a continuous decrease until the middle of 2007, stabilizing thereafter at a level of popularity equivalent to 25% of the indicated peak.



Figure 6. Google Trends of the lexical set “Carl Schmitt”



The same Google Trends app enables more detailed analysis, such as the country from which the majority of searches for the term came. Figure 7 reveals that the 5 countries that searched most for “Carl Schmitt” were, in order of decreasing rank, Germany, Luxembourg, Moldova, France, and Italy. The 10 countries that searched the most for the term included the 5 already listed plus Chile, Austria, Spain, Hungary, and Argentina.

Figure 7. Countries with the most searches for Carl Schmitt on Google Trends (2004–2022)



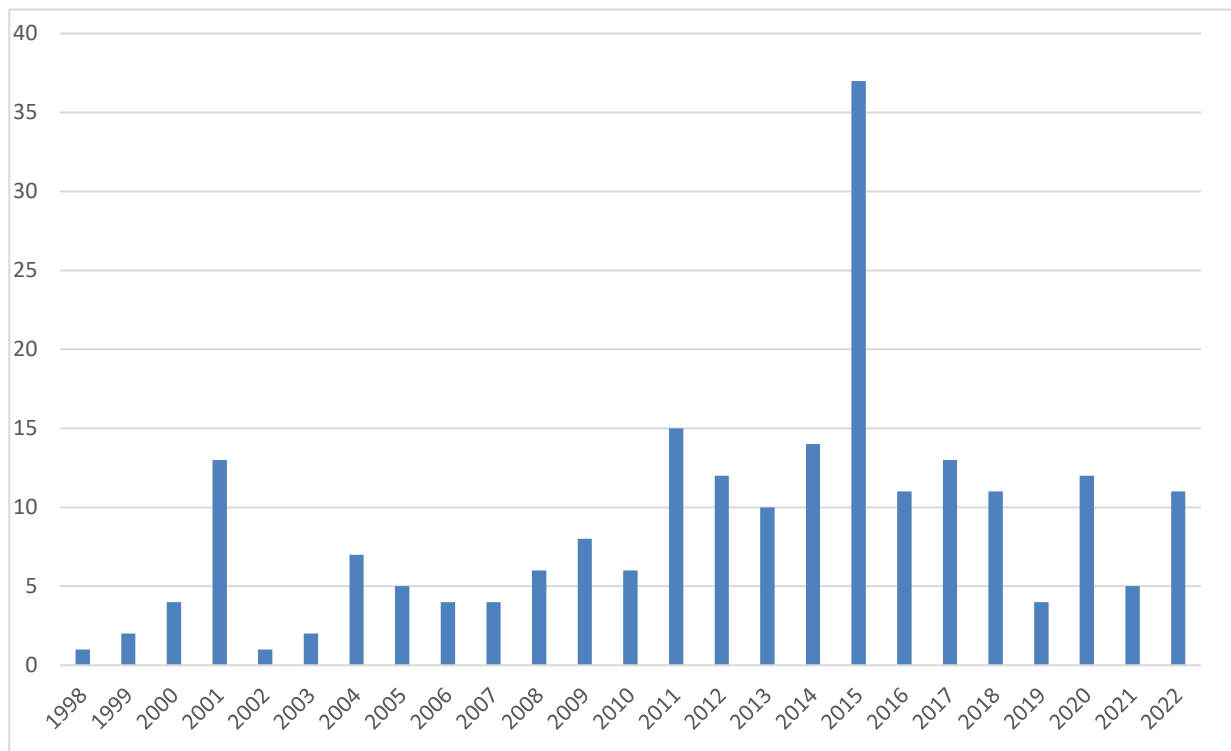
Legend: Alemanha=Germany; Luxemburgo=Luxembourg; Moldávia=Moldova; França=France; Itália=Italy.

We close this descriptive and bibliometric contribution with a search conducted in one of the most extensive databases in the academic world: the Scopus database. This database allows us to complement the previous analysis, which is dependent on other algorithms.



We find that Scopus identified 261 works focused on the thinking of Carl Schmitt, as of November 7, 2022. Its evolution from 1998 onward is described in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Works about “Carl Schmitt” (Scopus database)



In Figure 8, it can be seen that, since 1998—i.e., in the last 24 years—there has been an average of 18 works published on Schmitt in the various journals indexed by Scopus, with a sharp growth starting in 2011; this is yet more proof of a “rediscovery” of Schmitt’s thought, even in academic analysis.

Most of these works are identified as ‘research articles’ (158), although there are also 35 entries in academic encyclopedias and 34 ‘book reviews’. The journals that published the most on Carl Schmitt in this period were, in descending order: *History of European Ideas* (62 research publications), *Political Geography* (43), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (25), *Journal of Historical Geography* (16), *Geoforum* (11), *Cuestiones Constitucionales* (7), *Estudios Políticos* (6), *Acta Sociologica* (4), and *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* (4). Most of the identified works are related to 3 major fields: Social Sciences (164), Arts & Humanities (137), and Economics, Econometrics & Finance (26).

Some reasons for the growing attention on Carl Schmitt

Weber took the “nerve” out of the so-called “civil society” by pushing it toward a certain anomie (Durkheim, 2001), the vanishing point of which there was a latent nihilism. Consequently, this type of society, with diverse sociopolitical contexts but surrounded by



a feeling of impotence, is more sensitive to polarization and factional appeals (Mouffe, 2019). Taken together, these are the right ingredients for receptivity to authoritarian proposals (Riemen, 2012). These ingredients herald the reestablishment of an ancestral, almost anthropological order, which restores key elements for freedom.

Recent, more 'directist' examples that we observe in the global order can verify this, considering the return of British sovereignty with Brexit, the excitement around Trump with his "Make America Great Again" movement, and Bolsonaro's "Green and Yellow" movement in Brazil.

It is therefore of superlative interest to verify the genealogical thread of Schmittian thought that investigates the motivations embedded around a decision-making centralism that he sought to structure as a metapolitical dimension. In this way, we can be in a position to reach the heart of his most emblematic ideas, verify their comparability with today's reality, realize what the concentrationist ideas of power are based on, and—more ambitiously—make a precautionary call to the "dawn" of civil society. This follows Müller (2003) who approaches Carl Schmitt as a troubling yet intellectually enduring figure whose anti-liberal critiques continued to influence European political and legal thought after 1945. In "A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought", Müller (2003) examines how Schmitt's conceptual legacy—spanning political theology, constitutional theory, and critiques of liberal universalism—was re-appropriated by diverse intellectual movements across the political spectrum. Müller (2003) argues that Schmitt's work persists because it exposes vulnerabilities in liberalism, particularly in moments of crisis, and because post-war European debates on globalization, technocracy, sovereignty, and constitutional jurisprudence repeatedly return to Schmitt's frameworks to articulate the limits of liberal governance.

Tracy B. Strong, another major interpreter of modern political thought, engages Carl Schmitt within a broader twentieth-century constellation of thinkers confronting the erosion of overarching political "visions." As an authority on Schmitt and editor of influential editions such as *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*, Strong (2007) emphasizes Schmitt's central claims about sovereignty, political theology, and the friend-enemy distinction as responses to the crisis of liberal rationalism. His work situates Schmitt among figures like Nietzsche, Weber, Kant, and Arendt, stressing that what unites these thinkers is their recognition that political life cannot rely solely on rational, depoliticized frameworks. In Strong's reading, Schmitt becomes a pivotal figure for understanding how modern politics grapples with legitimacy, authority, and the limits of liberalism in an age skeptical of stable normative foundations

Discussing Schmittian thought and modern parallelisms

Thus we come to the point in which to reflect on how the thought of this philosopher of the twentieth century can have relevant reflections for everyday reality.

The last few years have been full of various events on the international political scene that seem to indicate the presence of Schmitt's philosophical background in a set of decisions; these events should be reviewed.

From the outset, this conceptualization took hold in British society, where national institutions were dissolving in the face of the power from Brussels. This idea of



participatory tax evasion arose in one of the longest, most consistent, and most dynamic democracies on the “old continent”—which also has a strong identity component that is not alien to its geographical circumstances and that is woven into the different communities that make up Great Britain under the mainstay of the monarchy. This idea seemed to indicate a power corset, a diffusion of decision-making beacons, and a dilution of the national spirit that, deep down, could—in the long run—mean a secondary role for the British political-institutional entity, so proud of its autonomy to the point of showing it within the framework of religious organization. This pattern first became established with the MEP Nigel Farage, and then with Boris Johnson in the role of Prime Minister—who recovered the “old transatlantic alliance” with the United States and Donald Trump.

Another international occurrence—more slippery in time, yet nonetheless pressing—was Vladimir Putin’s reinterpretation of the “friend/enemy” concept. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the consolidation of the liberal-globalist model in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international order after the Second World War, despite maintaining the legal-international spectrum based on the UN, diluted the historical bipolar consensus. In addition to the ideological diversity that seemed to have an interregnum there, it supplanted Russian aspirations to participate in the “balance of nations” in an important way. Two no-less-relevant factors were added to the mix. The first factor was a reading of universal history that diluted the role of the USSR in the defeat of Nazism, since the USA ended up materializing its leadership in the military-political context in European territory; this occurred together with the enlargement of NATO to borders close to Russia, which was seen as an international threat. In addition to not being recognized for its past merits in overcoming the Nazi danger, Russia was now almost surrounded by the “companions” of Yalta. The second factor was the Soviet implementation of perestroika. Despite the epiphenomenon of the so-called BRIC (emerging economies characterized by impressive growth rates), the effective consolidation of this group of countries occurred with China, which maintained state communism yet knew how to carry out strategic international expansion in the chain of raw materials and to absorb a good part of the development and industrial production.

Without extensive interpretations, there may be a Schmittian explanation for the occurrence of the war in Ukraine: a political-institutional mischaracterization with repercussions on the official historical interpretation, and a feeling of military siege and a marginalization in the global economy that deserved (in the Kremlin’s assessment) the opposition by military means to recover the status of great world power. In other words, the Schmittian “friend/enemy” concept is clearly evident here.

Another political manifestation that deserved to be copied by the international community, namely within the European Union, was the set of changes of a legal/constitutional nature that overestimated the importance of politics in the public sphere, with a decrease in the effective independence of the judicial system. This practice, contrary to the core founding values of the European Community, may well be impressive as a Schmittian thought that evolved into the sense that the “people” element is centralized in the figure of political leadership rather than prescribed in the legal-constitutional order. In this order, there is a dichotomous political-judicial complementarity (Varzim and Silveiras, 2021). Given this, the same effect is extended, if in a more mediatic way and vitalized by the defense of national identity “threatened by the other” (e.g., the foreigner, the migrant), which calls into question the cultural



elements considered as fundamental in Viktor Orban’s mirrored view of Hungary (Lusa, 2022).

The foundation of all this—due to its strategic, dimensional, economic, and (naturally) political importance—was Donald Trump. Realizing China’s economic rise and the unifying effects of this on the global supply chain, Trump devised the epitome “Make America Great Again” as a way of recovering the leading honor that the US held in much of the “first round” of globalization as we understand it today. This movement encompassed protectionist ideas, the centralization of political power, the strong and authoritarian decisionism locating the Other and in the Different as the reason for “turning to oneself”. This set of ideas has gained several followers, not only in Europe but in the Americas: these ideas were also decisive in the election in Brazil of Jair Bolsonaro, who devised an intra-territorial “friend/enemy” narrative, composed an ethics of national good, appropriated the colors of the national flag, and made his failed attempt at re-election in a composite of “who is with me is the true Brazilian” (Gomes, 2022). This cliché was, incidentally, also taken on by the leaders of the emerging radical right-wing parties—particularly the Portuguese Far right party—when he assumed himself as a defender of the “good Portuguese” (Carvalho, 2021).

This whole climate of political competitiveness between more dialoguing ideas and more nationalist ones has occurred on a global scale with the Covid-19 pandemic as an “intermezzo”. This onset brought a set of transformations to the political sphere (Coutinho, pp.141-145, 2020). It contained one of the links that Schmitt considered fundamental for the assertion of power in the sovereign: the “state of exception”. Agamben (2018) masterfully discussed this assertion, detailing the dangers of “concentrated power” and—in contrast to Schmittian ideas—the loss of autonomy and popular will when, on this pretext, democratic institutions and practices are decreased. Henry Lévy was even more incisive in pointing to the upheaval brought about by the virus in terms of the normal functioning of institutions and the world as we are used to seeing it (Lévy, 2020). In reality, and with enough distance to conduct a preliminary analysis, we are able to verify that the set of countries that most assumed the idea of central power—specifically, dictatorships—imposed draconian measures to confine populations more effectively or more quickly (Simone and Mourao, 2021). However, the attempt to dissolve the individual through its minimization and technological control (such as the *stay away covid* app), in addition to its adulterated ethical dimension from a democratic point of view, ended up bringing less benefit to those who adopted it (Han, 2014). WHO figures on the status of the virus (Lusa, 2023) show us also that Western democracies arrived at the vaccine more quickly than dictatorships.

China, which refused foreign aid in order to control the remaining Covid cases (Tiago, 2023), demonstrates that excessive sovereignty in this pandemic episode can degenerate into isolationism and that the centralization of political power does not always provide medium-term responses that lead to the two fundamental links that Schmitt proposes: the interests of the “people” or the interests of the state itself.

Conclusion and Emerging Challenges

At the end of the previous section, we pointed out a certain “median goodness” of measurable results corresponding to the actions of Western democracies for the



resolution of cases in moments of “exception”. However, the truth is that the decision-making ritualism contemplated in democracies appears, at times, as a less-expedient formula for action.

Today, a certain permeability of the concentrationist ideas of power suggested by Carl Schmitt is facilitated by a set of realities:

- the delay of Western democracies in responding to certain demands of an increasingly informed civil society, which require fluidity in the processes carried out by the public sphere;
- the slowness of justice in processes, mediated by the symbolic importance that is withdrawn for the functioning of the community;
- corruption, especially among public decision-makers who should be committed to civic service to the community;
- the insecurity arising from the “ghettoization” that results from less successful models of wealth redistribution, or simply through exogenous segregation;
- large sovereign debts that charge citizens with (heavy) taxes on work and do not allow significant investment that promotes the creation of wealth;
- the degradation of public services provided in sensitive areas such as health, civil protection, and education;
- an unstable inflation, and with it the devaluation of wages and savings;

among many other examples that could be expounded.

In conclusion, in this work, we validated the current importance of Schmittian thought. This is due to the philosophical construction that, as we have seen, exists in the subconscious of those who search for a better functioning of society.

Carl Schmitt, who *sanctified* politics, particularly reflected on what the supporters of democracy consider a vice: the interpretation of the popular will by the sovereign. This is because the examples of personalized sovereignty embodied in a single individual have degenerated into dictatorships that restrict individual freedom. Worse occurs—as in the extreme case of Nazism—when Schmitt’s ideas undergo a literalist interpretation that does not take advantage of their density.

Finally, we have the stimulating reading and argumentative rigor that Carl Schmitt brings to the current philosophical–political context, one that is always in need of being revisited. A consequential purification of his thought is emerging, among the most informed democracies, in a moderation of his ideas through the action of a prompt, fair, effective state that defends the general interest—which leads to a general perception of satisfaction and community pride.

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