

**ELECTIONS AND THE ORIGINS OF AN  
ARGENTINE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION, 1810–1880\***

**Eduardo Zimmermann**

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**Eduardo Zimmermann** teaches Latin American history at Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires, where he was rector between 2003 and 2008. He was junior research fellow at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London (1990–91) and a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies (2008). A recipient of the Premio Ensayo Histórico *La Nación 120 Aniversario*, he is currently a fellow of the National Academy of History in Buenos Aires.

He is the author of *Los liberales reformistas. La cuestión social en la Argentina 1890–1916* (Editorial Sudamericana, 1995) and the editor of *Judicial Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (ILAS/MacMillan, 1995). His current research deals with the interplay of judicial institutions and politics in nineteenth-century Argentina.

He holds a law degree from the Universidad de Buenos Aires and a DPhil in modern history from the University of Oxford.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present paper addresses several issues raised by the evolution of the electoral institutions and practices developed in nineteenth-century Argentina, and the role they played in the country's further political development. On the basis of the pioneering works of a new political history, two features of that historical process are considered in particular: first, an early consolidation of democratic principles born out of a widely shared perception of egalitarian social conditions prevalent in the River Plate provinces; second, the development of political and electoral practices that over time were to militate against the establishment of "classical" institutions of political representation. Many of the features of nineteenth-century Argentine electoral life, which would shape a particular democratic culture in the twentieth century, are thus seen as the result of a particular historical combination of early egalitarian politics with weak institutions rather than as a reflection of a strategy of exclusion and control by ruling elites or some vague "antidemocratic" cultural legacy.

## **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo enfoca varias cuestiones surgidas de la evolución de las instituciones y prácticas electorales desarrolladas en la Argentina del siglo diecinueve, y el papel que las mismas jugaron en el posterior desarrollo político del país. Sobre la base de trabajos pioneros de una nueva historia política, se consideran en particular dos características de ese proceso histórico: primero, la temprana consolidación de principios democráticos nacidos de una extendida percepción de las condiciones sociales igualitarias prevalecientes en el Río de la Plata; segundo, el desarrollo de prácticas políticas electorales que a lo largo del tiempo obstaculizarían el establecimiento de instituciones "clásicas" de la representación política. Varios de los rasgos de la vida electoral en la Argentina del siglo diecinueve, que configurarían una particular cultura democrática en el siglo veinte, son en consecuencia vistos como el resultado de una particular combinación histórica de una vida política tempranamente igualitaria con instituciones débiles, más que como el reflejo de una estrategia de control y exclusión por las elites gobernantes, o como un ambiguo legado cultural "antidemocrático".



In 1852 Juan Bautista Alberdi, writing from exile in Valparaíso, Chile, published a constitutional draft<sup>1</sup> that was to become one of the sources for the first Argentine constitution, ratified in 1853. In his review of various political projects and constitutional models that could guide the organization of his country after the downfall of the Rosas dictatorship, Alberdi dedicated a few paragraphs to “the electoral question.” “Without a severe alteration (*una alteración grave*) of the republic’s electoral system,” he claimed, “we shall have to abandon our hope of getting governments worthy of our suffrage.”<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly enough, unlike some of his contemporaries, Alberdi was not warning against the dangers of a possible expansion of the suffrage in the future. Rather, he was lamenting the consequences of past mistakes that now demanded this “severe alteration.” Alberdi pointed to the advantages that Rosas had gained from the electoral law passed in 1821 by the liberal Rivadavia administration. This first generation of liberals, said Alberdi, had neglected to establish the minimum conditions of “intelligence and material welfare that everywhere are demanded as guarantees of the purity and rectitude of suffrage,”<sup>3</sup> and had naively allowed too generous a latitude for the exercise of political rights, with dire consequences: “universal suffrage, established by Rivadavia’s law of 1821, gave the rabble (*la chusma*) a voice in government, and Rosas was able to hold onto power because of the electoral support of this mob, which has a natural affinity with every kind of despotism.”<sup>4</sup>

With the same pragmatism with which he espoused a fusion of centralist and federalist principles in his constitutional project, Alberdi suggested a moderate remedy to this excessive expansion of electoral rights: he recommended a temporary reintroduction of indirect voting through electoral colleges, “el sistema de elección doble y triple,” which had been abolished by the 1821 law. At the same time, he invited his readers to focus on “the object and extent” of power rather than on the identity of its holders or the mechanisms adopted for their election.<sup>5</sup> Setting up a distinction that was to be used again and again, Alberdi pointed to the benefits of a *república posible* (a republic that was the best currently possible), one in which the enjoyment of ample civil and economic liberties by all would lead to a material transformation of the country and its people, which in turn would make possible the arrival of the *república verdadera* (true republic). After all, he mused, a republic has many forms and degrees and lends itself to every

adaptation demanded by circumstances of time and space. The art of constitution making resides precisely in the ability to interpret and to implement such adaptations. The future of republican institutions in South America, he concluded, was wholly dependent on the selection of the appropriate electoral institutions.<sup>6</sup>

The present paper addresses issues raised by Alberdi about the evolution and appropriateness of the electoral institutions and practices developed in nineteenth-century Argentina and the role they played in the country's further political development. In particular, Alberdi's analysis highlights two features of the historical circumstances that will be considered below: first, an early consolidation of democratic principles born out of a widely shared perception of egalitarian social conditions prevalent in the River Plate provinces; second, the development of political and electoral practices that over time were to militate against the establishment of "classical" institutions of political representation. This particular conception of electoral politics also helps to explain the ways in which revolutions and civil wars were dealt with by the political system. They were not seen as a definitive collapse of the rules of the political game but were understood as another instance of unwholesome practices that allowed for the continuation of the game by other means.<sup>7</sup> This understanding of political life was widespread enough to merit a severe condemnation from Alberdi in his 1852 treatise: "As long as we foolishly believe what was accepted in 1810, namely, that revolution and healthy politics are one and the same... As long as we genuinely believe that a conspirator is any better than a thief, Spanish America will lose any hope of gaining the respect of the world."<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of Alberdi's motivations and the accuracy of his diagnosis and proposals, we can appreciate the centrality of the electoral question in his interpretation of mid- nineteenth-century Argentine political life. His concern about the effects of ideas of political representation and electoral mechanisms on political reality was widely shared in nineteenth-century Latin America, as the first post-revolutionary transatlantic constitutional experiment covered the continent.<sup>9</sup> Evident shortcomings in electoral practices (the recurrent presence of fraud and violence) led twentieth-century historians for decades to disregard the significance of elections and political representation. Writing about historians and the problem of early American democracy, J. R. Pole noted years

ago the tendency to adopt “a completely anachronistic note of apology for the insufficiency of democratic principles in early American institutions,”<sup>10</sup> and something similar could be said of the way in which elections and democratic principles in Argentina before the 1912 electoral reform have traditionally been viewed.

Over the past 25 years, however, new historiographical currents have launched a reevaluation of the role of elections and debates about representation in nineteenth-century Latin American politics. The lines along which this reappraisal has proceeded are well known: departing from a “traditional” model of interpretation too prone to dismiss as “corrupt” (and thus meaningless) anything that didn’t fit the teleological framework of an ever-widening franchise, Latin American historians have reached a more subtle appreciation of the role of electoral norms and practices within the national and provincial political systems, incorporating into the picture a wide range of social actors participating in different ways in political life. This new Latin American political history has not only transformed the study of electoral practices. It has also explored debates on changing conceptions of citizenship and representation; the development of different forms of collective identity and the part they played in the origins of the new nation-states and federal regimes; the emergence of public opinion and new forms of political sociability; and the relations between citizenship and the republican tradition of citizen militias.<sup>11</sup>

Recent Argentine historiography has been part of this process of innovation. Gradually, traditional narratives postulating a “landed aristocracy” in control of the political system up until the 1912 electoral reform have given way to a more nuanced interpretation of nineteenth-century political actors and practices.<sup>12</sup> New studies of the revolutionary period and the first decade of independence have analyzed changes in the old and new ideas of political representation and the transformation in political identities. These were followed by detailed studies of elections during the first half of the century; of the emergence of new forms of political sociability in Buenos Aires; of republican discourse during the Rosas dictatorship; of the role of citizen militias in republican political discourse; and of the network of political mobilization, public opinion, and electoral practices after the fall of Rosas in the second half of the century.<sup>13</sup> Studies of late nineteenth-century politics have complemented the pioneering work of Natalio

Botana, revealing higher levels of competitiveness in elections within a context of fragmentation of political forces and a much more varied political scene, which would eventually lead to the crucial 1912 electoral reform.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the growth of a new regional political history has led to a better understanding of the complex mechanisms linking local situations and national politics, including the ways in which local networks helped to consolidate or thwart the projects of the national political elite.<sup>15</sup>

This renewal in Argentine and Latin American political historiography, however, has had little impact on the ways in which social science and political theory have approached the study of democracy in the region, reflecting a traditional lack of communication between historiography and these disciplines.<sup>16</sup> The nineteenth-century Latin American constitutional experience, for instance, has been almost completely neglected by political theory and conceptual histories of democracy, judging by some of the most important works in the field,<sup>17</sup> and the restoration of that experience to the intellectual history of the Western world is long overdue.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, this new history of elections and political representation can provide an appropriate background to the studies of recent democratization in the region, as well as take advantage of the theoretical perspectives developed in them. To contextualize the recent “waves” of democratization in the region in a long-run perspective covering the nineteenth-century experience can be as fruitful as the use of some of the insights there developed to interpret that experience.<sup>19</sup> Last but not least, economists, economic historians, and political scientists have developed a political economy approach to the origins of democratic institutions in the region, tying together resource endowments, political institutions, and economic development in their interpretations. Again, unfortunately, acknowledgement of the new political history of nineteenth-century Latin America in these worthy endeavors has been minimal to nonexistent.<sup>20</sup>

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On the basis of the pioneering works of this new political history, we can trace some of the issues raised by the introduction of modern electoral practices and institutions in nineteenth-century Argentina and the consequences for the consolidation of the country’s particular democratic tradition. Let us begin with the first decades of



independent life, after the revolutionary events launched by the breakdown of the Spanish Empire in America.

### POSTREVOLUTIONARY FORMS OF CITIZENSHIP AND ELECTORAL RIGHTS

F. X. Guerra has amply illustrated the “precocious rise of modern politics” that took place in Spain and Spanish America following Napoleon’s invasion of the peninsula and the abdication of King Ferdinand VII. In a few years the evolution from traditional forms of representation based on corporate bodies to a modern form of representation based on the whole population was complete, in no small part because of the influence of the 1812 Cádiz Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

In Buenos Aires the revolutionary events of 1810—a revolutionary *junta* replacing the Spanish Viceroy—also had their effects on ideas of political representation. On May 22 the *Cabildo Abierto*, the open assembly of *vecinos*, “la parte principal, más sana y acaudalada” (the majority of worthy men of property), also had to hear demands for an expanded representation to be achieved by the election of *diputados del pueblo* (people’s deputies).<sup>22</sup> The revolutionary Junta that replaced Viceroy Cisneros summoned representatives of the *cabildos* (assemblies) from the provinces, “in order to establish the most suitable form of government.”<sup>23</sup> In its May 27 call the Junta instructed provincial *cabildos* that their representatives, to be convened in Buenos Aires, had to be chosen by “la parte principal y más sana del vecindario” (the notables among the neighbors), thus opening the first debates on the definition of the rules that were to regulate the elections of these representatives.<sup>24</sup>

The term *vecino* delimited the category of those eligible to vote. It was usually taken to mean a male head of household with an established *domicilio* (dwelling) who had been resident for a certain period of time. Other criteria sometimes used were to be gainfully employed, to be married, or to have enrolled in militias. As has been rightly pointed out, at the time the category was undergoing a transition from its traditional meaning toward a modern individualist conception of *ciudadano* (citizen), which had not yet fully evolved.<sup>25</sup> The Junta had instructed provincial *cabildos* to summon “la parte principal y más sana del vecindario,” and this could be interpreted in many ways. Some

considered that to be a head of household with a known domicile was sufficient, while others emphasized that only “la parte principal” of the *vecinos* was to be considered as electors. In response to a specific query on this point from the Santa Fe *cabildo*, the Junta decreed that for the election of representatives all *vecinos* had to be called upon, with no distinction between married and unmarried men and no predetermined order in the seating arrangements (“sin etiquetas ni orden de asientos”).<sup>26</sup>

For the qualities required to be eligible for election as a representative the Junta drew on the qualifications specified by the Spanish *Real Orden* (Royal Decree) of October 1809, which had regulated election for the *Cortes* (legislative assemblies): “well-established probity, abilities, and education...and the qualities that constitute a good citizen and a vigilant patriot.”<sup>27</sup> From then on this combination of both “social” (abilities, education, probity) and “political/ideological” (“a good citizen, a vigilant patriot,” or “a proven dedication to the cause of America”) requirements was to appear again and again in elections as the set of criteria to determine those eligible for election as representatives.

The first elections in the capital cities of the interior displayed considerable variety in terms of the mechanisms used, the levels of participation by *vecinos*, and the degree of competitiveness or consensus in the selection process developed in the *cabildos*.<sup>28</sup> Juan Carlos Garavaglia<sup>29</sup> has identified three common patterns. First, provinces such as La Rioja or Tucumán had low participation of *vecinos* (37 and 36, in urban populations of 2,900 and 3,600 respectively) and consensus or agreement rather than competitiveness regulating the elections—only one candidate, and no mention of the electoral mechanism used. Second, others had a higher level of participation (46 *vecinos* in San Luis, 75 in Jujuy, 64 in Santa Fe, 100 in Córdoba, 102 in Salta, in urban populations that ranged from 1,700 in San Luis to 11,500 in Córdoba), three or four candidate competing for election, and viva voce voting. And third, the elections in Mendoza and San Juan, by contrasts, demonstrated some surprisingly “modern” features: relatively high numbers of participating *vecinos* (87 in San Juan and 165 in Mendoza, in urban populations of 3,500 and 5,500 respectively); many candidates competing (six in San Juan, eight in Mendoza); and secret voting, the use of a jug (*cántaro*) or a large crystal vase as improvised ballot boxes, and a two-round system in Mendoza “for the greatest security and purity of the election.”<sup>30</sup>

Garavaglia attributes the exceptionality of the last two cases to the prevalence of small and medium property owners within the local wine-producing economies: this distribution of property appears to have been conducive to a more egalitarian society, which led to earlier adoption of modern mechanisms of political representation. From an 1850s perspective Alberdi commented on Mendoza's advantage over the other Argentine provinces in being closer to Chile, "a model of constitutional freedom for Spanish America for more than 20 years."<sup>31</sup> Although these two cases stand out initially, gradually the evolution toward the adoption of modern electoral mechanisms began to take place in the rest of the provinces. A political consensus grew among the local elites that social conditions in the River Plate provinces did not permit an easy rationalization of exclusionary political practices.<sup>32</sup>

As we shall see, the evolution from traditional forms of representation of corporate bodies to modern ideas of "individual" citizenship was accompanied by the inclusion of new social actors in elections. In Buenos Aires, the extension of voting rights to the rural population and the suffrage of Indians were the first steps.

In February 1811 the so-called *Junta Grande*, enlarged with new members from the provinces, ordained the establishment of provincial juntas to be elected through indirect voting. The election of these local juntas was seen as a means of "introducing to our peoples the advantages of popular government." In an illustration of the transformation from corporate representation into a new conception of the individual citizen, the votes for the electors, who would in turn select the members of the juntas, were to be cast by "every individual, with no exception for either official employees or members of secular or ecclesiastical *cabildos*, because individual members of these bodies shall attend as simple citizens."<sup>33</sup>

Two months later political conflict in Buenos Aires introduced a new social actor: "los hombres de poncho y chiripá" (men who wear ponchos and gaucho blankets), when 1,500 men from the rural areas rode into the Plaza Mayor to confront the urban elites, "los hombres de capa y de casaca" (men who wear cloaks and dress coats). The formal presentation of their demands marked the expansion of representation to rural sectors, an expansion that on this occasion was not accomplished through electoral mechanisms.<sup>34</sup> From then on it was necessary to incorporate representation of the countryside in the

electoral process. Hence the call for the 1812 General Assembly established that “*Vecinos* from rural areas with the required attributes have a right to be electors and elected to the assembly, just like those from this capital city and other towns of the united provinces.”<sup>35</sup> Among the required qualifications was the demonstration of a “resolute affiliation to the cause of the liberty of the United Provinces.”<sup>36</sup> Later on the call for the establishment of the Asamblea del Año XIII (1813 Assembly) summoned “*todos los vecinos libres y patriotas de sus respectivos cuarteles*” (every free and patriotic neighbor from the different *cuarteles*) to appoint an elector in every *cuartel*, which in the Buenos Aires countryside took place in the *cabildo* of Luján.<sup>37</sup> The 1813 assembly extended the right to vote and to stand for election to “*todos los americanos españoles mestizos, chulos, indios, y demás hombres libres que se hallaren al tiempo de la elección*” (all Spanish Americans of mixed race, *chulos*, Indians, and other free men who present themselves at election time) in the electoral assemblies for the *Perú intendencias* (colonial administrative units), which were to elect representatives of the Indian communities.<sup>38</sup>

Two other points included in the call to the 1813 Assembly are worth mentioning. First, article one names as potential voters “*todos los vecinos libres y patriotas*” (all free and patriotic inhabitants), and article four establishes that those elected were to be “*todas las personas libres y de conocida adhesión a la justa causa de América*” (all free persons of known dedication to the just cause of America), thus reaffirming a conception of *vecino* that increasingly relied on the importance of political commitments rather than social qualifications.<sup>39</sup> Second, article five established that voting was to be public and *viva voce*, “as befits a virtuous and free people.” Experiments in secret voting such as those that had taken place in Mendoza and San Juan in 1810 were thus abandoned, and from then on debates on the pros and cons of public vs. secret voting took place frequently.

The 1815 and 1816 *Estatutos* reaffirmed indirect voting in primary and electoral assemblies as the mechanism to elect deputies and instituted a population census in cities, towns and villages as the basis for the distribution of the number of electors. Again, the issue of public or secret voting was discussed, and it was ultimately decided that in primary assemblies the voter had the right to choose if he wanted to vote “*de palabra o*

por escrito” (by voice or in writing).<sup>40</sup> The same principles were adopted in the 1819 constitution.

This first revolutionary decade was to end in 1820, “the year of anarchy,” when caudillo armies defeated the national army at the battle of Cepeda, thus forcing the dissolution of national authorities. In summing up the evolution of electoral practices in these agitated years, we can highlight three main features of the forms that political representation and elections adopted: First, there was a gradual but sustained evolution from traditional forms of corporate representation towards the representation of individual citizens, as exemplified in the call for the creation of the 1811 provincial juntas, not dissimilar to what had taken place in Spain in previous years. Second, the early electoral experiments showed a surprising willingness to extend political representation to new actors, such as rural communities and Indians, and a flexible conception of the category of *vecino* in the cities. No restrictions based on wealth or literacy were mentioned in the rules, not even in the moderate form used by the 1812 Cádiz Constitution, which had such influence elsewhere in the region; much less was there any “discourse of capacities” as the conceptual foundation for such restrictions.<sup>41</sup> Third, on the other hand, the rules articulated a strong belief in the importance of indirect voting as an instrument of order and control of what was perceived as the greatest danger to political stability: the chaotic forms of participation in popular assemblies promoted by elite political factions, who favored assemblies as a means of mobilizing popular support and were thus opposed to indirect voting. As has been rightly pointed out by Marcela Ternavasio, at this stage debates about the use of assemblies (such as *cabildos abiertos*) vs. indirect mechanisms of representation were much more hotly contested than discussions about the extension of the suffrage.<sup>42</sup>

The idea that factions within the political elite, rather than the popular masses, posed the greatest danger to political stability was not unique to early nineteenth-century River Plate politics; it also inspired the construction of strong executive powers as a check on those tendencies in the United States. “Your *aristoi*,” wrote John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, “are the most difficult animals to manage in the whole theory and practice of government. They will not suffer themselves to be governed.”<sup>43</sup> Many

observers in early nineteenth-century Buenos Aires would have agreed wholeheartedly, and the following decades would confirm their view.

### **ELECTORAL RULES, 1820–1880: SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND VOTING RIGHTS**

The dissolution of a national structure of government in 1820 led to the autonomous political organization of the provinces. In the courses of this Buenos Aires launched an ambitious process of institutional reform led by its Minister of Government Bernardino Rivadavia.<sup>44</sup> Among the most significant institutional innovations the electoral law passed in 1821 had a prominent place, since it would regulate elections in the province for more than three decades and its basic tenets were later adopted both at constitutional and legislative levels. The most remarkable feature of this law was an explicit adoption of a wide conception of the right to vote. Every free man over 20 years of age, or younger if emancipated from his parents, native born or a permanent resident (*avecindado*), had the right to vote according to article two of the law.<sup>45</sup>

Many saw this as a sign of the incorporation into electoral institutions of the egalitarian ethos predominant in the River Plate provinces since independence. In 1820 an anonymous political pamphlet described life in Buenos Aires in the following terms: “there are no distinctions or classes rooted in custom, and an equality of fortunes can be perceived: there are few rich people, but there are no poor either. The disposition is lively and inclined to novelty, both excellent conditions for the advancement of a republican order.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in the 1840s Domingo F. Sarmiento claimed in his *Facundo* that the key to understanding the historical evolution of the country lay in “*democracy*, consecrated by the 1810 Revolution, and *equality*, the dogmas that have penetrated into the lowest layers of society.”<sup>47</sup> The idea that the River Plate provinces were another illustration of the advancement of the unstoppable force of democracy was given its definitive sanction within Argentine liberal historiography by Bartolomé Mitre in his *Historia de Belgrano y la Independencia Argentina* (1877). Looking back to the time before the 1810 Revolution, Mitre placed the origins of this “primitive equality” in the particular circumstances that marked the process of colonization of the River Plate: when compared with the conquest of other regions in the continent, only the provinces of the

River Plate presented a certain “Tocquevillean” social homogeneity: “there were no poor or rich, all being relatively poor...[and] no antagonisms of race or interest...these were the seeds of a free society.”<sup>48</sup>

In the early twentieth century James Bryce gave a similar description of the social bases of Argentine politics: “Society is something like that of North American cities, for the lines between classes are not sharply drawn, and the spirit of social equality has gone further than in France, and, of course, far further than in Germany or in Spain. One cannot speak of an aristocracy, even in the qualified sense in which the word could be used in Peru or Chile...”<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding the presence of this rhetoric of egalitarianism in the 1820s debates, it has been rightly pointed out that the particular political conjuncture of these years may have been a more relevant factor in shaping the text of the law. In particular, studies of the period have highlighted two aspects of the political circumstances that facilitated the expansion of the right to vote. The first was the need of the Buenos Aires ruling coalition for the expansion of electoral participation as a means of attenuating factional mobilization of popular elements in open assemblies (and this explains why, with the passage of the electoral law, the Rivadavia administration proceeded to abolish the *cabildo* of Buenos Aires).<sup>50</sup> Far from being a concession to popular demands for the expansion of electoral rights, the law was an attempt to use higher levels of participation in elections as a mechanism for the introduction of a certain degree of order and discipline in a highly volatile political environment, where direct forms of participation, under the direction of elite fractions, had predominated.

Second, the “open” or ambiguous character of many of the articles of the law was explained by the lack of clear-cut principles with which to regulate the inclusion or exclusion of both the electors and the elected. For instance, the expression *todo hombre libre* (every free man) raised many issues that had been touched upon during the debates about the law: were the poor and indigent to be considered *hombres libres* when it was recognized that they lived in a state of “absolute dependency”? In leaving this question unresolved, the law delegated to the electoral authorities in charge of the polling stations or *mesas* tables the power to decide on election day who qualified as a voter. As we shall see, this proved to be an important factor in making the election of the electoral

authorities (autoridades de mesa) themselves—and even the physical control of the “electoral tables”—the key to the whole electoral process.

In similarly ambiguous terms, article three of the law established that in order to be elected, candidates should have “*some*” property (“*alguna* propiedad inmueble, o industrial” (i.e., real estate), with no specific requirement of annual income or rent. Again, this lack of precision in the determination of a required socioeconomic status has been explained as a reflection of the social composition of the Buenos Aires political elite. Far from being a homogeneous aristocracy imposing high barriers to the entry of newcomers, this group was mostly composed of members of the military, clergy, and lawyers, whose entire political careers has been founded on their participation in the revolution. A more precise definition of socioeconomic eligibility requirements for election could have opened the possibility of excluding some of them from the political process.<sup>51</sup>

In any case, as Marcela Ternavasio has pointed out, even more innovative than the adoption of a wide franchise was its combination with the elimination of electoral assemblies in favor of direct voting. (European precedents usually combined direct voting with property or literacy qualifications.) In introducing direct voting the law took away from political factions the possibility of negotiating positions or candidatures *after* the election, thus further reinforcing the crucial role that control of electoral booths on election day had for their chances of political success.

In the following years reactions to these innovations were mostly critical. As we have seen in Alberdi’s analysis, a return to indirect forms of representation was seen by the mid-nineteenth century as one of the suggested “remedies” for the consequences of the 1821 law, that is, the use of plebiscitarian methods by the Rosas dictatorship. Others demanded the introduction of property or literacy qualifications. At the Constitutional Congress of 1824–1827 there were those who argued for the exclusion of *domésticos y jornaleros* (domestic servants and day laborers), while others favored a literacy requirement to come into effect after a few years, following the 1812 Cádiz Constitution model.<sup>52</sup>

In its article 13 the 1821 law maintained the principle of public “verbal” voting. Once the voter had expressed his preference, this had to be recorded in two separate



registries by officers of the polling station. Any discrepancies between the two registries were to be settled by the presiding officer with the participation of two other officers (article 18).

Finally, the law did not adopt representation based on population but maintained a fixed number of seats for the different constituencies, thus favoring the city of Buenos Aires over the countryside constituencies of the province of Buenos Aires: the city, organized in eight *parroquias* (parishes) elected 12 deputies, while the countryside (*la campaña*), organized in 11 *secciones* (sections), elected only 11 deputies, despite its larger population.<sup>53</sup> It was precisely this electoral predominance of urban districts that was to be reversed under the Rosas regime, when the political ascendancy of the rural world was consolidated.

The Rosas dictatorship (1832–52) was characterized by the establishment of an absolute predominance of the executive power over the *Sala de Representantes* (House of Representatives) and, in terms of the operation of representative institutions, the suppression of electoral competition in favor of political “unanimity.” Instead of abolishing the electoral institutions established by the previous liberal regime, Rosas made use of the 1821 law to systematically impose plebiscitarian majorities in order to keep in check warring political factions. Rosas himself drafted the lists of candidates, which were then distributed to provincial authorities, police and military officers, judges of the peace, and sometimes even the clergy.<sup>54</sup> Rosas based his political ascendancy on the support of rural sectors and in turn ensured that these sectors achieved greater political representation. From 1832 onward the number of representatives elected in rural districts was higher than the number elected in urban *parroquias*, thus expressing in very concrete ways the symbolic ascendancy of rural sectors over the urban elites.<sup>55</sup>

After the fall of Rosas in 1852 and the secession of the state of Buenos Aires from the Argentine Confederation, both the state and the confederation, now two independent political entities, enshrined in their constitutions and electoral laws the same principles that had been established by the 1821 law.<sup>56</sup> Far from a restriction of the right to vote or a gradual process of reform of the electoral system, the second half of the century witnessed the consolidation of the principle of *suffragio amplio* (full suffrage). Moreover, the national constitution ratified in 1853 (but repudiated by Buenos Aires) allowed the

National Congress to revise provincial constitutions, and in some cases Congress vetoed provincial documents containing mechanisms for qualification or restriction of the right to vote. This was a significant difference from the situation in Colombia in the 1850s, for instance, where provincial constitutions introduced limitations.<sup>57</sup>

After national (and constitutional) unification in 1860 the same principles regulating the right to vote were repeated in three successive national electoral laws: in 1863, 1873, and 1877. However, these laws also introduced some important innovations that are worth mentioning. First, the 1863 law ordered the creation of a national electoral registry, the *Registro Cívico Nacional*, opening every October to register male citizens over 18 years of age and enrolled in the National Guard.<sup>58</sup> The requirement of enrollment in the National Guard, which linked the exercise of electoral rights to the tradition of the “citizen in arms,” was eventually eliminated in the 1877 law.<sup>59</sup> The creation of the *Registro Cívico* reduced the power of the *autoridades de mesa* to determine who was accepted at the polling booth by making it more difficult to reject a registered voter.<sup>60</sup>

Second, the 1873 law introduced compulsory use of ballot boxes in every electoral district. However, this did not mean the adoption of secret voting, since the electoral ballots had to include not only the names of the candidates but also the voter’s name and registration number, and these requirements were repeated in the 1877 law.<sup>61</sup> Again, the pros and cons of secret voting were hotly debated. Buenos Aires had adopted the principle of secret voting and the use of “closed ballots” deposited in ballot boxes in its 1857 provincial law.<sup>62</sup> The national laws, however, proved a greater obstacle for the proponents of secret voting. Despite the case for secret voting as a means of protecting citizens against potential coercion, many still argued in favor of public voting as more “suitable to the rights and liberties of republican countries.” In the end, the national laws maintained a compromise, whereby voters used ballot boxes but the ballots included the voters’ names and registration numbers.<sup>63</sup>

Third, although the potential for voter coercion was not completely eliminated, other complementary measures reduced it. Several mechanisms were implemented to regulate more strictly the election of *autoridades de mesa*: participation of judicial authorities, election by lot of *vecinos* to take part in the process, and the appointment of the *autoridades* in advance of the date of the election. Furthermore, drastic restrictions, or

a complete ban, were imposed on the presence of armed military personnel at or near polling stations, with tougher sanctions for those violating the rules. The 1873 law punished every act of coercion on the part of military officers, judicial functionaries, or public officials with up to five months imprisonment. The 1877 law was even more detailed in its regulations of the conduct of military officers on election day. It was strictly forbidden to summon militias during the electoral period or to make any display of armed force on election day, and commanders and superior officers were instructed to excuse themselves from the polling station immediately after voting and to refrain from exerting their influence in any form in order to curtail the free exercise of the right of suffrage (“hacer valer en cualquier manera la influencia de sus cargos para coartar la libertad del sufragio”).<sup>64</sup> All these regulations reflect the importance of both the physical presence and the moral influence of commanding officers in electoral practices in previous years. It is also worth remembering that this same 1877 law eliminated enrollment in the National Guard as a requirement for electoral registration. By the 1880s, it has been argued, the ideal of the “citizen in arms” that had inspired much of the republican rhetoric of previous years was waning, gradually being replaced by other versions of liberal discourse placing more emphasis on the civilizing capacity of commerce as a stabilizing force in politics.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to what the national constitution and national electoral laws established, the debates of the provincial constitutional convention of Buenos Aires in 1873 are worth noting, given the importance of some of the issues discussed. For instance, the debate on compulsory voting: even though the 1873 provincial constitution did not introduce compulsory voting (which did not happen until the 1912 national electoral law) and maintained the principle that voting was a *right* derived from the condition of being a citizen, article 48 declared that voting was also a *duty* to be discharged in accordance to the constitution and laws of the country.<sup>66</sup> To many, discussions of suffrage as a duty rather than a right opened an easier path to the introduction of conditions under which such a duty had to be fulfilled.<sup>67</sup>

Another important issue debated at the 1873 Buenos Aires convention was the introduction of the principle of proportional representation as a mechanism for the protection of electoral minorities. This principle was included in article 49 of the

provincial constitution and was later regulated by a provincial electoral law of 1876. That same year Luis Varela, a distinguished jurist and one of the defenders of this legislation, published an extensive survey of European precedents in support of the new system. Having witnessed contemporary debates in the French Third Republic on the same issue, Varela proudly concluded that this was an instance in which European nations could profit from the experience of “American democratic practice.”<sup>68</sup>

The establishment of proportional representation was accompanied by the principle of representation based on population (article 47), a principle that was also adopted by the national constitution. The dramatic demographic changes that took place in the two following decades, therefore, necessarily had profound consequences for the structure and workings of the national political system. Fueled by European immigration and rapid economic development, population growth in the Littoral region, as revealed by the 1895 national census, soon forced a new balance of electoral forces among the different provinces: the old coalitions of the interior provinces, which had enjoyed disproportionate electoral representation, finally gave way to the ascendant Littoral provinces, both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the electoral colleges for presidential elections. In time this would translate into a redefinition of the fiscal relations between the different regions and the national government, in what has been described as “the political economy of unequal federalism.”<sup>69</sup>

All these constitutional and legal rules and regulations attempted to introduce modern electoral theory and practice with the ambitious goal of shaping the conduct of social actors. Who were these social actors? How were local practices reconciled with the new institutions in the electoral process? What was the level of involvement and participation of different social strata in the electoral battles? From examination of electoral registers and the chronicles of the political press,<sup>70</sup> recent studies shed some light on these questions.

## ELECTION DAY: ACTORS AND PRACTICES

This section will cover three themes related to electoral practices: first, the evolution of turnout and electoral participation; second, a review of the different mechanisms of voter mobilization and control developed by the various factions and parties; and third, rituals, celebrations, and symbolic components of elections.

### Electoral Turnout

As we have seen, participation in elections during the revolutionary period amounted to a few dozen *vecinos*, with some regional variations. By the early 1820s numbers had not changed much. In the city of Buenos Aires, for a total population of 55,000, in the first elections under the 1821 law the winning candidate got 328 votes. Total numbers of votes cast rose from 100–300 for the 1810–20 period to 2,000–3,000 for the next decade, reaching 4,000 in some elections. During the Rosas period the mechanisms of plebiscitarian mobilization developed by the regime resulted in more impressive rates of participation. In 1835, when extraordinary faculties were granted to Governor Rosas, the government got 9,320 votes.<sup>71</sup>

After the fall of Rosas, under the liberal governments of the Organización Nacional, there was a marked increase in both the frequency and competitiveness of elections. In the city of Buenos Aires from 1860 to 1870 there were between four and seven elections per year, at different levels. During a period of rapid demographic growth, however, electoral turnout, in terms of the percentage of those eligible to vote, declined precipitously.

The decrease in electoral participation has been attributed to a growing fear of the “dangers” involved in electoral activities. Pressures exerted on voters to keep them away from polling stations, a practice used by all parties, might be limited to a peaceful buyout of their ballots but could also take the form of physical threats, and rumors about the possibility of violence often sufficed to restrain potential voters.

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**POPULATION OF THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES AND  
ELECTORAL TURNOUT<sup>72</sup>**

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Year	Population	Voters (approx.)	% of population	% of eligible
1822	55,000	2,000/3,000	7%	40%
1836	65,000	2,000/3,000	7%	40%
1869	178,000	1,000/2,000	3%	10/20%
1887	433,000*	6,000**	2%	10/20%

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\*Census, 1887.

\*\*Electoral results, 1874 and 1880.

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Nevertheless, these electoral vices, generally condemned by all (even those benefiting from them) did not cast doubt on the legitimacy of the regime or the whole political system. On one hand, alternative forms of participation such as public demonstrations and a vibrant political press kept channels open for the expression of public opinion.<sup>73</sup> On the other, there was confidence that a gradual civic improvement would lead to better political institutions. Even Alberdi who, as we have seen, had little faith in nineteenth-century Argentina's electoral institutions, argued in defense of such a possibility: "Protests and calls for nullification [of election results]—born out of the natural imperfection of constitutional practices in countries ill-prepared for their development—always produce worse consequences. It is necessary to encourage the habit of accepting the results, whatever their shortcomings, and expect that the repetition of our constitutional practices will lead to their amendment and improvement. I refer particularly to the elections, which are a common source of commotion about alleged violations of our Constitution."<sup>74</sup>

What was the socioeconomic background of voters? Doubts about the reliability of the press and electoral registers as sources aside, the literature presents a solid consensus on the strong participation of the lowest social strata, *el bajo pueblo*, in elections during the whole period. Through the organization and mobilization of effective networks (that have been described by some as a form of "collective voting"), dockworkers, stevedores, peons, and journeymen participated in support of different

political factions.<sup>75</sup> The winning coalition press described this group as “the real people,” while opposition press depicted them as “an inebriated mob.”<sup>76</sup>

For the last decade of the nineteenth century Paula Alonso has presented a more varied picture, detecting a larger participation of middle-class professional sectors in the city of Buenos Aires, within a context of low turnouts.<sup>77</sup>

All in all, studies of nineteenth-century electoral turnout and socioeconomic composition of the electorate have been understandably cautious about their results, given the fragmentary nature of the sources. Nevertheless, two general observations seem to be shared by all: first, the levels of participation were low when compared with other nineteenth-century Latin American cases; second, there was a significant presence of popular social networks, constituting homogeneous electoral blocks in favor of certain candidates, formed mostly by urban workers of different trades. Nevertheless, as many of these studies also point out, the meaning of elections as social events went beyond the physical presence of voters at the polling stations on election day. This was only the last act of a long and laborious process of recruitment, mobilization, and control of voters, which involved many people and demanded considerable efforts from the various political factions. The next section traces the different stages involved in such efforts.

### **“Los trabajos electorales”: Voter Mobilization and Control on Election Day**

The elimination of indirect voting by the 1821 electoral law strengthened the importance of *trabajos electorales* (electoral labors), as they were called by the actors at the time. With no chance of post-election negotiations in electoral assemblies, the various political groups had to rely completely on their pre-election organizational efforts in order to secure their positions. These efforts were concentrated mainly on, first, decisions concerning lists of candidates; second, mobilization of voters; third, physical control of the polling stations.<sup>78</sup>

The process of drafting lists of candidates for elections had been, since the first years of independence, one of the areas in which political elites had fought most vehemently and thus was always considered a source of instability and political turmoil.

As we have seen, this had led the Rosas dictatorship to put an end to the problem, by confining all decisions about the selection of candidates to Rosas himself.<sup>79</sup>

After Rosas's downfall a newly discovered freedom of association gave rise to new institutions of political sociability, where the process of candidate selection was going to find its new home. In particular, the expansion of "electoral clubs"—the so-called *clubes parroquiales* (organized by parish) and *clubes de opinión*—allowed for new ways of establishing and nurturing political loyalties. Pilar González Bernaldo has revealed a remarkable growth in the membership of these clubs among the Buenos Aires political elite during the post-Rosas years.<sup>80</sup> The clubs developed a dual role: On one hand, they offered a forum for debates and negotiations about the drafting of the candidate lists (and in this the political dailies linked to the various clubs played an important part). On the other, the clubs operated as an organizational mechanism for the recruitment and mobilization of other social groups—what was usually described as an "electoral army"—popular elements who promised not only their votes but, more importantly, their willingness to fight for the physical control of the polling station, the *mesa electoral*, which was seen as the key to winning the election.

As was mentioned above, the 1821 electoral law had delegated to the authorities of the polling station the crucial role of deciding on the inclusion and exclusion of voters, given the ambiguities of the text of the law, in addition to being responsible for counting the votes and proclaiming the winner. The appointment of such authorities, therefore, amounted to the control of the polling station (who could vote and who was going to count the votes) and became crucial to the electoral fortunes of the various groups. A few years after this system came into existence, a participant summarized the situation thus: "it is now an established axiom that by winning the *mesa* you win the election; if you control the wooden table, you control the polling station, and thus you control the election."<sup>81</sup>

Under Rosas, the judges of the peace appointed the *autoridades de mesa* in rural districts, thus securing for the regime the control of the provincial territory.<sup>82</sup> In the city of Buenos Aires the situation was more complex, and the various factions had to rely on intermediary agents to mobilize people willing to fight for the control of the tables and secure the appointment of electoral authorities. The workplace also operated as an arena



of recruitment, and thus *capataces* (bosses) became electoral agents. Friendships and social relations built up in coffeehouses and *pulperías* (general stores) were another source of electoral networks linked to the new political clubs.<sup>83</sup>

During the second half of the century electoral clubs became even more powerful instruments for political factions vying for control of the ground on election day. Just as in the 1830s, observers in the 1860s were quite aware of the import of such maneuvers: “el que tiene la fuerza, toma las mesas y el que toma las mesas, gana las elecciones” (those who have the power take control of the *mesas*, and whoever controls the *mesas* wins the elections), said *La Tribuna* in 1864. Electoral clubs orchestrated the mobilization of popular elements to cover two facets of the electoral process: the vote and the display of physical force at the polling station.<sup>84</sup> The channels for recruiting popular elements also extended beyond the clubs. National, provincial, and municipal public employees were frequently pulled in different directions by their superiors. During the 1870s customhouse employees were singled out by the opposition press as an important “electoral army” of the government. Similar situations obtained among police officers, the military and, most importantly, officers of the National Guard. As was mentioned before, the 1877 national electoral law eliminated enrolment in the Guard as a condition to vote, but it was clear that before that date the influence of its officers over their troops on election day was considerable. That influence could be both moral and physical, as suggested by the 1873 and 1877 electoral laws’ prohibition of the presence of armed officers at the polling stations.<sup>85</sup>

The widespread use of fraud and coercion during this period has been taken as an indication of the ways in which elections were exploited by the ruling elites to keep the opposition at bay. However, the elections were genuinely competitive, and ruling elites were not the only political actors to resort to abuses. Participants in these electoral battles seemed to accept a certain amount of fraud and coercion as common vices of a particular way of doing politics, in which *all* sides were involved, winners and losers alike. We should keep in mind that frequently, in Buenos Aires and many provinces, *governments* themselves—national against provincial, provincial against municipal—acted as rivals in elections, using all their administrative and political resources against each other. In 1864 in the city of Buenos Aires commanders of the National Guard threw all their influence in

favor of the Club del Pueblo (People's Club, one of the electoral clubs mentioned above, which was supported by the national government) and managed to defeat the candidates of the provincial government, even though the latter had the support of the judges of the peace. Both sides anticipated the use of fraud and violence in the next elections, as reflected in their newspapers editorials. "Fraud will be pitted against fraud," warned *La Nación Argentina*, and its rival, *El Nacional*, replied, "let them know that on the day of the battle we will not be scared by gunpowder, and the rule of the gun and the stone will be ended. If they want to impose their force, we will resist with our force."<sup>86</sup> Admission of shared responsibility in the promotion of "alternative" methods of deciding elections was candidly summed up by *La Tribuna* in 1864:

This is what irritates us: they try to present the Club Libertad (Liberty Club) as an accomplice to a scandal, when everybody knows that what our club did last Sunday the Club del Pueblo has always done; and if they did not do it that day, it was only because they could not, because they did not have enough people to take over the *mesas*. *We all know how elections are won.*<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that fraud and violence alone set the tone of the elections. Popular mobilization and struggles for electoral control were accompanied by a series of social rituals and celebrations—meetings, parades, banquets—that incorporated sectors of the population who did not necessarily intend to vote but found participation in these events an attractive point of entry to the world of politics. New social meanings were thus imputed to the electoral process, meanings that transcended a narrow definition of elections and political representation.<sup>88</sup>

### **Political Rituals and the "Choreography" of Elections**

The Rosas dictatorship produced remarkable innovations in terms of using popular celebrations and festivities surrounding the elections as mechanisms for mobilization. In the 1830s the press repeatedly highlighted the introduction of new features in the electoral process: "music, fireworks, cheers for the candidates." This contrasted with the elections under the previous liberal administration of Rivadavia, when a more solemn tone and lower participation had been the rule. Under Rosas parades and processions

shared an air of religious festivity, in which elements of politics, religion, and carnival were mixed in public displays of allegiance to the regime.<sup>89</sup>

In the countryside electoral celebrations marked a special occasion in the social life of small towns and villages. *Pulperías* were crowded with people, and popular games such as *bochas* (bowls), cockfighting, horseracing, *sortija* and *pato* (creole folk games) were followed by dances in the evenings. All this gave elections the appearance of a popular festival, and invited different social sectors to participate in it, notwithstanding the differences among them in terms of wealth, social position, and political power.<sup>90</sup> The commitment of popular rural sectors to the electoral process is well depicted in a popular rhyme of the time: “Si hubiera sido preciso/Que nos llamen a votar/No queda uno en la Campaña/Sin bajar a la ciudad” (If they needed us to vote, the countryside would be emptied—we would all be in the city).<sup>89</sup>

Dominance of the electoral tables in rural towns and villages did not have the same strategic importance as in the city of Buenos Aires, since Rosas had a tighter control of the situation in the countryside, having usually distributed beforehand the lists of those to be elected. It had, however, considerable symbolic and ritualistic significance: authorities of the *pueblo* presided over the voting and the parade of the *vecinos* at the polling station, thus visibly reinforcing their power and the allegiance of the whole town to the regime.<sup>91</sup>

After the fall of Rosas, the domination of rural politics, which he had favored, gave way to a resurgence of urban politics. With the rebirth of independent political life in Buenos Aires the city witnessed the emergence of new electoral campaign rites and rituals. In what Hilda Sabato aptly describes as a new “culture of mobilization,” campaign events such as the proclamation of a candidate or a public meeting or demonstration in protest against electoral results deemed fraudulent frequently attracted higher numbers of participants than the election itself. Chronicles of these events frequently highlighted the higher social position of the participants vis-à-vis the voters. In 1874 *La Tribuna* covered campaign meetings for both presidential candidates (Avellaneda and Mitre), reporting that “more than 7,000 citizens” had attended the first meeting and “between 6,500 and 7,000 people” the second, numbers that far exceeded the turnout on election day. The newspaper also enthusiastically noted the presence of “three

music bands” and “many ladies from the most notable circles of our society” who threw flowers to the candidates at both events.<sup>92</sup> Just like the gauchos in the countryside with their games and dances, people from the city of Buenos Aires got involved in these rituals of celebration, displaying a willingness to participate that appeared much stronger than their interest on election day.<sup>93</sup> Clearly, both the harshness of some of the “electoral labors” aimed at securing physical control of the polling tables and the festive character of social rituals that gave life to the electoral campaigns were significant features of the political life of the period. While these practices certainly did not replace the centrality of the vote as a mechanism of political representation, they offered alternative ways of including in the political process thousands of people who took part in them but did not necessarily vote.

### **CONCLUSIONS: EARLY ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE IN ARGENTINA**

What does all this tell us about nineteenth-century elections and their consequences for democratic practice in Argentina? First of all, despite the recurrent episodes of fraud and violence, the early adoption of a wide suffrage and the relative frequency of elections—even during the years of the Rosas dictatorship—signal the centrality of democratic mechanisms in nineteenth-century Argentine politics. In 1876 Emilio Castelar, a Spanish republican leader of great influence in Latin American political circles, made the point emphatically in his prologue to a book by an Argentine jurist and politician: “Among us [Europeans],” he wrote, “it is still to be resolved whether democracy will rule public life. In the Americas this is not an issue anymore; it is a fact well established and understood. It only remains to organize in a proper and wise fashion the already triumphant democracies.”<sup>94</sup> Debates on what was the “proper and wise fashion” in which to organize triumphant democracy in Argentina were to continue until the 1912 electoral reform and beyond.<sup>95</sup> But, as we have seen, unlike the situation of countries in which the forces of expansion and restriction clashed hotly and repeatedly,<sup>96</sup> regular elections with a wide franchise were an established feature of the Argentine political system from the first years of independence onwards. To portray nineteenth-century Argentine politics in terms of continued electoral exclusion of the masses is not only anachronistic; it also

ignores the salience of other political issues such as conflicts about territorial identities, the contested predominance of central or state governments, and other ideological cleavages that clearly took precedence at the time over the electoral question.

Second, mechanisms of voter mobilization and control—and even the use of fraud and coercion on election day—are misunderstood if treated simply as the tools of a ruling elite that profited from the corruption and control of the political process. Voter mobilization, attempts at electoral fraud, and resort to the use of coercion were part of a complex of strategies practiced by *all* political factions, in and out of power. Usually, the electoral fortunes of these factions depended heavily on the organizational skills involved in such ephemeral activities rather than on the support of a stable, loyal constituency.<sup>97</sup> “The image of a people eager to exercise their voting rights proves anachronistic for many nineteenth-century societies,” Hilda Sabato has rightly concluded. “The political elites frequently complained about the *indifference* or the *lack of civic spirit* among the entitled citizens. *Quite often, the mounting of political machines was a means not only to control voting but also to make it happen.*”<sup>98</sup> In any case, political actors considered the presence of features such as fraud and coercion in the political system as a phase, a transitory “primitive” form of political life, which was going to improve gradually with the passage of time and through civic education.

In the long run, the mix of an egalitarian ethos, an early expansion of the suffrage, and a “culture of mobilization,” which tended to lead to the predominance of forms of “direct participation” rather than the consolidation of classic mechanisms of representation, contributed to the birth of a particular democratic culture. A perpetual search for “unanimity” and the use of electoral mechanisms not to represent but to suppress or control factions and divisions have been highlighted in Marcela Ternavasio’s studies of the Rosas years as well as in some of Guillermo O’Donnell’s observations about the “micro” and “macro” aspects of contemporary Argentine political life.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, some of the best studies of Latin American political history<sup>100</sup> explore the notions of “state-driven citizenship” and a polity in which institutional change emerges as the result of state initiatives rather than the organization of social forces pressing through their representatives—reinforced in some cases by a particular institutional design of the executive branch. These ideas are echoed in O’Donnell’s explanation of the presidential

figure as the “embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests” in contemporary Argentina’s “delegative democracy.”<sup>101</sup>

Democratic participation, says Robert Dahl, develops out of what we might call “the logic of equality,”<sup>102</sup> and that initial egalitarian impulse was certainly present in the origins of electoral institutions in nineteenth-century Argentina. What followed, however, reflected the difficulties of reconciling that democratic impulse with the logic of “classic” political representation and its institutions in ways not dissimilar to other Latin American experiences.<sup>103</sup> In his classic study of “polyarchies” Dahl studied some of these difficulties and their origins: “When the suffrage is extended *before* the arts of competitive politics have been mastered and accepted as legitimate among the elites, the search for a system of mutual guarantees is likely to be complex and time consuming.”<sup>104</sup> Institutions regulating competitive electoral life and a system of rules of mutual security for government and opposition were far from consolidated by the time elections with an almost universal franchise came to be a part of the Argentine political system.<sup>105</sup>

Many of the features of nineteenth-century Argentina electoral life were thus the result of a particular historical combination of early egalitarian politics with weak institutions rather than a reflection of a strategy of exclusion and control by ruling elites or some vague “anti-democratic” cultural legacy. In any case, these are all issues that demand further investigation. If democracy is still for most of the region an “unfinished journey,” to quote John Dunn,<sup>106</sup> the same can be said of our knowledge about its origins and evolution.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The draft was included in the second edition of Alberdi's treatise *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización de la República derivados de la ley que preside el desarrollo de la civilización en América del Sud* (Valparaíso: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1852). The edition used is *Bases* (Santa Fe: Ediciones Castelví, 1963). See, in particular, chapters XII and XXII, pp. 56–58 and 112–16.

<sup>2</sup> “Sin una alteración grave en el sistema electoral de la República Argentina, habrá que renunciar a la esperanza de obtener gobiernos dignos de la obra del sufragio.” Here and throughout translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> “...las condiciones de inteligencia y de bienestar material exigidas por la prudencia en todas partes como garantía de la pureza y acierto del sufragio.”

<sup>4</sup> Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Elementos del Derecho Público Provincial Argentino* (1854), in *Obras Completas*, Buenos Aires: La Tribuna Nacional, 1886, vol. V.

<sup>5</sup> “Legislaturas o consejos de administración, gobernadores o juntas económicas, ¿qué importan los nombres? Los objetos y la extensión de su poder es lo que ha de verse.” (Legislative assemblies or administrative councils, governors or economic *juntas*, what's in a name? The object and extension of their power is what matters.)

<sup>6</sup> Later on Alberdi would reconsider the possible adoption of monarchical models or, as he called them, “gobiernos a la europea” (European-style governments). This alternative was to be discarded after the end of the Mexican experience in 1867. See Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Del gobierno en Sudamérica según las miras de su revolución fundamental* (1863, 1867), vol. IV of *Escritos póstumos* (1896) (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmas, 2002). On Alberdi and Argentine constitutionalism, Natalio Botana, *La tradición republicana. Alberdi, Sarmiento y las ideas políticas de su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1984); Gabriel Negretto and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, “Rethinking the Legacy of the Liberal State in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina (1853–1916) and Mexico (1857–1910),” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, May 2000; Jeremy Adelman, “Between Order and Liberty: Juan Bautista Alberdi and the Intellectual Origins of Argentine Constitutionalism,” *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, June 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Earle has highlighted this “Clausewitzian” understanding of nineteenth-century Latin American politics in her introduction to Rebecca Earle, ed., *Rumours of War: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000), p. 4. See also Posada-Carbó, *Elections before Democracy*, pp. 1–15; Sabato, *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*, pp. 11–29; Guerra, “The Spanish-American Tradition”; John Charles

Chasteen, “Fighting Words: The Discourse of Insurgency in Latin American History,” *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1993. On the ways in which this was translated in the judicial treatment of rebels and revolutionaries in Argentina see Jonathan M. Miller, “Courts and the Creation of a ‘Spirit of Moderation’: Judicial Protection of Revolutionaries in Argentina, 1863–1929,” *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, winter 1997; and Eduardo Zimmermann, “*En tiempos de rebelión*. La justicia federal frente a los levantamientos provinciales, 1860–1880,” *Jornadas de Historia Política* “De la periferia al centro. La formación del sistema político nacional, 1852–1880,” Mendoza, July 3, 4 and 5, 2008, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.

<sup>8</sup> “En tanto que se conserve estúpidamente la creencia, que fue cierta en 1810, de que la *sana política* y la *revolución* son cosas equivalentes... mientras se crea sinceramente que un conspirador es menos despreciable que un ladrón, pierde la América española toda la esperanza a merecer el respeto del mundo.” Alberdi, *Bases*, chapter 34.

<sup>9</sup> José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, *En pos de la quimera. Reflexiones sobre el experimento constitucional atlántico* (Mexico City: CIDE/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> J. R. Pole, “Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 67, no. 3, April, 1962, p. 632.

<sup>11</sup> Within an ever-expanding body of literature, see for a general overview three very influential collections of essays: Antonio Annino, ed., *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995); Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy. The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996); and Hilda Sabato, ed., *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones. Perspectivas históricas de América Latina* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999). See also Eduardo Posada-Carbó, “Electoral Juggling: A Comparative History of the Corruption of Suffrage in Latin America, 1830–1930,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, October 2000, and Hilda Sabato, “On Political Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 4, October 2001. A pioneer work was J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma: La expansión del sufragio en Chile* (Buenos Aires: IDES, 1985). The work of François-Xavier Guerra has been a source of inspiration to many. See his “The Spanish-American Tradition of Representation and Its European Roots,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, February 1994; *Modernidad e independencias. Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992); “Hacia una nueva historia política: Actores sociales y actores políticos,” *Anuario del IEHS* (Tandil), no. 4, 1989; and “El



olvidado siglo XIX,” in *Balance de la Historiografía sobre Iberoamérica (1945–1988)*. *Actas de las IV Conversaciones Internacionales de Historia* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1989). On the influence of Guerra on recent Latin American political historiography see Federica Morelli, “Entre ancien et nouveau régime. L’histoire politique hispano-américaine du XIXe siècle,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2004, and Erika Pani and Alicia Salmerón, eds., *Conceptuar lo que se ve. François-Xavier Guerra, historiador. Homenaje* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1979); Ezequiel Gallo, “Argentina: Society and Politics, 1880–1916,” *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Eduardo Zimmermann, *Los liberales reformistas. La cuestión social en la Argentina 1890–1916* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1995); Roy Hora, *The Landowners of the Argentine Pampas: A Social and Political History 1860–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> José Carlos Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, provincias, estados: Orígenes de la nación argentina (1800–1846)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1997); Marcela Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2002); Oreste Carlos Cansanello, *De súbditos a ciudadanos. Ensayo sobre las libertades en los orígenes republicanos. Buenos Aires, 1810–1852* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 1998); Jorge Myers, *Orden y virtud. El discurso republicano en el régimen rosista* (Bernal: Universidad de Quilmes, 1995); Pilar González Bernaldo de Quirós, *Civilidad y política en los orígenes de la Nación Argentina. Las sociabilidades en Buenos Aires, 1829–1862* (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001); Hilda Sabato, *La política en las calles. Entre el voto y la movilización: Buenos Aires, 1862–1880* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1998); Hilda Sabato and Alberto Lettieri, comps., *La vida política en la Argentina del siglo XIX. Armas, votos y voces* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Paula Alonso, “Politics and Election in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898: The Performance of the Radical Party,” *JLAS*, 25, 1993, “Voting in Buenos Aires before 1912,” in Posada-Carbó, *Elections before Democracy*, and *Between Revolution and the Ballot Box: The Origins of the Argentine Radical Party in the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Carlos Malamud, *Partidos políticos y elecciones en la Argentina: La Liga del Sur, 1908–1916* (Madrid: Publisher?, 1997); Dolores Cullen, “Electoral Practices in Argentina 1898–1904,” DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1994; Fernando Devoto and Marcela P. Ferrari, *La construcción de las democracias rioplatenses: proyectos institucionales y prácticas políticas, 1900–1930* (Buenos

Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1994); Fernando Devoto, “De nuevo el acontecimiento: Roque Sáenz Peña, la reforma electoral y el momento político de 1912,” *Boletín del Instituto Ravignani*, vol. 14, 1996; Martín Castro, “Factional Struggle, Political Elites and Electoral Reform in Argentina, 1898–1912,” DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> See the articles collected in Sabato y Lettieri, *La vida política en la Argentina*; Beatriz Bragoni, *Los hijos de la revolución. Familia, negocios y poder en Mendoza en el siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), and “¿Gobiernos de familia? Elites, poder y política en la experiencia argentina del siglo XIX. Registro de un ejercicio,” in Beatriz Bragoni, ed., *Microanálisis. Ensayos de historiografía argentina* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2004), pp. 145–77; Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency during the Argentine State-Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853–1870)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Roberto Schmit, *Ruina y resurrección en tiempos de Guerra. Sociedad, economía y poder en el oriente entrerriano posrevolucionario, 1810–1852* (Buenos Aires, Prometeo Libros, 2004); Pablo Buchbinder, *Caudillos de pluma y hombres de acción. Estado y política en Corrientes en tiempos de la organización nacional* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2004); Eduardo Míguez, “Guerra y orden social en los orígenes de la nación argentina, 1810–1880,” *Anuario IEHS* 18, 2003, pp. 17–38; Juan Carlos Garavaglia, *Construir el estado, inventar la nación. El Río de la Plata, siglos XVIII–XIX* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007). For a general evaluation of these recent trends see Tulio Halperin Donghi, “El resurgimiento de la historia política: Problemas y perspectivas,” in Bragoni *Microanálisis* (cited above) pp. 17–30.

<sup>16</sup> Aguilar Rivera, *En pos de la quimera*, pp. 16–24. See also, as efforts to bridge that gap, Posada-Carbó, *Elections before Democracy*; Sabato, “On Political Citizenship”; and Elías Palti, *El tiempo de la política. El siglo XIX reconsiderado* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editores, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, John Dunn, ed., *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Russell L. Hanson, “Democracy,” in Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson, *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Aguilar Rivera, *En pos de la quimera*, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Larry Diamond, “Is the Third Wave of Democratization Over?” in his *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Guillermo O’Donnell, *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press,

1999); Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring, eds., *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Elisa Mariscal and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, “Schooling, Suffrage, and the Persistence of Inequality in the Americas, 1800–1945,” in Stephen Haber, ed., *Political Institutions and Economic Growth in Latin America: Essays in Policy, History, and Political Economy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press/Stanford University, 2000); Stanley L Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, “The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World,” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 4, December 2005; Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Guerra, “The Spanish-American Tradition,” pp. 7–8.

<sup>22</sup> Saturnino Salcedo, *Las primeras formas de elegir y los actuales sistemas electorales. Régimen político de las provincias argentinas* (Buenos Aires: ETGLA, 1948); E. Ravignani, *Asambleas Constituyentes Argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1937-1939), vol. VI, part II, pp. 925–65.

<sup>23</sup> *Junta Provisional Gubernativa de las Provincias del Río de la Plata a nombre del Sr. D. Fernando VII*; see Julio V. González, *Filiación histórica del gobierno representativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial “La Vanguardia,” 1938), vol. II, p. 39, for the different denominations used by the Junta.

<sup>24</sup> See González, *Filiación histórica*, pp. 44–48, for debates on the status of these representatives and whether they were invested with legislative or constitutional faculties.

<sup>25</sup> See Guerra, “The Spanish-American Tradition,” p. 14; on *vecinos* and *ciudadanos*; also José Carlos Chiaramonte, “Ciudadanía, soberanía y representación en la génesis del estado argentino (c. 1810–1852),” in Sabato, *Ciudadanía política*; and Cansanello, *De súbditos a ciudadanos*, pp. 13–51.

<sup>26</sup> Noted *vecinos* could choose preferential seating in the assemblies, as they could in church.

<sup>27</sup> González, *Filiación histórica*, pp. 70, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Detailed information on each of the electoral processes in the provinces can be found in González, *Filiación histórica*, vol. II, part 2, “El proceso electoral,” pp. 117–397.

<sup>29</sup> Garavaglia, “Manifestaciones iniciales de la representación en el Río de la Plata: La Revolución en la laboriosa búsqueda de la *autonomía* del individuo (1810–1822),” in his *Construir el estado, inventar la nación*, pp. 165–98.

<sup>30</sup> González, *Filiación histórica*, pp. 273–311, and “Manifestaciones iniciales,” p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> For a general discussion on natural endowments, forms of economic organization, and electoral institutions see Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, “The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World,” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 4, December 2005. Alberdi’s statement on Mendoza and Chile is taken from *Elementos de Derecho Público Provincial Argentino*, p. 401. On the evolution of Mendoza’s electoral institutions in the nineteenth century, see Beatriz Bragoni, “Los avatares de la representación. Sufragio, política y elecciones en Mendoza, 1854–1881,” in Sabato y Lettieri, *La vida política en la Argentina*, pp. 205–22. J. Samuel Valenzuela, “From Town Assemblies to Representative Democracy: The Contested Building of Electoral Institutions in post-Colonial Chile” (presented at the conference “The Origins of Democracy in the Americas, 1770s–1870s,” Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, September 18–21, 2008), describes the use of “secret ballots” in elections regulated by the Chilean governing junta in December 1810.

<sup>32</sup> Marcela Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto. Política y elecciones en Buenos Aires, 1810–1852* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> Garavaglia, “Manifestaciones iniciales,” p. 181, my emphasis. See also Ravignani, *Asambleas Constituyentes Argentinas*, vol. VI, part 2, pp. 3–45, for the provincial juntas.

<sup>34</sup> Garavaglia, “Manifestaciones iniciales,” p. 189.

<sup>35</sup> “Los vecinos de la campaña con las calidades requisitas, tienen derecho a ser electores y electos en la asamblea, del mismo modo que los de esta capital y demás pueblos de las provincias unidas.”

<sup>36</sup> Article 2 of the *Adiciones al reglamento de la Asamblea del año XII*, 9 de marzo de 1812, reproduced in Ravignani, *Asambleas Constituyentes Argentinas*, vol. VI, part 1, pp. 629–47.

<sup>37</sup> Garavaglia, “Elecciones y luchas políticas en los pueblos de la campaña de Buenos Aires: San Antonio de Areco (1813–1844),” in his *Construir el estado, inventar la nación*, p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> *El Redactor de la Asamblea*, no. 8, Buenos Aires, May 8 1813, reproduced in San Martino de Dromi, *Documentos Constitucionales Argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ciudad Argentina, 1994), p. 2034; Ravignani, *Asambleas Constituyentes Argentinas*, vol. I, pp. 3–104. The constitutional draft of 1819 established equal rights for Indians in its article 128. See *Estatutos, reglamentos y constituciones argentinos (1811–1898)* (Buenos Aires: Instituto “Emilio Ravignani,” Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1956), p. 130. For the 1813 Assembly decision on the suffrage of Indians see González, *Filiación histórica*, pp. 392–97.

<sup>39</sup> *Elecciones de diputados*, 24 de octubre de 1812, *Registro Oficial de la Republica Argentina*, 1879, reproduced in San Martino de Dromi, *Documentos Constitucionales Argentinos*, p. 2013.

<sup>40</sup> “Estatuto provisional para dirección y administración del estado, dado por la Junta de Observación,” May 5, 1815, and “Estatuto provisional dado por la Junta de Observación y aprobado con modificaciones por el Congreso de Tucumán,” November 22, 1816, both in *Estatutos, reglamentos y constituciones argentinas (1811–1898)*.

<sup>41</sup> For the political discourse of “capacities” in Spain and in the Cádiz Constitution, see Joaquín Varela Suárez-Carpegna, “Propiedad, ciudadanía y sufragio en el constitucionalismo español (1810–1845),” *Historia constitucional* (revista electrónica), no. 6, 2005, <http://hc.rediris.es/06/index.html>. For the discourse of “capacities” in Great Britain, France, and Germany see Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). For a detailed study of the movements of expansion and restriction of voting rights in the nineteenth-century United States see Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). An example of the marginal impact of such discourse in the River Plate provinces can be seen in José M. Mariluz Urquijo, “Manuel José García. Un eco de Benjamín Constant en el Plata,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, July 1967.

<sup>42</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 32–33, 48–49.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in J. R. Pole, “Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy,” p. 632.

<sup>44</sup> On the ideological leanings of the Rivadavia administration see Klaus Gallo “Jeremy Bentham y la ‘Feliz Experiencia.’ Presencia del utilitarismo en Buenos Aires 1821–1824,” *Prismas. Revista de historia intelectual*, no. 6, pp. 79–96.

<sup>45</sup> The complete text of the law is reproduced in San Martino de Dromi, *Documentos Constitucionales Argentinos*, p. 591. The absence of socioeconomic or educational qualifications for the exercise of political rights was also adopted by other provinces in their constitutions or electoral laws: Santa Fe (1819), Entre Ríos (1820), Corrientes (1821), Salta (1823), and Mendoza (1827). See David Bushnell, “El sufragio en la Argentina y en Colombia hasta 1853,” *Revista del Instituto de Historia del Derecho* (Buenos Aires), vol. 19, 1968.

<sup>46</sup> “No hay un hábito de distinciones y de clases, y se observa una igualdad de fortunas: hay pocos ricos, pero tampoco hay pobres. El carácter es vivo y dispuesto a la novedad, condiciones excelentes para el adelantamiento y orden republicano.” “Ilustración sobre las causas de nuestra anarquía y del modo de evitarla. Firmado por Don F.S. y dada a luz por un amigo suyo,” Buenos Aires, Imprenta de Phocion, 1820, Archivo General de la Nación, sala 7, Colección Celesia, Impresos 1820, legajo 2472, cited by Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>47</sup> “A la democracia consagrada por la Revolución de 1810, a la igualdad, cuyo dogma ha penetrado hasta las capas inferiores de la sociedad.” Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo o Civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (1845) (Buenos Aires: Emecé editores, 1988), p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> “Como en realidad no había pobres ni ricos, siendo todos más o menos pobres, resultaba de esto una especie de igualdad o equilibrio social, que entrañaba desde muy temprano los gérmenes de una sociedad libre.” Bartolomé Mitre, *Historia de Belgrano y de la Independencia Argentina* (Buenos Aires: La Nación, 4th edition, 1887), chap. 1, “Introducción: La sociabilidad argentina 1770–1794,” pp. 11, 57.

<sup>49</sup> James Bryce, *South America: Observations and Impressions* (London: MacMillan, 1912), pp. 341–42.

<sup>50</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*.

<sup>51</sup> Bushnell, “El sufragio en la Argentina y en Colombia,” p. 21; Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 51, 83–86, 90. The classic study of the formation of these groups is Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Revolución y guerra. Formación de una elite dirigente en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1972). On a similar dilemma faced by Mexican political elites at the time of the sanction of the 1824 constitution see Aguilar Rivera, *En pos de la quimera*, pp. 157–58.

<sup>52</sup> The 1826 constitutional project postponed for 15 years the enforcement of the proposed clause suspending the exercise of political rights by illiterates; the Cádiz constitution established a postponement of 18 years. Cf. Ravnani, *Asambleas Constituyentes Argentinas*, vol. III, and Varela Suárez-Carpegna. The 1824–27 constitutional congress also debated the status granted to elected *diputados*: did they represent the nation as a whole or the constituencies of their provinces? For a detailed account of these debates of political identities in the River Plate see Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, provincias, estados*. Also on forms of collective identity in Latin America see Luis Roniger and Tamar Herzog, eds., *The Collective and the Public in Latin America: Cultural Identities and Political Order* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> The complete text of the articles can be found in *Documentos Constitucionales Argentinos*, pp. 591–93; see also Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 175–76, 198–99, 206, 210–14, 229–30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214–19. Classics of Argentine literature such as Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, and Echeverría’s *El Matadero* present the symbolic connotations of this ascendancy of rural sectors and the subordination of the city before this new power.

<sup>56</sup> On the 1857 Buenos Aires electoral law see González Bernaldo, *Civilidad y política*, pp. 285–86.

<sup>57</sup> On the Argentine Congress's veto of provincial constitutions see *Actas de las sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1854–1855–1856*, cited by Bushnell, “El sufragio en la Argentina y Colombia,” pp. 28–29; Negretto and Aguilar Rivera, “Rethinking the Legacy of the Liberal State,” p. 372; and Bragoni, “Los avatares de la representación,” pp. 208–09.

<sup>58</sup> *Registro Nacional*, 1863, pp. 102–106.

<sup>59</sup> On the links between political representation and the ideal of the “citizen in arms” in nineteenth-century Argentine politics see Sabato, *La política en las calles*, and her introduction to Sabato y Lettieri, *La vida política en la Argentina*; for similar debates in the United States see Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*.

<sup>60</sup> Whether there were moves to register voters under this new regime and, if so, comparisons of such movements with mobilizations on election day are issues that await further investigation.

<sup>61</sup> *Registro Nacional*, 1873, pp. 733–37, and *Registro Nacional*, 1877, pp. 666–71.

<sup>62</sup> Carlos Heras, “El intento de reforma electoral de 1856 en la provincia de Buenos Aires,” and “El proyecto de 1857 estableciendo el voto secreto en la provincia de Buenos Aires,” *Trabajos y Comunicaciones* (Universidad Nacional de La Plata), 12 (1964) and 13 (1965).

<sup>63</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 157–66. Secret voting was ultimately established with the 1912 electoral reform. On ballot boxes and polling stations in the nineteenth-century United States see Richard Franklin Bense, *The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Articles 59 and 60, “Ley de elecciones nacionales,” *Registro Nacional*, 1877, p. 670. On the role played by militias and national guards in the elections in Santa Fe and Mendoza see Marta Bonaudo, “Las élites santafesinas entre el control y las garantías: el espacio de la jefatura política” and Bragoni, “Los avatares de la representación,” both published in Hilda Sabato and Alberto Lettieri, *La política en la Argentina del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003)

<sup>65</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, p. 165. See Alberdi's classic *El crimen de la guerra* (1870), in *Obras Selectas* (Buenos Aires: Librería La Facultad, 1920), for an example of a classical liberal critique of militarism and hero worship in nineteenth-century Argentina.

<sup>66</sup> “Constitución de la Provincia de Buenos Aires,” 1873, artículo 48, in *Constituciones de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Lajouane, 1885), p. 26.

<sup>67</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 162–66; on voting as a right and as a privilege in the United States see Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, pp. 8–14.

<sup>68</sup> Luis V. Varela, *La democracia práctica. Estudio sobre todos los sistemas electorales propuestos para dar representación proporcional a las mayorías y minorías* (Paris and Mexico City: A. Bouret, 1876), p. xix.

<sup>69</sup> Botana, *El orden conservador*; Lucas Llach, “The Wealth of the Provinces: The Interior and the Political Economy of Argentina, 1880–1910,” PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2007, chap. 4; Pablo Gerchunoff, Fernando Rocchi, and Gastón Rossi, *Desorden y progreso. Las crisis económicas argentinas 1870–1905* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Existing electoral registers and archives of the political press are fragmentary and not always reliable. Most of the data in the following section is taken from secondary sources based on electoral results from the city of Buenos Aires.

<sup>71</sup> Bushnell, “El sufragio en la Argentina y en Colombia,” p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Based on Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 92–93; Carlos Heras, “Un agitado proceso electoral en Buenos Aires. La elección de diputados nacionales de febrero de 1864,” and “Las elecciones de legisladores provinciales de marzo de 1864,” both in *Trabajos y Comunicaciones*, no. 4 (1954) and no. 5 (1955), respectively.

<sup>73</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 15, 81–92.

<sup>74</sup> “Las protestas, los reclamos de nulidad, prodigados por la imperfección natural con que se realizan las prácticas constitucionales en países mal preparados para recibirlas, son siempre de resultados funestos. Es necesario crear la costumbre de aceptar los hechos como resultan consumados, sean cuales fueren sus imperfecciones, y esperar a su repetición periódica y constitucional para corregirlos o disponerlos en su provecho. Me refiero en esto especialmente a las elecciones, que son el manantial ordinario de conmociones por pretendidas violaciones de la Constitución.” Alberdi, *Bases*.

<sup>75</sup> Studies of elections during the 1860s highlight the participation of certain specific groups, for instance, railway workers. Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, p. 146; Gabriel Di Meglio, “Viva el bajo pueblo”. *La plebe urbana de Buenos Aires y la política entre la Revolución de Mayo y el rosismo* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007); Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 92–95; Darío Cantón and Jorge Raúl Jorrat, *Elecciones en la ciudad 1864–2003* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Histórico de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2005), vol. I (1864–1910), pp. 384–85; Germán Tjarks, “Aspectos cuantitativos del estado económico y social de la ciudadanía argentina potencialmente



votante (1860–1890),” *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina “Doctor Emilio Ravignani,”* vol. 11, no. 18–19, 1969.

<sup>76</sup> Quotes from *La Nación Argentina* and *El Nacional*, April 1864, in Heras “Las elecciones de legisladores provinciales.”

<sup>77</sup> Alonso, “Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires.”

<sup>78</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, p. 104. On the setting and management of polling places in the United States see Bensel, *The American Ballot Box*, pp. 1–25.

<sup>79</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 125, 171.

<sup>80</sup> González Bernaldo, *Civilidad y política*, pp. 263–73.

<sup>81</sup> This 1833 statement from Diputado Anchorena is cited by Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, p. 81. See also Posada-Carbó, “Electoral Juggling,” for another example (Peru) of the practice of physical control of the polling stations in nineteenth-century Latin American electoral history.

<sup>82</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 96, 219–23. On the ways in which ties of personal loyalty (rather than an efficient bureaucratic-administrative structure) determined the success of these authorities in the countryside of Buenos Aires see Eduardo Míguez, “Guerra y orden social en los orígenes de la nación argentina, 1810–1880,” *Anuario IEHS* 18, 2003, pp. 17–38, and “La frontera sur de Buenos Aires y la consolidación del Estado Nacional, 1852–1880,” *Taller: La formación del sistema político nacional, 1852–1880*, Tandil, April, 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 132–38. On coffeehouses, *pulperías*, and sociability in Buenos Aires see Sandra Gayol, *Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor, y cafés, 1862–1910* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 1995); Mark D. Szuchman, “Constructing the City, Constructing the State: Architecture and Political Transition in Urban Argentina, 1810–1860,” in Víctor M. Uribe-Uran, ed., *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2001), pp. 193–218; and Carlos Mayo, ed., *Mostradores, clientes y fiado: Fuentes para el estudio de las pulperías de Buenos Aires y la pampa: (siglo XIX)* (Mar del Plata: Suárez, 2007).

<sup>84</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 87–89.

<sup>85</sup> Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 128–35, and Heras, “Las elecciones de legisladores provinciales,” pp. 60–62, describe instances of influence of commanders of the National Guard in the February 1864 election that led to demands for the reorganization of the force. See Bragoni, “Los avatares de la representación,” and Bonaudo, “Las elites santafesinas,” for the influence of the National Guard and public officials in Mendoza and Santa Fe elections.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Heras, “Las elecciones de legisladores provinciales,” pp. 57, 65.

<sup>87</sup> Héctor Varela, “Los escándalos del domingo,” *La Tribuna* April 1. 1864, in Heras, “Las elecciones de legisladores provinciales,” p. 76, my emphasis.

<sup>88</sup> On this approach to the study of elections see the classic article by Frank O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780–1860,” *Past and Present*, 135, 1992.

<sup>89</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 187–88, 230–33; Ricardo Salvatore, “Fiestas federales e identidad política en Buenos Aires, 1829–1852,” *Entrepasados*, no. 11, 1996; González Bernaldo, *Civilidad y política*, discusses Rosas’s relations with the Buenos Aires Afroamerican communities and their celebrations.

<sup>90</sup> Garavaglia, “Elecciones y luchas políticas,” pp. 220–24. On popular dances such as the *minué federal* and its place in social life under Rosas see John Charles Chasteen, “Patriotic Footwork. Social Dance and the Watershed of Independence in Buenos Aires,” in Víctor M. Uribe-Uran, ed., *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2001), pp. 173–91.

<sup>91</sup> Garavaglia, “Elecciones y luchas políticas,” p. 223.

<sup>92</sup> *La Tribuna*, cited in Sabato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 154–57.

<sup>93</sup> On the persistence of these rituals in early twentieth-century Buenos Aires see Eduardo Zimmermann, “Elections, Political Opposition, and the Press in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina,” in C. Mayo and D. Sheinin, eds., *Essays in the Histories of Canada and Argentina* (Peterborough: University of Trent, 1997).

<sup>94</sup> “Entre nosotros se trata aún de si las democracias han de advenir o no a la vida pública; entre los americanos ya de eso no se trata, por asegurado y resuelto y sobreentendido; se trata sólo de organizar con sabiduría y acierto las democracias triunfantes.” Emilio Castelar, prologue to Luis V. Varela, *La democracia práctica. Estudio sobre todos los sistemas electorales propuestos para dar representación proporcional a las mayorías y minorías* (Paris and Mexico City: A. Bouret, 1876), my translation. On the influence of Castelar on late nineteenth-century Latin American political elites see Charles Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 41–47.

<sup>95</sup> For these debates see Darío Roldán, comp., *Crear la democracia. La Revista Argentina de Ciencias Políticas y el debate en torno de la República Verdadera* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006).

<sup>96</sup> See Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, for an analysis of the forces of electoral expansion and restriction in US history.

<sup>97</sup> See Posada-Carbó, “Electoral Juggling,” for similar observations about other Latin American cases.

<sup>98</sup> Sabato, “On Political Citizenship,” p. 1303, my emphasis.

<sup>99</sup> Ternavasio, *La revolución del voto*, pp. 254–55; O’Donnell, “Democracy in Argentina: Macro and Micro,” in *Counterpoints*.

<sup>100</sup> For example, Garavaglia, “Manifestaciones iniciales,” p. 224; José Murilo de Carvalho, *Ciudadanía en Brasil. El largo camino* (Place?: Casa de las Américas, 2004), p. 201; Botana, *El orden conservador*, p. 282; Negretto and Aguilar Rivera, “The Legacy of the Liberal State.”

<sup>101</sup> O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” in *Counterpoints*.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.10.

<sup>103</sup> On these difficulties see Aguilar Rivera, *En pos de la quimera*, pp. 129–66; Palti, *El tiempo de la política*, pp. 203–18; Darío Roldán, “La cuestión de la representación en el origen de la política moderna. Una perspectiva comparada (1770–1830),” in Sabato and Lettieri, *La vida política en la Argentina*, pp. 25–43.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 38. Jonathan Miller, “Judicial Review and Constitutional Stability: A Sociology of the U.S. Model and Its Collapse in Argentina,” *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, 21, 1997–98, deals with the role of the Argentine Supreme Court in the development of Dahl’s “rules of mutual security” in Argentina.

<sup>105</sup> A discussion of Dahl’s scheme of historical sequences of democratization in the Argentine context also raises the issue of the evaluation of an early wide expansion of the suffrage and its inclusionary effects vis-à-vis its long-term consequences for the sustainability of democratic institutions. I owe this observation to Carlos Rosenkrantz, from the Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires.

<sup>106</sup> John Dunn, *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)