

## The Roots of Weak Democracies

### *Argentina and Colombia*

Argentina and Colombia, like Chile and Uruguay, democratized in the early twentieth century and for similar reasons. Argentina and Colombia were both plagued by revolts in the nineteenth century, which undermined constitutional rule and provoked state repression. In the 1880s, however, Argentina began to take important steps to professionalize its military, as did Colombia a couple of decades later. These measures made it increasingly difficult for the opposition to prevail in a revolt and, as a result, the opposition in both countries abandoned the armed struggle by the early twentieth century and began to focus on the electoral path to power. In the absence of armed rebellions, the governments of both countries began to respect civil and political liberties more consistently.

The emergence of strong parties in Argentina and Colombia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also helped lead to democratization. The opposition parties pushed aggressively for democratic reforms that would level the electoral playing field. The ruling parties used their control of the legislature to block the reform proposals, but in the early twentieth century these parties split, and a faction sided with the opposition to enact major democratic reforms. In the wake of the reforms, both countries experienced lengthy episodes of democratic rule for the first time.

Nevertheless, the democracies that arose in Argentina and Colombia proved to be weaker than those in Chile and Uruguay, although this only became apparent after 1929. The shortcomings of parties in Argentina and the military in Colombia contributed to the failings of their democracies. In Argentina only one strong party emerged, the UCR. This party played an important role in the democratization process while it was in the opposition, but once the Radicals took power, the country lacked a strong opposition party to protest electoral infractions and promote further democratization. Moreover, because the opposition did not have a strong party, it could not effectively compete with or restrain the ruling party, which ultimately led some opposition leaders

to encourage the military to intervene. This occurred in 1930 as well as in later years, albeit under somewhat varying circumstances.

Colombia, by contrast, gave birth to two strong parties during the nineteenth century, but its military was considerably weaker than that of Argentina. Although the professionalization of the military in the early twentieth century deterred opposition revolts by making it difficult for the opposition to overthrow the central government, the state did not gain a monopoly on violence across the large, geographically fragmented country. As a result, opposition groups increasingly resorted to violence at the local level as the twentieth century wore on, thereby undermining democratic rule.

#### REVOLTS AND MILITARY PROFESSIONALIZATION IN ARGENTINA

For much of the nineteenth century, the Argentine military was weak, and the state lacked a monopoly on the use of violence. The country fought a lengthy war of independence with Spain (1810–1818) during which territories that had formerly belonged to the Vice Royalty of Río de la Plata, including Upper Peru (Bolivia), Paraguay, and Uruguay, broke off to form separate nations. The rest of what is now Argentina fragmented into self-governing provinces, which were loosely allied. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Argentina had no central government; nor did it have a national military that was capable of unifying the nation. The provinces as well as local leaders had their own militias, which often fought among themselves (Álvarez 1987; Casal 2001). Much of the fighting was between Unitarists who favored a strong central government and Federalists who represented regional interests and sought a high degree of provincial autonomy.

Juan Manuel de Rosas, a wealthy landowner who became governor of the province of Buenos Aires in 1829, undertook efforts to impose stability and centralize control. Buenos Aires was wealthier than the other provinces, and Rosas used these resources to extend his influence to other provinces and to build up a large coercive apparatus, including an army, a militia, a police force, and a paramilitary organization, known as the *mazorca* (Gelman and Lanteri 2010, 82–83).<sup>1</sup> The government imported some weapons, but also manufactured primitive rifles, cannons, swords, and gunpowder (Lynch 2006, 61). Nevertheless, Rosas lacked a professional military. He replaced experienced army officers with loyalists, and he relied on poorly armed and trained troops who were pressed into service (Lynch 2006, 88). To maintain order, Rosas also sought out the assistance of militias and friendly indigenous groups, but he was never able to establish a monopoly on violence, facing frequent internal and external conflicts (Gelman and Lanteri 2010, 86). Between 1829 and

<sup>1</sup> Military expenditures accounted for 81 percent of government expenditures in Buenos Aires in 1841, not counting debt payments (Garavaglia 2003, 155).

1852, there were fifteen years of war and only eight years of peace (Míguez 2003, 18).

Argentina did not become unified until after Rosas was overthrown in 1852 by Justo José Urquiza, the governor of the Province of Entre Ríos. Under Urquiza's leadership, the Argentine Confederation in 1853 adopted its first successful constitution, which was ratified by all the provinces except for Buenos Aires. The refusal of Buenos Aires to join the confederation led to continued conflict, and in 1859, Urquiza invaded Buenos Aires and defeated its provincial militia at the Battle of Cepeda. Two years later, however, the two sides clashed again at the Battle of Pavón, and this time the provincial militia of Buenos Aires prevailed, due in large part to its purchase of rifles from Europe. The victory of Buenos Aires enabled its governor, Bartolomé Mitre, to dictate the terms of the province's incorporation into the federation, and in 1862, he became the first president of a unified Argentine Republic.

The unification of Argentina did not bring an end to revolts, however, in large part because the federal military remained relatively weak and nonprofessional. According to one estimate, between 1862 and 1868 alone, there were 107 revolts and 90 battles in which 4,728 people died (Oszlak 1997, 107). As Table 6.1 indicates, the most common type of revolt involved regional leaders who resisted the control of the federal authorities and/or sought to overthrow provincial governments. Another type of rebellion stemmed from the discontent of the opposition with defeats in elections characterized by fraud and manipulation. For example, supporters of Bartolomé Mitre rebelled unsuccessfully after Nicolás Avellaneda was declared the winner of the 1874 presidential elections. Similarly, backers of Carlos Tejedor, who was the governor of Buenos Aires, revolted after Julio A. Roca was declared the winner of the 1880 elections.

The frequent rebellions not only cost numerous lives and disrupted the economy but they also deepened authoritarian rule. In response to revolts, Argentina's leaders often assumed emergency powers and clamped down on the opposition. State repression was particularly severe under Rosas, and it peaked during periods when his regime faced serious domestic and external threats (Lynch 2006, 95–119). Bartolomé Mitre, who was president from 1862 to 1868, also engaged in state repression in response to rebellions. According to the liberal politician Carlos D'Amico:

[T]here wasn't a single day in those six long years [of the Mitre administration] in which there wasn't a state of siege in some corner of the Republic or in all of them ... Mitre governed like a despot, suppressing all liberties ... When it wasn't the Paraguayan War, it was civil wars that spilled torrents of Argentine blood. (Cited in Camogli 2009, 247)

Subsequent presidents also clamped down on the opposition in response to revolts (Loveman 1993, 288–289). When supporters of Mitre rebelled after he lost the 1874 elections, President Domingo Sarmiento declared a state of siege and censored the press. The Radical Party revolts of the 1890s met with a similar response: The 1892 elections, for example, took place under a state

TABLE 6.1 *Major revolts in Argentina, 1852–1929*

Year	Description of revolt	Type of revolt (outcome)
1851–1852	General Justo Urquiza, Governor Juan M. Rosas' military commander, revolted with 25,000 men and defeated Rosas at the Battle of Caseros.	Military coup (took power)
1852–1853	Buenos Aires rebelled with 8,000 men and declared independence, leading to a failed siege by Argentine Confederation troops under Urquiza.	Elite insurrection (stalemate)
1859	Buenos Aires rebelled in response to a law declaring that it must join the Argentine Confederation, but Urquiza defeated the rebellion.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1860–1861	Unitarian rebels assassinated the governor of San Juan and placed an ally in power, but Colonel Juan Saa and federal troops overthrew him.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1861	Buenos Aires rebelled and its forces of 15,000 men led by General Mitre defeated the Argentine Confederation at the Battle of Pavón.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1863	Federalists led by “El Chacho” Peñaloza revolted against Liberal dominance but were defeated by government troops.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1866–1867	Federalists revolted with 3,000 men and briefly overthrew Liberal governors of western provinces, but were defeated by government forces.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1867–1868	Colonel Patricio Rodríguez and 2,000 <i>gauchos</i> overthrew the governor of Santa Fe, but the revolt was quickly suppressed by federal troops.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1870–1871	Federalist leader Ricardo López Jordán revolted with 12,000 men and seized Entre Ríos, but was defeated by government forces.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1873	Federalist leader Ricardo López Jordán revolted in Entre Ríos with 9,000 men, but was defeated by government troops.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1874	8,000 supporters of Bartolomé Mitre rebelled in La Rioja and Buenos Aires after he lost the 1874 election, but government troops defeated the rebels.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1880	9,000 supporters of Carlos Tejedor, the governor of Buenos Aires, rebelled after he lost the elections, but government troops defeated the rebels.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1890	The Civic Union movement rebelled in Buenos Aires with support from 2,000 men, but government troops defeated the rebels.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1893	UCR rebelled with over 6,000 men in Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, San Luis, Corrientes, and Tucumán, but government troops defeated the rebels.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1905	UCR rebelled in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Mendoza, and Santa Fe. Government troops defeated the rebels.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)

Source: Latin American Revolts Database.

of siege in which the government arrested opposition politicians or sent them into exile.

In the 1880s, however, the government began to professionalize the military, which gave the state a monopoly on violence for the first time. By the end of the decade, the regional leaders and the indigenous population had been subjugated, and the government had extended its influence throughout the national territory. When President Roca completed his first term in office in 1886, he proudly declared that the country had not suffered a single rebellion, civil war, or indigenous attack under his administration (Rock 2002, 106–107). Revolts remained scarce in the years that followed. There was only one major revolt in the 1880s, two in the 1890s, one in the first decade of the 1900s, and none in the 1910s and 1920s. The number of revolts declined not just because rebels reasoned that they had little chance of prevailing but also because the military's acquisition of ever more lethal weaponry increased the potential costs of rebellion. These costs were clearly demonstrated in the 1880 rebellion, which was significantly deadlier than previous uprisings.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign conflicts helped spur the strengthening and professionalization of the military. The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) led Argentina to acquire additional weaponry and expand the size of its armed forces, which more than doubled in the war (López-Alves 2000, 190–191). Nevertheless, the Argentine military's poor performance in the war persuaded the Argentine government that the military needed upgrading, which it pursued in the years that followed (Nunn 1983, 45–46; Sabato 2010, 134). Argentina's often tense rivalries with Brazil and Chile also contributed to the development of its armed forces. During the late nineteenth century, the Argentine government became profoundly concerned about Chile's military buildup and the two countries nearly went to war. The conflict led the Argentine military to engage in heavy spending on European weaponry and warships beginning in the 1890s (Rock 2002, 174; Resende-Santos 2007, 224–228).

The expansion of the army and the acquisition of foreign weaponry and training was expensive, but Argentina was able to afford these expenditures in large part because of the tremendous export growth it enjoyed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From 1870 to 1913, Argentina's exports increased by 6.3 percent annually and its GDP grew at a rate of 5.8 percent per year, the fastest in South America during this period (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 86, 97). The economic growth led to a massive flow of resources to the Argentine state, a third of which was channeled to the armed forces. Argentina's expenditures on the army rose from approximately eight million pesos in 1891 to twenty million pesos in 1897 and remained relatively elevated during the first two decades of the twentieth century (Potash 1969, 6; Resende-Santos 2007, 197).

<sup>2</sup> Malamud (2000c, 33–34, 47–48) argues that during the nineteenth century the cost of revolution in Argentina was generally low since casualties tended to be modest and the rebels generally received amnesties, but these costs rose towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The rapid development of the Argentine economy during this period financed infrastructure development, which also increased the coercive capacity of the state (Oszlak 1997, 109; Lewis 2002, 165–166). The railways expanded dramatically in Argentina during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which allowed the military to rapidly transport troops from one end of the country to the other. In 1870, Argentina had only 455 miles of railway lines, but by 1900 it had 16,292 miles of track and by 1930 it had 23,687 miles (Summerhill 2006, 302). The telegraph, meanwhile, grew from 800 miles of lines in 1870 to 27,100 miles in 1900, enabling the military to quickly communicate with units in the field and coordinate strategies (Banks and Wilson 2014). A French diplomat reporting on the defeat of the regional leader Ricardo López Jordán in 1876 commented that, “with the railroads and the telegraphs, the era of the caudillos has come to an end. This time only five hundred men were needed for just ten days to defeat an insurrection that earlier would have taken the regular army more than a year” (cited in Rock 2002, 68).<sup>3</sup>

Even more importantly, the Roca administration undertook various reforms in the 1880s that helped professionalize the military and ensure that it had a monopoly on violence. In the wake of the 1880 conflict with the Buenos Aires militia, Roca passed a law banning provincial military forces (Sabato 2010, 137). These provincial forces, which significantly outnumbered the national army, had frequently been used in rebellions against the national government (Gallo 1986, 379).<sup>4</sup> The Roca administration also introduced the general staff organization of the military in 1884, although this had existed in a rudimentary way since 1861 (Nunn 1983, 47). In addition, the Argentine government improved the military training of its officers. President Domingo Sarmiento had created a Military College (1869) and a Naval School (1870), and Roca followed up by establishing a School for Noncommissioned Officers (1884) and a Military Engineering School (1886). Roca also issued new rules establishing meritocratic criteria for officer recruitment and promotion (Bragoni 2010, 155). As a result, in the late nineteenth century, military officers began to disengage from politics (Sabato 2010, 131–132).

Foreign training and equipment played an important role in strengthening and professionalizing the Argentine military. In the 1860s and 1870s, the government had purchased Remington repeating rifles from the United States, and they proved so effective at squashing rebellions that various governors successfully petitioned Roca, who was then the minister of war, to supply them with

<sup>3</sup> Sarmiento noted that the military’s suppression of revolts “confirmed a common fact that is forgotten by the rebels: that is, steam [railways] and the telegraph go faster than the horses ridden by the caudillos” (cited in Oszlak 1997, 179).

<sup>4</sup> Under Roca, the national guard was dissolved and integrated into the army as a reserve force, boosting its numbers by 65,000 men (Nunn 1983, 48).

the weapons in the late 1870s (Rock 2002, 90).<sup>5</sup> Prior to the 1870s, Argentina had mostly used French artillery and firearms, and had modeled its armed services on the French military. Some Argentine officers also trained in France as well as other European countries (Dick 2014, 77). After France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, Argentina, like Chile, turned its eyes toward Germany. Argentina had begun to purchase German military equipment, such as Krupp field artillery, during the War of the Triple Alliance, and by the 1890s Germany was the exclusive supplier to its land forces (Resende-Santos 2007, 198).

During the 1870s and 1880s, Argentina began to study German military organization and hire individual German military advisers, and in 1899, it contracted a German mission. Argentina did not go as far as Chile in emulating the German military, however, in part because of resistance from some Argentine officers, including General Pablo Riccheri who became minister of war. The German mission in Argentina was much smaller than the one in Chile: It initially consisted of only five German officers, although it was later expanded to eight (Resende-Santos 2007, 194–196).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the German mission, which lasted until the outbreak of World War I, strengthened the Argentine armed forces considerably. As part of this mission, the Argentine government made further arms purchases, upgrading to more recent models of Mauser rifles and Krupp artillery: The Argentine government also gained permission to redesign and manufacture the Mauser rifle (Resende-Santos 2007, 199). Germany remained the exclusive supplier of military equipment to Argentine land forces until World War I (Resende-Santos 2007, 199; Schiff 1972, 453–454).

At the advice of the mission, the Argentine government expanded the size of the military, modeling its conscription system on that of Germany. A 1901 law (amended in 1905) created universal military service, although it also allowed conscripts to buy their way out (Nunn 1983, 128–129). This law led to a dramatic increase in the size of the army. In the first year alone, it incorporated 68,000 men, and by 1910 Argentina could field a standing force of 250,000 men (Resende-Santos 2007, 201–202). Argentina also copied the organization of the German armed forces, which consisted of a first-line army, reserves, a national guard, and a territorial guard. Similarly, it modeled the curriculum of its Superior War School on Germany's war academy, and employed various German officers as instructors. Moreover, numerous Argentine officers were sent to Germany for training. Potash (1969, 4) estimates that somewhere between 150 and 175 officers trained there before World War I. Under German prodding, the Argentine military also adopted more stringent standards for promotions and required that commissioned officers graduate from

<sup>5</sup> Foreign arms could also be used by rebel troops to deadly effect, as in the 1862 Battle of Pavón, but rebels typically had a harder time obtaining these weapons, especially after Roca dissolved the provincial militias.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately thirty German officers served in Argentina from 1900 to 1914 (Schiff 1972, 444).



the Military College (Resende-Santos 2007, 203–206). The German mission for a time even gained influence over the promotion of officers to senior ranks (Schiff 1972, 444).

All these measures helped create a stronger and better-trained military. The reforms, the weapons, and the training that the Argentines received increased state coercive capacity, helping bring an end to the outsider revolts that had plagued Argentina. By the end of the nineteenth century, the opposition had little prospect of taking power through armed struggle.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE UCR

Political parties arose in Argentina in the mid-nineteenth century, but the first strong party in the country, the UCR, did not emerge until the 1890s. The UCR quickly built a powerful organization and developed widespread ties to the electorate, especially in the federal capital and province of Buenos Aires. The UCR aggressively denounced electoral corruption and helped put democratic reform on the agenda, but it also initially participated in armed revolts.

As Chapter 4 discussed, strong parties were slower to arise in Argentina than in Chile and Uruguay in part because the population was dispersed. Most of the parties that emerged in Argentina during the nineteenth century were based in the city of Buenos Aires, which had a dense population that was easier to mobilize, but these parties failed to extend their reach to the provinces. According to Alonso (2000, 79), before the 1890s “party organization had been sporadic, inconsistent, and informal.” The parties of this period were active only during elections and lacked developed organizations and ideologies. They rarely published party platforms or manifestos, although they typically had affiliated newspapers that disseminated their messages (Míguez 2013; Remmer 1984, 31). Abraham König, a Chilean politician and diplomat who traveled to Argentina in 1890, observed that: “In the Argentine Republic, there are no parties with organized ideas ... voters groups themselves around one man, not around a party label represented by a man” (cited in Remmer 1984, 31).

During the 1830s and 1840s, there was little political space for the emergence of independent parties. In Buenos Aires, Governor Juan Manuel de Rosas used state repression to install what became known as a regime of unanimity in which his preferred candidates won elections by enormous margins (Sabato and Ternavasio 2011; Ternavasio 2002).<sup>7</sup> After the downfall of Rosas in 1852, there was greater electoral competition and respect for civil and political liberties, but elections continued to be plagued by fraud and intimidation

<sup>7</sup> Rosas made up the lists of candidates, distributed the ballots, and ensured that they won by an overwhelmingly margin. As a result, the legislature consisted of a homogenous group of supporters of Rosas (Ternavasio 2002, 206–214; Zimmermann 2009, 13).



(Sabato 2001a, 10–12; Alonso 2007, 5–6). Incipient parties did emerge during this period, but they were highly personalistic and undisciplined organizations that failed to establish strong ties to the electorate. The parties signed up candidates, registered voters, and mobilized supporters to come to the polls, but they were inactive between elections (Sabato 2001a, 73–78).

During the 1880s, electoral competition began to wane, and a single party, the National Autonomist Party (PAN), came to dominate, winning all of the presidential elections as well as a majority of the seats in both chambers of the legislature for several decades (Alonso 2010, 13).<sup>8</sup> The PAN, which was officially founded in 1881, had emerged in the early 1870s when a coalition of provincial politicians formed a League of Governors to support the presidential candidacy of Nicolás Avellaneda. General Julio A. Roca quickly became the most important figure within the PAN: he served two terms as president (1880–1886 and 1898–1904) and played a key role in the presidential succession process during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As Roca and others recognized, governors controlled the elections through their influence over the prefects, justices of the peace, and chiefs of police, so the key to electoral success was to win the support of the governors.<sup>9</sup> In order to do so, presidents distributed revenue, land, and credit to the provinces and made the political appointments that the governors preferred (Alonso 2000, 30–31). In addition, the 1853 constitution gave presidents the right to intervene in the provinces, which they used to get rid of or undermine recalcitrant governors on forty separate occasions between 1880 and 1916 (Botana 2012, 104–112).

Although the PAN ruled Argentina for three decades, it never developed into a strong party. Indeed, it was only a loose alliance of politicians without a disciplined or centralized organization (Alonso 2000, 34; Castro 2012, 22; Alonso 2010, 13). The PAN made little effort to organize mass support or develop a loyal membership (Alonso 2000, 34–38; Remmer 1984, 30). It possessed no program or standing bureaucracy, and its provincial branches had considerable autonomy (López 2001a, 72; Remmer 1984, 31; Alonso 2000, 34–38; 2010, 13; Rock 2002, 166). According to *La Prensa*, the PAN was only “a body of clients ... subject to the orders of the master at the top” (cited in Rock 2002, 166). Loyalty was in short supply within the organization and the president had to engage in constant negotiations in order to maintain the support of the governors and legislators (Alonso 2010, 31–32; Castro 2012, 22–24).

The PAN faced relatively little competition until the emergence of the UCR in the 1890s. The UCR was the first Argentine party to build a strong organization, and it initially did so with private rather than public resources since,

<sup>8</sup> Election-day violence declined beginning in the 1880s, but the government continued to intervene in elections (Alonso 1996, 193–194; Botana 2012, 142–152; Alonso 2000, 29–30).

<sup>9</sup> As a newspaper at the time reported: “The justices elect the governor and the governor elects the justices” (cited in Rock 2002, 78).

unlike the PAN, it did not control state offices during its first two decades (Alonso 2000, 162; Remmer 1984, 104; Rock 2002, 144). The UCR created a permanent structure that included precinct-level committees in the major cities around the country and it developed a large and loyal following, which retained its partisan identification even during the late 1890s and early 1900s when the party was inactive. The party not only brought its supporters to the polls, it also mobilized them for rallies and armed uprisings, all of which put pressure on the government to respond to its demands.

Several factors enabled the UCR to develop into a strong party. First, it successfully exploited the center-periphery cleavage that structured Argentine politics during the nineteenth century. The UCR, and its predecessor, the Civic Union, brought together Buenos Aires elites who were frustrated with the dominance of the country by the PAN, a party that was controlled by provincial elites. Indeed, the main leaders of the UCR, such as Leandro Alem, Bernardo de Irigoyen, and Hipólito Yrigoyen, came from the federal capital or the province of Buenos Aires. The UCR catered to interests of Buenos Aires. For example, it supported free trade, which disadvantaged many provinces but benefited the federal capital, which had the only port in the country (Alonso 2000, 210). Unlike many previous parties, however, the UCR successfully organized in the province of Buenos Aires as well as the federal capital, which together represented more than 40 percent of the country's population in the 1890s. The UCR could thus gain significant representation in the legislature with support in these two districts alone, although it subsequently built support in other provinces as well.

Second, the UCR developed a broadly appealing message focused on the corruption of the existing political system in Argentina (Alonso 2000, 108–109; Rock 1975, 50–51). Alonso (2000, 105) argues that the party was essentially backward-looking, seeking to restore the system of the 1860s and 1870s before the PAN monopolized politics. The party did not develop any major reform proposals during its time in the opposition, but it relentlessly denounced government electoral manipulation and called for clean elections.<sup>10</sup> These appeals struck a chord with the many people that were disenchanted with the existing political system and the PAN. Indeed, the UCR developed its provincial networks in part by reaching out to local elites that had been marginalized under the PAN (Rock 2002, 162). The UCR's overwhelming focus on electoral corruption enabled it to bring together groups with very different interests that were disenchanted with the PAN, including students and freethinkers as well

<sup>10</sup> During the early 1890s, the UCR did propose an amendment to the electoral law that sought to reduce fraud in the electoral registries and simplify voting on election days (Alonso 2000, 166; López 2005a, 190–191). This minor proposal passed, but it failed to significantly reduce fraud. Subsequently, a legislator from the UCR, along with another opposition deputy, proposed a more sweeping reform that included obligatory voting, but the ruling party blocked this measure (López 2005a, 192–193).

as pro-clerical groups.<sup>11</sup> It also benefited from the fact that, by the early 1890s, other parties that might have competed with the UCR for the opposition vote had been profoundly weakened or absorbed by the PAN (Alonso 2000, 27–28).

Third, the UCR's principled intransigence also contributed to its popularity. Unlike other parties, the UCR in the 1890s and early 1900s refused to compromise or forge political pacts. Whereas other parties, such as the Autonomist Party and the National Civic Union, undermined their popularity and opposition credentials by forging alliances with the PAN and participating in the government, the UCR resolutely refused to do so. Indeed, beginning in the late 1890s, the UCR vowed it would not even participate in elections until it was certain that they would be fair. This intransigence helped it capture the support of many of those people who had become disillusioned with parties. The UCR's participation in armed uprisings in 1890, 1893, and 1905 also attracted some followers. According to Alonso (2000, 10), "the Radicals' defense of the use of violence became the party's distinguishing feature, producing the most enduring division between the UCR and the other political parties." Many Argentines came to admire the party's steadfastness and the willingness of its leaders to fight for their ideals.

The UCR first emerged in 1890 as the result of a split within the Civic Union movement, which had risen up in protest against the government of Miguel Juárez Celman. The Civic Union had begun as a movement of Buenos Aires students, but it quickly incorporated diverse sectors of the opposition, including political elites, such as Leandro Alem, Bernardo de Irigoyen, and Bartolomé Mitre.<sup>12</sup> The members of the Civic Union had a variety of grievances but most prominent among them were the president's authoritarian governing style and the severe economic crisis that had afflicted Argentina beginning in 1890. The Civic Union also won support among sectors of the army who were dissatisfied with Juárez Celman and his tendency to promote his friends within the military. In July 1890, the Civic Union revolted with the support of its allies in the military. The rebels, who consisted of approximately 1,000 soldiers and 300 civilians, seized an arsenal in the city of Buenos Aires, but they quickly ran out of ammunition and were outnumbered by the army troops that remained loyal to the government. The rebels surrendered after four days of fighting and a toll of some 800–1,000 casualties (Alonso 2000, 56–66; Duncan 1981, 331–332).

A few days after the rebellion, Juárez Celman resigned under pressure from his erstwhile ally Roca who organized the legislature against him.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In its 1915 party manifesto, the UCR defended its lack of a developed platform by arguing that "the only preoccupation of this great party is strict compliance with the sanctity of the vote" (cited in Rock 1975, 51).

<sup>12</sup> The main base of the Civic Union was in Buenos Aires where it had sixty clubs, but it also established clubs in Córdoba, Corrientes, Mendoza, Rio Cuarto, Salta, San Luis, Santa Fe, and Tucumán (Remmer 1984, 32).

<sup>13</sup> Juárez Celman had alienated Roca and others with his domineering style. He also made the mistake of fleeing Buenos Aires at the outset of the rebellion.

Roca then forged an alliance with Mitre to run in a coalition in the 1892 presidential elections. The pact between Mitre and Roca split the Civic Union. The sectors of the Civic Union that opposed the alliance, including Leandro Alem, the president of the movement, and his nephew, Hipólito Yrigoyen, broke off and formed the UCR.<sup>14</sup> The UCR declined to compete in the 1892 presidential elections, arguing that the PAN had corrupted the country's institutions and that electoral fraud made such elections illegitimate. Shortly before the elections, the government discovered evidence that the Radicals were planning another uprising, and it responded by declaring a state of siege and arresting some of the leaders of the party. Although the government temporarily lifted the state of siege on election day, the Radicals nevertheless abstained from the elections.

As soon as the leaders of the UCR were released from prison, they began to plot another revolt, which came to fruition in July 1893 when civilian uprisings involving thousands of participants took place simultaneously in the provinces of Santa Fe, San Luis, and Buenos Aires. A second wave of uprisings, which involved some military troops, occurred in August and September 1893 in additional provinces, including Corrientes and Tucumán.<sup>15</sup> Some of these insurrections, including the ones in Buenos Aires and Santa Fe, temporarily overthrew the provincial governments, leading to Radical takeovers. The armed forces mostly remained loyal to the government, however, and by late 1893 it had suppressed the revolts. In the aftermath, the government severely repressed the UCR, jailing many of its leaders, censoring its newspapers, banning public demonstrations, and maintaining a state of siege throughout 1894 (Alonso 2000, 135–136).

In the wake of the failed insurrections, the UCR opted to abandon the armed struggle and participate in elections, and this strategy paid dividends. In 1894, it won elections to the provincial legislature, national legislature, and governorship in the province of Buenos Aires, and it also registered some electoral successes in the federal capital, Mendoza, and La Rioja (Rock 2002, 161).<sup>16</sup> By 1895, the Radicals controlled sixteen out of the eighty-six seats in the lower chamber, along with one seat in the Senate (Alonso 2000, 165).

After 1896, however, the party entered into crisis largely because of internal divisions and the death of the leader of the party, Leandro Alem, who committed suicide in July 1896 after a period of declining health. His death led to a battle for control of the party between the executive committee of the

<sup>14</sup> Only twenty of the original sixty members of the Civic Union organizing committee in the capital joined the UCR (Alonso 2000, 93).

<sup>15</sup> The revolt in Buenos Aires was the largest, involving an estimated 6,000 men and taking place in eighty of the eighty-two departments in the province (Alonso 2000, 125; Del Mazo 1957, 82–85).

<sup>16</sup> The party was similarly successful in the federal capital, where it consistently won more than 40 percent of the vote between 1892 and 1896 (Alonso 2000, 155 and 159).

party, which was dominated by leaders from the federal capital, and Hipólito Yrigoyen, who had developed a strong and well-organized branch of the party in the province of Buenos Aires. The executive committee sought to forge an alliance with Mitre's National Civic Union, but Yrigoyen opposed such a move since it would weaken his control of the UCR (Federici 2005, 89). The struggle led the party to split in two, and by the end of 1898 it had dissolved (Alonso 2000, 197–198).

Nevertheless, the UCR's disbandment proved only temporary. In 1903, Yrigoyen began to reconstruct the party, drawing mainly on those members who had remained loyal to him during the party's split. In addition to reopening the Buenos Aires branch, he opened party clubs in Córdoba, Santa Fe, Mendoza, and Entre Ríos, reestablishing his links to the provinces (Rock 1975, 48). The relaunch of the party in early 1903 drew a crowd of 50,000 people, demonstrating the Radicals' enduring strength (Alonso 2000, 201; Del Mazo 1957, 113).

Rather than participate in elections, Yrigoyen opted to plan another revolt, this one involving a group of junior army officers. In February 1905, these officers rose up in Buenos Aires and several other provinces and managed to take Vice-President José Figueroa Alcorta hostage. The uprisings received little popular support, however. Senior officers remained loyal to the government and the military quickly suppressed the revolt, which *La Nación* referred to at the time as a "parody of a sedition" (cited in Rock 2002, 193). In the wake of this failed rebellion, the UCR essentially abandoned the armed struggle, although Yrigoyen would occasionally hint at the possibility of future revolts (Yablon 2003, 250).

The failure of the rebellion only briefly interrupted the restructuring of the UCR, however. Yrigoyen and other Radical leaders quickly received an amnesty and deepened their efforts to reorganize the party. By 1906, the party was once again the most popular organization in the federal capital (Yablon 2003, 249). UCR committees were set up not only in the federal capital but in all of the provincial capitals and more than 200 other municipalities between 1906 and 1908 (Remmer 1984, 90; Del Mazo 1957, 123). The UCR continued to abstain from elections after 1905, however, vowing that it would not participate until honest elections could be guaranteed.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, between 1890 and 1910, the UCR grew into a powerful party that relentlessly pushed for free and fair elections. The Radicals were not able to take power during this period either through elections or revolts, but by denouncing the elections as corrupt and refusing to participate in them, the Radicals put pressure on the government to carry out reform. Indeed, as we shall see, one of the reasons that the government enacted democratic reform in 1912 was to persuade the UCR to participate.

<sup>17</sup> The party's repeated refrain was "the only program of the UCR is the restoration of the constitution and freedom of suffrage" (Snow 1965, 30).

# THE SPLIT WITHIN THE RULING PARTY AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Although the emergence of the UCR put democratic reform on the table, it was a split within the ruling party that made enactment of the reform possible. The split dated to 1890, but it grew worse in the early 1900s when Carlos Pellegrini, the second most powerful figure in the PAN, broke with General Roca, the party's dominant leader. The split with Pellegrini undermined Roca's control over the presidential succession process and led in 1910 to the election of a reformist president, Roque Sáenz Peña, who pushed through a sweeping electoral reform in 1912.

The PAN first experienced a major split in the wake of the downfall of President Miguel Juárez Celman, when a number of the former president's supporters formed a group known as the Modernists. With the support of elites from the littoral provinces, including Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos, and Santa Fe, the Modernists sought to nominate Roque Sáenz Peña, who had served in Juárez Celman's cabinet, as the presidential candidate of the PAN in 1892 (Alonso 2010, 280–281; 2000, 90–91). To block his candidacy, Roca engineered the nomination and election of Roque's father, Luis Sáenz Peña, who was viewed as a more malleable figure. The Modernists subsequently disintegrated, while Roca recaptured the presidency in 1898.

The split between Roca and Pellegrini built upon this earlier division but did not occur until 1901 when Pellegrini, who was then an influential senator, proposed a plan that would have stretched out Argentina's annual debt service payments, but at the cost of increasing the country's debt (Richmond 1989, 131–133; Castro 2012, 53–55, 62–69; Waddell 2005, 128–134). Opposition newspapers denounced the plan and students carried out violent protests against it, leading Roca to withdraw his support for it. In response, Pellegrini broke with Roca and thereafter became one of the most prominent supporters of democratic reform (Rock 2002, 177; Waddell 2005, 135–140).<sup>18</sup>

Pellegrini had expected to be chosen as the PAN's presidential candidate in 1904, but after the rupture, Roca was determined to block his candidacy. Neither Roca nor Pellegrini had the power to impose his own preferences, however. As a result, they agreed to hold a Convention of Notables in which the PAN's presidential candidate would be selected (Castro 2012, 118–124). At this convention, Roca successfully maneuvered to have Manuel Quintana, who was not even a member of the PAN, nominated as the party's presidential candidate in order to block the nomination of Pellegrini (Sciarrotta 2005, 144–148; Richmond 1989, 133; Waddell 2005, 137–138).<sup>19</sup> Quintana then

<sup>18</sup> Prior to the rupture, Pellegrini had not been a consistent supporter of electoral reform, arguing that electoral practices would improve over time (Waddell 2005, 139; Rock 2002, 177).

<sup>19</sup> That Roca agreed to support the nomination of Quintana, a traditional rival, shows how much the split had weakened him and how determined he was to prevent the nomination of Pellegrini.

insisted on nominating José Figueroa Alcorta, a former Modernist, as his vice-presidential candidate (Sciarrotta 2005, 147–148; Castro 2012, 136–137).

Quintana was elected president in 1904, but he died only sixteen months after he took office, leaving Figueroa Alcorta in power. Under Figueroa Alcorta, the split within the PAN deepened. The new president sought to dismantle Roca's bases of support, intervening in the provinces and channeling government spending in ways that undermined the allies of Roca and bolstered his own supporters (Sciarrotta 2005, 151–152; Rock 2002, 16).<sup>20</sup> Roca fought back, using his ties to provincial governors and his influence in the legislature to block some of the president's policies. This led Figueroa Alcorta to briefly shut down the legislature in January 1908 and to intervene extensively in the elections that year in order to win a narrow majority in the Chamber of Deputies for the first time (Rock 2002, 199–200; López 2005b, 225–226).<sup>21</sup>

Figueroa Alcorta's success in weakening Roca paved the way for the election of a reformist candidate in 1910. For opponents of Roca, Roque Sáenz Peña was an obvious choice, given his long history of opposition to the former president.<sup>22</sup> In 1909, various Buenos Aires elites who were united by their opposition to Roca formed a new party, National Union, to promote Sáenz Peña's candidacy for president (Rock 2002, 202–203; Castro 2012, 278–79). The Figueroa Alcorta administration, several provincial governors, and many local-level political bosses also provided important support, although the president never explicitly endorsed Sáenz Peña (Rock 2002, 203; Castro 2012, 249–250).

Sáenz Peña's election quickly came to be seen as inevitable. The Radicals called on their supporters to abstain from the elections on the grounds of the "impossibility of the guaranteed and honorable exercise of the suffrage" (López 2005b, 234). The Mitristas nominated Guillermo Udaondo as their presidential candidate, but they, too, called for abstention shortly before the elections because of governmental control of the proceedings. Supporters of Roca did not even put forward a candidate. As a result, on election day in March 1910, Sáenz Peña won an overwhelming victory.

After taking office, Sáenz Peña quickly followed up on his campaign promises to reduce electoral fraud and manipulation by introducing a pair of laws

<sup>20</sup> Figueroa Alcorta also sought the support of the Radicals, but Yrigoyen refused to join his coalition unless he enacted reforms that guaranteed clean elections, which the president declined to do (Remmer 1984, 91, 247; Castro 2012, 238–239; Sciarrotta 2005, 157–158).

<sup>21</sup> Figueroa Alcorta fell short of a majority in the Senate whose members were elected by the provincial legislatures in which Roca still had considerable influence (Sciarrotta 2005, 156; Castro 2012, 237–238; Botana 2012, 184–185; Rock 2002, 198–199).

<sup>22</sup> Sáenz Peña's hostility to Roca dated at least to the 1880s when he served in the government of Juárez Celman, but it deepened over time. In 1897, Sáenz Peña led a group of members of the PAN who sought unsuccessfully to block the reelection of Roca as president, and after Pellegrini's death in 1906, Sáenz Peña became the head of the reformist wing of the PAN (López 2005b, 218–221). As one of Sáenz Peña's political allies put it, his candidacy represented "a symbol against Roca and the oligarchies" (Cited in Castro 2012, 255).



that sought to create a new electoral registry based on the military registration system (Sáenz Peña 1915, 100). Among other things, the new laws created an enrollment card that citizens would use to prove their identity. The legislature approved these laws in mid-1911, but not without some changes and delays caused by supporters of Roca and others (López 2005b, 241–245).

Sáenz Peña introduced a more sweeping electoral reform bill in August 1911. The proposed electoral law had numerous elements, but the provisions establishing obligatory suffrage, the secret ballot, and the incomplete-list electoral system received the most attention.<sup>23</sup> Article 1, following in the Argentine tradition, granted the right to vote to all male citizens, native born or naturalized, above the age of eighteen, with a few exceptions, including clergymen, soldiers, police officers, prisoners, criminals, the insane, and deaf mutes who did not know how to write. Articles 6 and 7 made voting obligatory, although exceptions were made for senior citizens and judges and their assistants who had to be in their offices during the hours of the election. Articles 41, 42, and 45 specified that the room where voters cast their ballots should not have windows or more than one functioning door, which would be shut to ensure that each voter was alone while casting his ballot. Voters would place their ballots in an envelope provided by the electoral authorities and then deposit them in the urn, before leaving the room. Article 44 mandated the use of the incomplete list for the election of national deputies. Under this system, two-thirds of the seats in each district would be awarded to the party list that finished first in the elections and one-third to the runner-up.

Sáenz Peña introduced the reform partly to woo the UCR. After his election in 1910, Sáenz Peña met twice with Yrigoyen to try to negotiate an agreement for the Radicals to participate in elections. Yrigoyen, however, rejected Sáenz Peña's offer to join his government, stating that "the Radical Party is not looking for ministries. It is only asking for guarantees to vote freely at the polls" (Cárcano 1986, 142; Cárcano 1943, 302). Nevertheless, Yrigoyen pledged to end the UCR's policy of abstention if the government would guarantee that elections would be free and fair, declaring: "The Radical Party [UCR] resorts to Revolution because it finds the electoral path closed ... if the government gives us guarantees, we will show up at the polls" (Cárcano 1943, 298). Although Sáenz Peña and Yrigoyen did not sign a formal agreement at these meetings, both of them made verbal commitments that they ultimately honored. Indeed, after the enactment of the reforms, the UCR ended its electoral boycott.

The negotiations clearly indicate Sáenz Peña's desire to persuade the Radicals to participate in elections and his willingness to use the electoral reform to do so. Nevertheless, the role that the UCR played in the reforms should not be exaggerated. Although Yrigoyen subsequently argued that many of the ideas

<sup>23</sup> See *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, Ordinary Session 10, August 11, 1911, pp. 807–818.

for the reform were his own and that he persuaded Sáenz Peña to go along with them, this account is contradicted by the recollections of other participants as well as notes from the meetings (Cantón 1973, 95–99; Cárcano 1986, 142–143; Cárcano 1943, 296–304; López 2005c, 256–257).<sup>24</sup> Sáenz Peña had long called for free elections and he made electoral reform the centerpiece of his 1910 presidential campaign. In August 1909, for example, he gave a speech calling for electoral reform and specifically for the secret and obligatory vote, stating that the latter “has counted at all times on all my sympathy” (López 2005b, 228). Sáenz Peña even demanded that his vice-presidential candidate be someone who shared his concern for electoral reform (López 2005b: 232).<sup>25</sup>

Sáenz Peña and his allies proposed the reform not just to encourage the Radicals to end their electoral boycotts but, equally importantly, to put an end to the electoral fraud and manipulation that had enabled Roca and his allies to dominate the Argentine political system (Castro 2012, 300–304; Hora 2001, 145; Scherlis and López 2005, 572). In presenting the reform to Congress, the president declared that it would “guarantee the liberty and the purity of the suffrage, removing it from the influence of local interests and passions, which were not always well motivated.”<sup>26</sup> In a letter to a close friend and political ally in January 1908, Sáenz Peña depicted the reform as a machine composed of two pistons: one that ended fraud and cleaned up the polls and another that pushed citizens to vote, adding that “only in this way can we attenuate the team of professional politicians that Roca has left us” (Cited in Castro 2012, 300). In a September 1908 letter to another friend, Sáenz Peña argued that ending Roca’s electoral control and establishing free suffrage would not only destroy the existing regime but also return to power a sector of the elite that had been ostracized by Roca (cited in Castro 2012, 255–256).

Sáenz Peña believed that each component of the proposed reform would contribute to the renovation of the political system in a different way. Obligatory

<sup>24</sup> Sáenz Peña did not agree to all of Yrigoyen’s demands. Yrigoyen asked the president to intervene in the provinces to guarantee free elections there, but Sáenz Peña refused. Sáenz Peña also declined Yrigoyen’s request to enact a stricter form of proportional representation rather than the incomplete list (Devoto, Ferrari, and Melón 1997, 176; Cantón 1973, 96).

<sup>25</sup> Some scholars have argued that the reform was aimed at dissuading the Radicals from carrying out revolts, but this seems unlikely. Sáenz Peña did not seem very concerned about the threat of another Radical uprising, and Radical leaders do not appear to have seriously considered one, given the disastrous failure of the 1905 rebellion (Castro 2012, 301–303; Hora 2001, 142–143; Cárcano 1943, 292–293; Devoto 1996, 96–97). In fact, Sáenz Peña suggested that the prevailing political stability made the electoral reform feasible, arguing in his electoral manifesto that “defensive governments cannot be reformers” (Castro 2012, 301; Devoto 1996, 97). Nor is it accurate to view the reform as an effort to incorporate the middle classes, as some scholars have argued, given that the UCR did not represent the middle classes at the time (Alonso 2000, 8; Scherlis and López 2005, 567; Míguez 2012, 15–16; Gallo and Sigal 1963, 213–216). For further discussion of these points, see Madrid (2019b).

<sup>26</sup> See *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, Ordinary Session 10, August 11, 1911, p. 807.

voting would help restore the legitimacy of the system by boosting voter turnout and ending abstentionism, but it would also prevent small groups from controlling the government (Sáenz Peña 1915, 104). The secret ballot, meanwhile, would reduce vote buying and enable free elections. In one speech, he likened vote buying to purchasing an invisible ring: "One does not buy what one cannot see" (Sáenz Peña 1915, 477). Sáenz Peña (1915, 45) supported the incomplete list because it guaranteed the representation of minorities, which he thought was essential to fair elections and good government. His minister of the interior also maintained that the incomplete list would make elections fairer by guaranteeing representation to the losing parties, who were the main victims of electoral manipulation.<sup>27</sup>

The initial prospects for the reform were unclear, given that legislators from the PAN had generally blocked or watered down prior electoral reform proposals.<sup>28</sup> The government had enacted a reform in 1902 that mandated the use of single-member districts to elect federal deputies, but PAN legislators resisted efforts to establish the secret ballot as part of this reform (Botana 2012, 212–213; Castro 2012, 92–100; Malamud 2000a, 111, 116–117; de Privitellio 2006).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in 1905, PAN legislators, over the objections of the opposition, eliminated the single-member districts, reinstating the complete-list electoral system that they believed facilitated their control of the legislature (Castro 2012, 158–159; Sciarrotta 2005, 150; López 2005a, 207–208). By 1910, however, the elements in the PAN that had traditionally blocked electoral reform were considerably weaker than they had been just a few years earlier. In addition, Sáenz Peña was a relatively popular president who was committed to reform.

The Sáenz Peña administration sought to get the reform approved rapidly so that it could be applied to the March 1912 legislative elections. Nevertheless, the proposal met considerable opposition in the legislature, particularly from traditional politicians who feared that it would undermine their political machines. In the Chamber of Deputies, Roquistas led by Julio A. Roca Jr., the son of the former president, headed the opposition to the reform (López 2005c, 279; Heaps-Nelson 1978, 10). In the Senate, the opposition was led by Benito Villanueva, a traditional ally of Roca and the former leader of the PAN in the federal capital, along with two former governors: Ignacio Irigoyen

<sup>27</sup> See *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, Extraordinary Session 5, November 8, 1911, pp. 150–151.

<sup>28</sup> In 1893, President Luis Sáenz Peña, in response to pressure from his son, had proposed a major electoral reform, but the ruling party blocked it (López 2005a, 184–188). In 1905, PAN legislators similarly shot down an attempt to establish the secret ballot (Castro 2012, 158; López 2005a, 208–210).

<sup>29</sup> The 1902 reform also created a permanent electoral registry and a civic document to be used to vote. The Roca administration proposed this reform to try to restore its popularity and the legitimacy of the political system (Castro 2012, 80–81, 92; de Privitellio 2006; Malamud 2000a, 105–106).

of Buenos Aires and Pedro A. Echagüe of Santa Fe (López 2005c, 280). Much of the opposition to the reform came from the more densely populated littoral provinces, especially the province of Buenos Aires, because they had the most developed political machines (Heaps-Nelson 1978, 18). The incumbent governor of Buenos Aires, General José Inocencio Arias, gave mixed signals on his position toward the reform, but many of the deputies from the province voted against key aspects of the reform proposal.<sup>30</sup>

Many of Sáenz Peña's own allies were initially opposed to, or at least unenthusiastic, about the reform proposal (López 2005c, 288–289; Devoto 1996, 106–107). As one deputy acknowledged to the newspaper *Crónica*, legislators did not want to enact any reform that might jeopardize their chances at reelection or antagonize their governors or political bosses:

*Crónica*: “And for what reform proposal will you vote?”

Deputy: “For the one that secures my reelection.”

*Crónica*: “And which is that?”

Deputy: “The one that is promoted by the people who have the most influence over my governor.”<sup>31</sup>

In order to get the reform approved, Sáenz Peña had to aggressively lobby members of his own National Union who ended up providing most of the support for the reform (Devoto 1996, 106–107; Castro 2012, 318; Cárcano 1986, 167; Heaps-Nelson 1978, 23). The number of deputies inclined to vote for the incomplete list did not exceed twelve at the beginning of November 1911, but by the end of the month Sáenz Peña had won the support of fifty of them (Botana 2012, 265). One legislator commented that: “I believe that an Argentine deputy would resist a proposition from Cleopatra, but I don't know if he could resist a proposition from the Argentine president” (cited in Botana 2012, 265). The president's allies even delayed approval of the budget in the lower chamber to put pressure on legislators to pass the reform (Devoto 1996, 107).<sup>32</sup>

The reform proposal first went to the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, which approved the reform project on September 29, 1911, but eliminated Article 44, which mandated the use of the incomplete-list electoral system for elections to the lower chamber. On the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, however, supporters of the incomplete list restored it to the bill, winning a roll-call vote by the narrow margin of 49–32.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See “El Block Bonaerense: Contra la Ley Electoral,” *La Razón*, November 27, 1911; and “La Lista Incompleta,” *La Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, October 24, 1911.

<sup>31</sup> “En la Presidencia,” *Crónica*, November 3, 1911.

<sup>32</sup> Of the deputies elected in 1910 when Sáenz Peña's National Union swept to power, thirty-five ended up supporting the reform and only eleven opposed it. By contrast, only fifteen deputies elected in 1908 voted for the reform, while twenty-three opposed it (López 2005c, 284–285). A somewhat similar pattern held in the Senate (Heaps-Nelson 1978, 23).

<sup>33</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, November 24, 1911, p. 338. See also Heaps-Nelson (1978, 18) for an analysis of who supported and who opposed the incomplete list.

They also won a subsequent vote to mandate the use of the incomplete list for elections to select senators from the federal capital as well as electors for the president and vice-president.<sup>34</sup> The discussion of the secret ballot was, surprisingly, less contentious, passing by a margin of forty-three votes.<sup>35</sup> However, reform opponents rejected the obligatory voting provision by a 34–32 vote.<sup>36</sup> Roca Jr. criticized the obligatory voting proposal on the grounds that it was “a leap into the darkness” since few countries had adopted it.<sup>37</sup>

Once the reform had cleared the Chamber of Deputies, it went to the Senate where the president had fewer allies. Here as well, the articles on the secret ballot received little attention – most of the debate focused on the provisions establishing obligatory voting and the incomplete list. Some senators criticized the obligatory voting proposal on the grounds that it eliminated the right to abstain and had not been widely implemented, but supporters of the obligatory vote easily prevailed on a roll-call vote with thirteen members in favor and six opposed.<sup>38</sup> More senators opposed the incomplete list, but in the end, its supporters narrowly prevailed on a 10–9 vote.<sup>39</sup> The Senate version of the reform then returned to the Chamber of Deputies, which approved the reform bill, including the obligatory voting provision, with only one minor modification.<sup>40</sup> The reform bill, Law 8871, became law on February 10, 1912.

The author carried out a statistical analysis of legislator support for the 1912 reform in the Chamber of Deputies, using a roll-call vote on the incomplete-list provision as well as López’s (2005c, 280–283) classification of deputies as reformists, undecided, or anti-reformists (Madrid 2019b). This analysis found that deputies elected in 1910, which was used as a proxy for membership in Sáenz Peña’s National Union, were significantly more likely to support the reform than other legislators.<sup>41</sup> Legislators who hailed from districts where the UCR was strong were also more likely to support the reform, although the relationship was weaker and less consistent. By contrast, legislators were not statistically more likely to support the reform if they came from districts where the urbanization rate was higher, industrial production was greater, strikes were more numerous, and the urban working or middle classes represented a larger share of the electorate. This quantitative analysis therefore provides

<sup>34</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, December 15, 1911, pp. 613–614.

<sup>35</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, December 13, 1911, pp. 582–583.

<sup>36</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, December 1, 1911, p. 538.

<sup>37</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, November 29, 1911, p. 501.

<sup>38</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, February 3, 1912, pp. 345–347.

<sup>39</sup> See the roll-call vote in *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, February 3, 1912, p. 351.

<sup>40</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, February 10, 1912, pp. 382–383.

<sup>41</sup> It is reasonable to assume that most legislators elected in 1910 were members of the National Union, given that party’s dominance of the 1910 elections and the fact that the elections used the complete-list system, which awarded all legislative seats in a district to whichever party or list finished first. By contrast, legislators elected in 1908 are assumed not to be members of the National Union since this party did not even exist then.

support for the idea that ruling party dissidents, and to a lesser extent UCR pressure, helped bring about the reform.

Thus, a split within the PAN led to the rise of a dissident faction that promoted reform partly to persuade the opposition Radicals to participate in elections, but also to renovate a corrupt political system that had long excluded them from power. Instead of proposing electoral reform, Sáenz Peña, like Figueroa Alcorta, could have used his control of the presidency to intervene in provinces and elections to weaken Roca and his allies. Yet any such effort might well have proven temporary. Once Sáenz Peña left office, the provincial networks of political bosses could have reassembled under the leadership of Roca or some other leader as they had in the past. By contrast, electoral reform seemed to offer a more permanent solution to the political corruption that Roca embodied. Indeed, in a 1908 letter to an ally, Sáenz Peña cautioned that “destroying Roca with his regime and its phalanxes is not an end but rather a means to redeem and rehabilitate the country” (cited in Castro 2012, 234).

#### ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN ARGENTINA AFTER 1912

The 1912 electoral reforms brought democracy to Argentina, although it was not until 1916 that a democratically elected president took office. The establishment of obligatory voting led to a dramatic increase in voter turnout, as did the decision of the UCR to abandon its policy of abstention. Whereas in the 1910 legislative elections 21 percent of registered voters had voted, in the 1912 legislative elections 68.5 percent of registered voters cast ballots (Cantón 1973, 45). During the next eighteen years, turnout would fluctuate somewhat, but in all cases it would remain significantly above the pre-1912 levels (Jones, Lauga, and León-Roesch 2005, 80–82, 108–109; Ministerio del Interior 2008, 59–69). As Table 6.2 indicates, voter turnout as a percent of the overall population also rose dramatically, increasing from 2.8 percent in 1910 to 9.2 percent in 1916 and 13.4 percent in 1928.

In the wake of the 1912 reforms, official intervention in elections declined markedly, particularly in urban areas, and elections became relatively free and fair.<sup>42</sup> The secret ballot discouraged vote buying and made it more difficult for political bosses to compel voters to support certain candidates. The adoption of the incomplete-list electoral system ensured that opposition parties gained legislative representation even in those districts where they did not come out on top. As a result, the opposition's share of legislative seats rose dramatically. The Radicals, for example, won 20 percent of the legislative seats up for election in 1912, 32 percent in 1914, and 42 percent in 1916. Even more importantly, Yrigoyen and the Radicals captured the presidency in 1916, winning 46.8 percent of the popular vote and a narrow majority of the votes in electoral

<sup>42</sup> Victorino de la Plaza, who became president after Sáenz Peña's death, described himself as “the first president of Argentina who does not know the name of [his] successor” (Rock 2002, 213).

TABLE 6.2 *Presidential elections in Argentina, 1854–1928*

Year	Winner (party)	Winner's share of electoral votes (%)	Runner-up's share of electoral votes (%)	Popular votes cast (% of total pop.)
1854	Justo José de Urquiza (Federal)	86	7	6,400 (1)
1860	Santiago Derqui (Federal)	58	36	12,800 (1)
1862	Bartolomé Mitre (Liberal)	85	0	14,000 (1)
1868	Domingo Sarmiento (independent)	51	17	16,900 (1)
1874	Nicolas Avellaneda (PAN)	64	35	25,800 (1.2)
1880	Julio A. Roca (PAN)	68	31	52,800 (2.0)
1886	Miguel Juárez Celman (PAN)	72	14	61,900 (2.0)
1892	Luis Sáenz Peña (PAN)	91	2	77,200 (2.0)
1898	Julio A. Roca (PAN)	73	13	89,200 (2.0)
1904	Manuel Quintana (PAN)	80	11	143,000 (2.5)
1910	Roque Sáenz Peña (National Union)	88	1	199,000 (2.8)
1916	Hipólito Yrigoyen (UCR)	51	35	745,825 (9.2)
1922	Marcelo de Alvear (UCR)	63	16	876,354 (9.5)
1928	Hipólito Yrigoyen (UCR)	65	19	1,461,605 (13.4)

Source: Latin American Historical Elections Database.

college. Conservatives, however, continued to control the Senate as well as most governorships (Remmer 1984, 93; Rock 1975, 96–97).

Between 1916 and 1930, the Radicals consolidated their dominance, winning regular victories in both presidential and legislative elections. A Radical leader, Marcelo de Alvear, succeeded Yrigoyen in 1922, winning 49 percent of the valid popular vote and 63 percent of the electoral college. Then in 1928, Yrigoyen returned to the helm, winning a resounding victory with 62 percent of the popular vote and 65 percent of the electoral college. The Radicals also dominated legislative elections during this period. After 1922, the UCR split, but the various Radical factions together still typically won a majority of the seats in the lower chamber.



The Radicals dominated elections throughout this period in large part because they built a strong national organization with branches located throughout the country. In addition, once in office, the UCR developed a strong patronage network that delivered goods to its supporters. The middle classes and the children of immigrants, in particular, flocked to the party drawn by the lure of patronage and the Radicals' criticisms of the traditional political elites (Cornblit 1975, 621–622; Rock 1975, 110–114; Walter 1978, 599–602; Alonso 2000, 202–203). Moreover, the other parties were generally poorly organized and strong in only a few areas, such as the Socialists and the Liga del Sur. The conservatives also suffered from divisions. Indeed, the votes for the various conservative forces actually outnumbered the votes for the Radicals in 1912, 1914, and 1916, but they were split between many parties (Cornblit 1975, 636). Various conservative leaders, including Sáenz Peña (1915, 531), urged the conservatives to unite, but their leaders could not overcome their personal differences, focusing their efforts on overcoming their conservative rivals rather than defeating the Radicals (Castro 2012, 321–322).

In power, the Radicals were guilty of some of the same misdeeds as their predecessors. Yrigoyen concentrated power and frequently intervened in the provinces to replace opposition governments or those controlled by dissident Radicals. The federal government ousted provincial governments on twenty separate occasions between 1916 and 1921, and these interventions lasted on average eleven months (Remmer 1984, 100). The Yrigoyen administration also sometimes interfered in elections, but the central means that the Radicals used to win elections was organization and patronage rather than fraud and intervention. Bartolucci and Taroncher (1994, 183) argue that “fraud in its broadest characteristics was eradicated [with the reform] ... the cases of fraud [that remained] were the product of the isolated actions of lower-level leaders, in contrast to the systematic planning that was evident in the previous political period.”

Yrigoyen's personalistic policies gradually led to a split within the party between supporters of Yrigoyen and his opponents, who were dubbed the Anti-personalists (Alemán and Saiegh 2014; Smith 1974). This split broke open during the Alvear administration when the new president sought to weaken Yrigoyen's influence. Although Yrigoyen managed to recapture the presidency in 1928, by that time he was seventy-six years old and no longer at the height of his powers. Moreover, the onset of the Great Depression in 1930 forced the Yrigoyen administration to cut jobs and spending, which undermined the party's support. Unemployment rose, exports fell, and foreign financing disappeared, which prompted landowners, industrialists, and commercial interests as well as workers and employees to abandon the government. Students began to organize violent demonstrations against the government, and in September 1930, the military stepped in, overthrowing the government.<sup>43</sup> The country would not experience another lengthy period of democracy until the 1980s.

<sup>43</sup> Yrigoyen's interference in military promotions and his use of the armed forces to intervene in the provinces had gradually alienated many military officers.

Various scholars have argued that Argentina's failure to develop a strong conservative party undermined democracy in the country by encouraging conservatives to call for military intervention, rather than dislodging governments through the ballot box (Gibson 1996; Di Tella 1971–1972; Middlebrook 2000a). Without a strong conservative party to protect them, these scholars suggest, elites resorted to extra-constitutional means to defend their interests. The problem, however, was not just that Argentina failed to develop a strong conservative party but also that only one strong party arose in the country, in contrast to Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay.<sup>44</sup> Without a strong opposition party to constrain them, ruling parties at times abused their governing powers. In the absence of a strong opposition party, ruling parties could not easily be dislodged via elections, encouraging the opposition to call on the military to intervene. This is what occurred in 1930 and it led to the breakdown of democracy in Argentina (Alemán and Saiegh 2014, 851–853; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013, 131–132). Similar processes would take place in subsequent years.

Nevertheless, between 1916 and 1930, Argentina represented a democratic pioneer in Latin America and a model for much of the world. Argentina did not become fully democratic during this period since women could not vote and some electoral manipulation continued, but elections were relatively free and fair, electoral participation was high, and alternation in power could and did occur. Although this vibrant democracy came to an end in 1930, many of the democratic innovations of this period, including obligatory voting and the secret ballot, continued to be used in Argentine elections in the decades that followed.

#### THE ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA

Colombia democratized at approximately the same time as Argentina and for very similar reasons. Like Argentina, Colombia was plagued by opposition revolts during the nineteenth century, which undermined constitutional rule and provoked state repression. At the outset of the twentieth century, however, Colombia professionalized its military, which deterred the opposition from carrying out further revolts and led it to focus on the electoral path to power.

Parties played a central role in the emergence of democracy in Colombia. As Chapter 4 discussed, two powerful parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, arose during the nineteenth century. From 1886 until 1930, the Liberal Party was in the opposition, and it advocated democratic reforms. The ruling Conservative Party resisted the reforms, but in the early 1900s Conservative dissidents broke with their party and allied with some Liberals to form the Republican Union. The members of the Republican Union then pushed the democratic reforms through the constituent assembly in 1910.

<sup>44</sup> The UCR largely defended elite interests during its tenure in government. For example, it enacted liberal economic policies and opposed labor activism.

The reforms strengthened horizontal accountability, guaranteed minority representation, and expanded the suffrage. In the decades that followed, most elections were relatively free and fair, and the opposition respected the results. Colombia did not become a full democracy in the early twentieth century because some electoral abuses continued and some restrictions on the franchise remained. Moreover, the military was not able to establish a monopoly on violence throughout the entire country, which encouraged regional rebellions that undermined democracy. Nevertheless, the 1910 constitutional reforms represented a watershed in Colombia's democratic development.

#### THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY AND REVOLTS

The Colombian state had a weak military and low coercive capacity throughout most of the nineteenth century. When the independence struggle ended in 1825, the new nation of Gran Colombia, which included present-day Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, had a large military composed of some 25,000–30,000 men (Safford and Palacios 2002, 111). The armed forces, which absorbed three-quarters of the government's revenues, were dominated by Venezuelans whose interference in politics created resentment among the elites of Bogotá.<sup>45</sup> These anti-military attitudes persisted among the civilian elites even after the secession of Venezuela in 1830, and led Congress to slash the military's budget and limit the number of troops to 3,300 men (Bushnell 1993, 87).

In the decades that followed, the Colombian government kept the military small in part because the country was poor and lacked the resources to invest in the armed forces. In 1870, Colombian exports were less than one-third those of Chile and less than one-fifth those of Argentina, even though Colombia was a much more populous nation (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 56, 59). According to data from Bolt et al. (2018), Colombia's GDP per capita in 1870 was the third lowest in South America of those for which there are data.

In addition, Colombia had no pressing external security threats during the nineteenth century that required a military buildup. Colombia had border disputes with its neighbors, but it did not fight any foreign wars during the nineteenth century, aside from brief conflicts with Ecuador and Peru that were resolved in Colombia's favor without it having to mobilize troops on a national scale (Esquivel Triana 2010, 159). Nor did it face powerful rivals. Most of Colombia's neighbors – Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela – had relatively small and weak militaries in the nineteenth century, and Brazil's much larger armed forces were stretched thin and based far from its border with Colombia. Although Colombia faced numerous internal revolts during the nineteenth century, many civilian elites viewed the military more as a threat than as a reliable ally in suppressing these rebellions.

<sup>45</sup> This resentment was exacerbated by the fact that many of the Venezuelan military officers, unlike the Colombian elites, were of African descent.

The size of the Colombian army fluctuated over time but until the 1880s it never exceeded 4,000 men (Payne 1968, 120; López-Alves 2000, 138). The Liberal governments of the 1850s–1870s were particularly frugal, slashing the army to under 2,000 men, a level below that of most other South American nations. The federal constitution of 1863 sought to delegate military responsibilities to the states, calling on each state to organize its own army. As a result, between 1863 and 1875 the army accounted for only 12 percent of the federal budget. William Scruggs, the US minister to Colombia, reported in 1875 that “[t]he National Army is merely nominal. Indeed, it can scarcely be said to exist” (Delpar 1981, 87–88).

The troops, moreover, were poorly paid, trained, and equipped. Soldiers frequently went into battle armed only with clubs, spears, and machetes – rifles had to be shared among various combatants (Tirado Mejía 1976, 54–57). The wages of the troops were often well below what they could obtain in other types of labor, and as a result, the soldiers tended to come from the poorest and least educated families (Deas 2002b, 90; Maingot 1967, 103–104, 115–118). In 1882, the Colombian government reported that less than one-third of the troops could read (Deas 2002b, 92). The government forcibly recruited troops, especially during wartime, and the soldiers frequently resisted combat and deserted in high numbers (Somma 2011, 233–234; Jurado Jurado 2005).

Military officers also lacked training. In 1848, President Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera founded a military college, but it closed in 1854 (Safford and Palacios 2002, 236). Efforts in 1861, 1883, 1891, and 1896 to create schools that would train officers and professionalize the armed forces also failed (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 25; Maingot 1967, 120–121). Officers typically owed their positions to political connections rather than military expertise, and during civil wars the military would divide along party lines (Delpar 1981, 87; López-Alves 2000, 135–137).

The weakness of the military encouraged frequent rebellions throughout the nineteenth century, as Table 6.3 indicates. Between 1830 and 1899, Colombia experienced fifteen major revolts as well as dozens of minor ones.<sup>46</sup> Colombia’s vast size and rugged terrain also encouraged revolts by making them difficult to suppress. Even after the loss of Ecuador and Venezuela, Colombia spanned more than 1.1 million square kilometers (twice the size of France), and the country was extremely mountainous.<sup>47</sup> The military therefore could not easily transport troops or communicate with them in the field.<sup>48</sup> As a result,

<sup>46</sup> According López-Alves (2000, 118), Colombia suffered more than fifty local rebellions during the nineteenth century.

<sup>47</sup> During the nineteenth century, a trip from Medellín to Bogota could take 20–30 days, even though the two cities are only 260 miles apart (Somma 2011, 220).

<sup>48</sup> The introduction of the railroad and steamships during the late nineteenth century improved the situation, but they only covered a small area of the country. Telegraph lines spread more widely, but these lines were frequently out of service. A contemporary joke was that telegraph delays were so common that a man sent his wife in the provinces a wire saying that “by the time you read this, I will be in your arms” (Safford and Palacios 2002, 255).

TABLE 6.3 *Major revolts in Colombia, 1830–1929*

Year	Description of revolt	Type of revolt (outcome)
1830	General Rafael Urdaneta overthrew President Joaquín Mosquera who had appointed liberals to high positions.	Military coup (took power)
1831	Liberals José María Obando and José Hilario López rebelled and overthrew Urdaneta.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1839–1842	War of the Supremes. Radical Liberals rebelled against President José Ignacio de Márquez, but they were defeated. 3,400 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1851	Conservatives rebelled against Liberal President José Hilario López, but the revolt was suppressed. 1,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1854	General José María Melo overthrew Liberal President José María Obando in a coup.	Military coup (took power)
1854	Constitutionalist Liberals and Conservatives assembled 11,000 rebels and defeated General Melo. 4,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1859–1862	Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera overthrew Conservative President Mariano Ospina with help from Liberals. 6,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1865	Conservatives revolted in various states, but they were suppressed by the military.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1867	Military officers with aid of Radical Liberals and Conservatives overthrew President Mosquera after he closed Congress.	Military coup (took power)
1875	Conservatives and Radicals joined forces to overthrow the Liberal governor of Magdalena.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1876–1877	War of the Parish Priests. Conservatives rebelled against liberal President Santiago Pérez, but they were defeated. 9,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1884	Radical Liberals rebelled against the governor of Santander but were defeated.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1884–1885	Radical Liberals rebelled against President Rafael Núñez, but they were defeated. 3,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1893	Artisans rioted in response to a newspaper article criticizing them as immoral. The riot was suppressed with 40–45 people killed.	Popular uprising (suppressed)
1895	Liberals rebelled against Conservative President Miguel Antonio Caro, but the revolt was suppressed. 2,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1899–1902	War of a Thousand Days. Liberals revolted against Conservative President Manuel Antonio San Clemente but lost. 100,000 deaths.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1900	Historical Conservatives carried out a coup that replaced the ailing President San Clemente with his vice-president.	Military coup (took power)

Source: Latin American Revolts Database.

internal wars sometimes dragged on for months and even years: The War of the Supremes (1839–1842), for example, lasted twenty-seven months; and the War of a Thousand Days spanned thirty-nine months (Patiño Villa 2010, 98–99). Both sides relied on the assistance of party militias, which typically did much of the fighting (López-Alves 2000, 137; Maingot 1967, 103).

The government prevailed in most civil wars in part because it typically had superior weaponry. For example, during the War of a Thousand Days, the rebels had only 20,000 firearms as opposed to the 200,000 belonging to the government (Jaramillo 1986, 74). Nevertheless, in some cases, the government was obliged to grant concessions, such as amnesties or policy reforms, to persuade the rebels to surrender, which encouraged the opposition to mount further rebellions. Moreover, in a number of cases, the rebels triumphed: Revolts toppled presidents in 1830, 1831, 1854, 1859, and 1867.<sup>49</sup> Armed revolts, in fact, represented a more promising path to power than elections in nineteenth-century Colombia, given that the latter only twice led to alternations in the party in power (Bushnell 1992, 19).

The nineteenth-century revolts typically pitted Liberals against Conservatives, although intraparty struggles also occurred at times. Occasionally, Liberals and Conservatives would fight on the same side, but as partisan identities developed, the conflicts increasingly broke down along party lines. Electoral fraud, political exclusion, and unconstitutional seizures of power often served as the catalysts for civil wars, but many of the conflicts were rooted in differences the two parties had with regard to the Catholic Church.<sup>50</sup> Liberal reforms that sought to curtail the influence of the Church met intense resistance from Conservatives who received material as well as symbolic support from the clergy.<sup>51</sup> The War of the Supremes, for example, began when President José Ignacio de Márquez ordered the closure of all monasteries with fewer than eight members, whereas the War of the Parish Priests was triggered by a Liberal decree restricting religious education in the public schools.

Rebel leaders mobilized their supporters through a variety of methods. Landlords pressured peasants to fight in the rebel armies or promised them financial rewards, such as a share of the war booty (Somma 2011, 203–216). Both sides also recruited volunteers by pledging to enact policies that would benefit them and by demonizing the other side. Liberal leaders, for example, motivated Afro-Colombians to fight in some of the early conflicts by promising

<sup>49</sup> In 1830 and 1854, military leaders overthrew the government, but forces representing the erstwhile political leaders rebelled and recaptured power.

<sup>50</sup> Other factors, including economic and social cleavages, regionalism, and personal political ambition, also contributed to the conflicts (Safford 2000; Earle 2000b).

<sup>51</sup> Uribe-Castro (2019) found that the expropriation of Church assets in the late nineteenth century reduced municipal-level violence in Colombia by weakening the Church and making it a less attractive ally.

them emancipation. Conservatives responded by appealing to racial and class-based fears, as in this 1861 speech by President Mariano Ospina:

Do you believe that ignorant blacks from Cauca, that these outlaws, dangerous men from the villages, that these men who formed the rebels' army are interested in philosophical questions about the form of government? No, this is a stupid belief. The motives of the masses surrounding the rebels' army are none other than your property and hatred for your race. (Cited in Rojas de Ferro 1995, 218)

Over time, the rebels managed to assemble larger and larger armies, thanks in part to the growing strength of partisan identities in Colombia. In the mid-century conflicts, the rebel armies consisted of only 3,000–4,000 troops, but they mobilized 15,000 soldiers in the 1876–1877 War of the Parish Priests, and tens of thousands of troops in the 1899–1902 War of a Thousand Days (Somma 2011, 203–204).<sup>52</sup>

The rebellions deepened authoritarianism in Colombia. When the rebels overthrew presidents or local-level leaders, they subverted constitutional rule. Even where the rebels did not prevail, however, they still undermined democracy by provoking state repression. Governments often responded to revolts by shutting down opposition newspapers and imprisoning, exiling, or even executing members of the opposition. During the War of the Supremes, for example, both sides executed prisoners, sometimes by firing squad and other times with lances (Safford and Palacios 2002, 222). In addition, the government at times forced citizens to provide loans to finance the war efforts or seized properties belonging to supporters of the rebels (López-Alves 2000, 121). Although some of these repressive measures only lasted as long as the rebellions, others endured. The 1884–1885 civil war, for example, gave birth to the long-lasting 1886 constitution, which granted the president the right to declare a state of siege in case of foreign war or civil commotion, a measure that presidents frequently invoked (Park 1985, 265).<sup>53</sup>

The revolts also had high human costs. According to McGreevey (1971, 88), the civil wars that occurred between 1830 to 1899 led to 33,300 deaths, and this does not include most of the fatalities in the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902). Moreover, the lethality of these conflicts went up over time. Whereas the civil wars prior to 1860 led to no more 4,000 deaths each, the revolution of 1860 caused 6,000 deaths, the War of the Parish Priests led to 9,000 deaths, and the War of a Thousand Days led to an estimated 100,000 deaths (Patiño Villa 2010, 98–99). Some of the increase in fatalities was due to the introduction of more sophisticated weaponry into Colombia. During the 1876–1877 war, for example, the Liberal Government of Aquileo Parra

<sup>52</sup> Women and children also fought in the rebel armies (Jaramillo 1986, 60–63).

<sup>53</sup> The 1853 and 1863 constitutions in Colombia had not provided for states of exception – they were the only Spanish American constitutions during the nineteenth century to lack this provision (Loveman 1993, 161).



acquired 5,500 Remington rifles and eight artillery pieces, while the rebels obtained 3,000 rifles (Somma 2011, 236). Whereas a traditional rifle could fire one shot per minute, a Remington could fire six per minute and a machine gun could fire dozens.

The economic costs of the rebellions were also high. In 1882 one Independent Liberal newspaper described the ravages of war as follows:

Every two years we have a war or feel the effects of one. When blood is not shed, or forced loans are not exacted, or property is not confiscated, there is at the very least profound agitation affecting even the lowest levels of society; business is paralyzed, industries decay, and capital flees to where it can find better guarantees – that is, in four or six months of agitation we destroy the good we have done in the previous two years. (Cited in Delpar 1981, 98)

Holguín (1976, 83–84) estimated that nine national civil wars cost the government 31.5 million Colombian pesos and fourteen local wars cost 5.6 million Colombian pesos, counting only the money that the Treasury allocated for the wars. McGreevey (1971, 176) calculated that the soldiers who died in the wars would have earned \$822 million in US dollars over their lifetimes. Neither of these figures, however, come close to representing the true economic costs since they do not include the disruption of business, the deterrence of investment, and the destruction of property.

The high costs of these wars led President Rafael Núñez, who dominated Colombia from 1880 until his death in 1894, to seek to create a military capable of bringing an end to the revolts. In 1885 when a rebellion broke out, he reached an agreement with the Conservatives to create a national reserve army composed of Conservative volunteers (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 31; Delpar 1981, 130; Safford and Palacios 2002, 245). The following year, Núñez enacted a new constitution that brought an end to the federalist system established in 1863 and declared that the central government alone had the power to import, manufacture, and possess arms and munitions of war. The Núñez administration also purchased 5,000 Gras rifles from France and significantly increased the number of troops. By 1888, the army had more than 6,200 troops, up from fewer than 1,500 men in the 1870s.

Nevertheless, Núñez did little to professionalize the military. In fact, he deepened its politicization by purging Liberals from the officer corps (Esquivel Triana 2010, 242–243). Efforts to improve the training of officers by creating military schools proved short lived, and the military continued to rely heavily on poorly trained and forcibly recruited troops (Soifer 2015, 230). Moreover, after the brief expansion of the army in the 1880s, the number of troops began to decline again (López-Alves 2000, 138–139). The continued weakness of the military became evident when it struggled to defeat the rebels in the War of a Thousand Days.

It was not until after the War of a Thousand Days that the government took major steps to professionalize the military. The export growth that Colombia

experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped finance military modernization and other state-building efforts. Between 1870 and 1913, exports grew by 5.4 percent above inflation annually, one of the fastest rates in Latin America (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 100). Although the economy had suffered during the War of a Thousand Days, under the administration of General Rafael Reyes (1904–1909) it began a rapid recovery, as foreign aid and international loans poured into the country (Lemaitre 2002, 255–256).

The military's poor performance in the war and the painful loss of Panama in the aftermath led to the emergence of a small group of military reformers in the Reyes regime (Studer 1975, 52–54). These reformers sought to professionalize and depoliticize the military, converting it into a national institution (Bergquist 1978, 225–226; Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 22).<sup>54</sup> To help with the overhaul of the military, the government hired a Chilean mission in 1907 and it was followed by three more Chilean missions, which lasted until 1915 (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 22–30; Arancibia Clavel 2002). None of these missions was large, but they exercised considerable influence, particularly at the outset.

One of the government's first steps was to enact Law 17 of 1907, which aimed to establish rational and meritocratic criteria for advancement within the military and deal with the huge number of officers who had received promotions in the war (Cardona 2008, 85–88; Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 62). The following year, Reyes issued Decree 1313, which required that officers take certain courses in order to be promoted (Cardona 2008, 90). In addition, the Reyes administration, with the assistance of Chilean officers, established several institutions to train military officers: the Army Cadet School, the Naval School, and the Superior War College (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 385–386; Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 60–63; Cardona 2008, 88–91). By 1914, the Army Cadet School had 110 students and the Superior War College had accepted thirty-six students (Cardona 2008, 89–90).

To cut military expenditures and create a better-trained and more professional force, the government reduced the size of the army, which had ballooned to 50,000 soldiers in the war, to 5,000 troops. Congress also prohibited the forced recruitment of soldiers in 1909. Nevertheless, Reyes' efforts to establish obligatory military service and to ban the use of payments to avoid military service largely failed (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 399; Cardona 2008, 97). As a result, soldiers continued to be drawn largely from the poorest sectors of Colombian society (Cardona 2008, 98).

The Reyes regime sought to ensure that the military had a monopoly on the use of force by initiating a program to collect the weapons Colombians had stockpiled during the War of a Thousand Days and earlier. By 1909, this program had collected 65,505 guns and 1,138,649 bullets (Bergquist 1978, 225; Esquivel Triana 2010, 265; Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 21). Reyes also created

<sup>54</sup> Although Reyes was a Conservative, he brought Liberals into his cabinet and sought to reduce partisan hostilities.

some new departments and broke up existing ones to weaken regional power centers, appease some local groups, and reduce the likelihood of rebellion (Bergquist 1978, 226). Finally, the Reyes regime increased the state's ability to respond to rebellions by building up Colombia's transportation and communications infrastructure. By 1910, Colombia had 614 miles of railroad track and 10,600 miles of telegraph lines, up from 409 miles of track and 6,500 miles of lines in 1903 (Banks and Wilson 2014).

Many of the military reforms proposed by the missions generated resistance from officers who resented Chilean interference and sought to protect their traditional prerogatives. Moreover, politicians continued to try to intervene in military promotions. Reyes himself provoked the ire of the Chilean mission by promoting his personal friends to key posts, rather than the graduates of the army School of Cadets (Abel 1987, 60). Nevertheless, overall, Reyes was a strong supporter of the reforms and helped ensure their implementation.

The government of Carlos Restrepo (1910–1914) continued with the professionalization efforts, albeit somewhat more tepidly (Maingot 1967, 192–196). The Restrepo administration modernized the weaponry of the military, expanded the training of officers, strictly implemented the regulations governing the promotion of officers, and avoided using the military to intervene in elections (Esquivel Triana 2010, 269–73; Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 62–67; Abel 1987, 61–62). Restrepo also sought to deny troops the right to vote to ensure that they did not get involved in elections, although he failed to get this measure approved by Congress.

The professionalization efforts clearly improved the coercive capacity of the Colombian state during the early twentieth century, which helped deter revolts. Indeed, there were no major revolts in Colombia during the first few decades of the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> The Liberal Party engaged in some small local uprisings during the early twentieth century, but eschewed major rebellions, in part because of the bitter memories of the disastrous War of a Thousand Days, and also because it recognized that it had little chance of prevailing in battle (Maingot 1967, 158, 165–166). Instead, Liberals focused on the electoral path to power, competing in elections and pushing for further democratic reforms. Some elements of the Liberal Party did advocate rebellion in the wake of the party's defeat in the 1922 elections in which there were compelling allegations of widespread fraud. However, General Benjamín Herrera, the defeated presidential candidate in 1922, refused to pursue a costly armed struggle that he did not believe his party could win.

The professionalization efforts also helped change the culture of the military. In the wake of the reforms, the military largely ceased to intervene in elections, although the police continued to be used in support of whichever party happened to be in power locally (Deas 1996, 174–175; Posada-Carbó 1997, 269; Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 62–92). Increasingly, the military saw its role as

<sup>55</sup> There was a major labor strike in 1928, which the military bloodily repressed.

to guarantee that the elections were held in an orderly fashion, rather than to support one side or another, and local authorities often called on the military to keep the peace at election time. Conservative officers continued to dominate the military throughout the early twentieth century, but these officers largely abstained from politics (Abel 1987, 62; Bushnell 1993, 157). Indeed, when a Liberal candidate was elected president in 1930, the military did not seek to intervene to block him from taking office.

Military professionalization did not go as far in Colombia as it did in the Southern Cone, however. Indeed, the return of Conservative administrations in 1914 brought an end to the military professionalization efforts because many Conservatives were unenthusiastic about measures that sought to undermine their control of the armed forces. In 1914, the government initiated the fourth and final Chilean mission, but it only had one officer to begin with, and this officer resigned in 1915 when the minister of war stripped him of his powers to appoint the officers teaching in the Military School (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 435–438). Once the Chilean mission came to an end, the military training programs deteriorated as the old guard officers reasserted control (Maingot 1967, 198–200). After a failed attempt to hire a German mission, the Colombian government enlisted a Swiss training mission in 1924. The Swiss, however, encountered many of the same obstacles that had obstructed the Chileans, and they ended their mission in 1928 without having made significant progress (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, ch. 5).

As a result, the Colombian military remained considerably weaker than its Argentine and Chilean counterparts. Between 1909 and 1922, the army fluctuated between 5,000 and 6,000 troops, which was below that of many of its neighbors (Abel 1987, 62; Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 124–125). The military budget also declined, dropping to a low of 7.6 percent of the total budget in 1923 (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 116). Military salaries were low, the equipment was deficient, and the training of officers and troops was rudimentary throughout this period (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 137; Maingot 1967, 200–208). The relative weakness of the Colombian military, combined with the ruggedness of the country's terrain, made it difficult for the government to establish a monopoly on violence and led to a renewal of revolts during the mid-twentieth century. This violence undermined the country's democracy in the long run. Nevertheless, the reformed military proved more than capable of suppressing the modest threats to the internal order that arose during the early twentieth century, which paved the way for the initial emergence of democracy in Colombia (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 97–110; Abel 1974, 209; Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 173–185).

## THE RISE OF STRONG PARTIES IN COLOMBIA

The emergence of two strong parties in Colombia during the nineteenth century also helped lead to democratization. The Conservative and Liberal parties did not formally emerge until the late 1840s, although some scholars have traced the origins of the parties to an earlier rift between the two independence

leaders, Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander (Bushnell 1993, 65; Delpar 1981, 3–4; Safford and Palacios 2002, 134–143). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the two parties developed strong organizations that had a presence throughout the country (Posada-Carbó 2012, 27; Delpar 1981, 177, 183, 191). The Conservatives first held a national party convention in 1879 at which they drew up a party constitution, named a party leader, designated an official newspaper, and created a complex party organization that would endure for years (Delpar 1981, 127). Similarly, in 1880 the Liberal Party formed a National Central Committee and encouraged the creation of state-level and municipal-level committees (Delpar 1981, 126).

Many of the organizations were initially impermanent. For example, the provincial electoral committees that each party formed to support candidates typically disappeared after the elections. Nevertheless, elections were held frequently in Colombia, so these organizations were usually soon revived. In addition, both parties had some organizations, such as newspapers, schools, and associations of artisans, that operated on a semi-permanent basis. The newspapers waged propaganda campaigns, the schools trained future leaders, and the associations of artisans helped mobilize workers to participate in elections as well as armed conflicts.

Both parties gradually developed strong ties to the electorate and enjoyed diverse, multiclass support, although their constituencies varied somewhat. The Liberal Party, for example, had greater support among the Afro-Colombian population, no doubt partly because of its advocacy of emancipation (Bushnell 1993, 106–107; Sanders 2004, 139–142; Delpar 1981, 18–25). Artisans also mostly supported the Liberals, at least initially, but the Conservatives sought their support as well (Sowell 1992, 48–49; Sanders 2004; Delpar 1981, 28–31). Democratic societies, which consisted mostly of artisans, sprang up throughout Colombia beginning in the late 1840s, and these societies developed close ties to the Liberal Party (Sowell 1992; Sanders 2004, 66–69). Conservatives founded similar mass organizations, such as the Popular Society for Mutual Instruction and the Christian Fraternity in Bogotá (Safford and Palacios 2002, 201; Posada-Carbó 2012, 18).

Each party had its regional strongholds, although neither party was dominated by leaders or supporters from a particular region. For example, in the 1856 elections, the Conservative Party fared best in Antioquia, Cundinamarca, and Boyacá, whereas the Liberal Party performed better in Santander as well as in the coastal states of Bolívar and Magdalena. Some scholars have suggested that Conservatives were stronger in the cities that were major administrative centers under colonial rule, while Liberals tended to hail from towns that were marginal during the colonial period, but there are important exceptions to this general pattern (Safford and Palacios 2002, 152).

During the nineteenth century, the two parties were led by and largely catered to elites. Conservatives tended to have more distinguished social origins, but the leaders of the parties did not differ significantly in terms of

their occupations (Delpar 1981, 56–58; Safford and Palacios 2002, 152–153; Safford 1972, 356–365; Bushnell 1993). Nor did the two parties advocate systematically different economic policies: They both mostly supported liberal policies such as free trade (Delpar 1981, 58; Safford and Palacios 2002, 155–156; López-Alves 2000, 123). At various moments, the parties took different positions on political issues, such as federalism and democratic rights, but their positions on these issues tended to vary depending on whether they were in power. Whereas the opposition typically promoted federalism and democratic rights, the ruling party usually resisted these measures.

The most important and consistent difference between the two parties was with regard to the Catholic Church, which the Conservatives strongly supported (Bushnell 1993, 110–111; Safford and Palacios 2002, 156). Conservatives sought to identify their party with the Church and to play up the religious dimension of their conflict with the Liberals. In an 1852 letter, Mariano Ospina, a founder of the Conservative Party, discussed the various banners that the party could use to rally supporters and discarded them all except for Catholicism, which he referred to as: “the only Conservative banner that is alive” (cited in Posada-Carbó 2012, 19).

The Catholic Church was, perhaps, stronger in Colombia than in any other Latin American country, and it did not hesitate to use its influence to support the Conservative Party (Mecham 1966, 115).<sup>56</sup> The Church helped select the party’s candidates and formed organizations to support it in elections (Abel 1987, 34). Priests often denounced the Liberal Party and its candidates from the pulpit and the Church even excommunicated some Liberal politicians. For example, in 1897, the Bishop of Pasto told the priests in his parish to teach “the faithful that they cannot vote for Liberals without offending God” (Posada-Carbó 2012, 29).

Whereas Conservatives thought of the Catholic Church as a force for moral and social order, Liberals viewed it as an obstacle to freedom, enlightenment, and economic growth, and pushed for the separation of church and state. Liberals attacked the Church for intervening in politics. A commission of the Liberal-dominated constitutional convention of 1863 noted the “influence of the clergy over the ignorant populations” and reported that the clergy intervened “openly and imprudently” in electoral affairs (Posada-Carbó 2012, 22). The Liberal Party also enacted measures seeking to curtail Church intervention in elections: The 1863 constitution, for example, denied clergymen the right to vote and to hold office.<sup>57</sup>

While in power, Liberals also implemented a broad range of secularizing reforms that sought to reduce the influence of the Church. The Liberal government of José Hilario López (1849–1853) expelled the Jesuits from Colombia

<sup>56</sup> Although many Colombians had strong religious beliefs, it is difficult to know how much influence the Church had over the electorate (Posada-Carbó 2012, 3, 12; Deas 1996, 166–167).

<sup>57</sup> On average, priests occupied five (out of twenty-five) positions in the senate and two (out of sixty) positions in the lower chamber from the 1830s through the 1850s (Posada-Carbó 2012, 20).

and passed laws that made the Church financially dependent on provincial legislatures, gave municipal councils a role in choosing priests, and deprived priests of the right to be tried in ecclesiastical courts. Conservatives rebelled in protest in 1851, but their revolt was quickly suppressed. López then enacted a new constitution that provided for freedom of religion and passed laws separating church and state – he also exiled the archbishop of Bogotá when he refused to cooperate with some of the new policies. A second wave of Liberal reforms took place in the early 1860s during the presidency of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera. Shortly after taking power, Mosquera asserted state control of the Catholic Church, expelled the Jesuits who had returned to Colombia in the late 1850s, and expropriated most Church assets. When the archbishop of Bogotá and other Church leaders protested, Mosquera imprisoned them, and declared that any religious communities that resisted would be abolished. The Pope responded by excommunicating Mosquera.

Another intense religious conflict occurred in the 1870s when the Liberals passed legislation making primary education free, compulsory, and secular (Bushnell 1993, 129; Shaw Jr. 1941, 598). In 1876, Conservatives revolted with the support of many Church leaders. In the wake of the revolt, the Liberals expelled four bishops as well as all clergymen who had taken up arms and it sought to impose further restraints on the Church to prevent future rebellions. In 1877, Congress also passed laws that abrogated the annual payments made to the Church for expropriated property and stipulated that clergymen could be convicted of violating the law if they incited civil disobedience through their sermons or publications. All these conflicts widened the divide between Liberals and Conservatives and strengthened partisan identities.

Beginning in the 1880s, religious conflict dissipated somewhat, although the Church continued to intervene in elections on behalf of the Conservative Party. The independent Liberal leader Rafael Núñez, who became president in 1880, sought to mollify Conservatives, resuming payments to the Church for expropriated property and repealing the 1877 laws that restricted the actions of the clergy. In 1886, Núñez created his own party, the National Party, and brought Conservatives into his government, ushering in an era of Conservative rule that would last until 1930. Under his leadership, Colombia reached a Concordat with the Vatican, and enacted a new constitution that declared Roman Catholicism to be the state religion and called for public education to be carried out in accordance with Catholic principles. Liberals, meanwhile, moderated their anti-clericalism, partly in order to build their ties to Conservative dissidents who opposed Núñez (Delpar 1980, 290–291).

Nevertheless, partisan identities had taken hold in much of the population by the time the religious divide between Liberals and Conservatives softened in the late nineteenth century. These identities had been strengthened by the violent conflicts that ravaged Colombia for much of the nineteenth century. Experiences of war created not only strong emotional attachments to one's own party but also powerful antipathies toward the other side.



Ernst Rothlisberger, a Swiss professor who lived in Colombia during the revolution of 1885, claimed that: “The majority do not fight in one party or another out of conviction but because they must avenge some atrocity. This fellow’s father was killed, that one’s brother was impressed, the mother and sisters of another were abused; in the next revolution they will avenge these offenses” (cited in Delpar 1981, 40–41). Executions of prisoners, which occurred in many of the wars, contributed to party polarization, enraging the friends, families, and co-partisans of the victims (Safford and Palacios 2002, 150).

The two parties proved extraordinarily durable, retaining their dominance throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The relative balance between the two parties contributed to their endurance since neither party was able to permanently dominate or destroy the other (Bushnell 1993, 117). Control of government shifted over time because of military victories as well as electoral triumphs and changes in party alignments. Whereas Conservatives dominated between 1841–1849, 1855–1861, and 1886–1930, Liberals controlled the presidency from 1849–1855 and 1861–1885. Both parties, however, managed to retain their core supporters even when they were in opposition. Indeed, the parties were typically more united when they were in the opposition than when they controlled the government.

The parties underwent frequent splits, which were caused by internal differences over policy as well as competition for leadership. The Liberals were particularly prone to splits, suffering major schisms in 1854, 1866–1867, and 1875–1878, which led Liberal candidates to run against each other in elections (Delpar 1981, 90–93; Posada-Carbó 2012, 27). At times, the splits resulted in the formation of new parties, such as the National Party or the Republican Union, but the new parties did not create enduring loyalties. Most of the people who joined the new parties eventually returned to the Liberal or Conservative fold (Delpar 1981, 58–59).

The strong partisan ties of each party meant that many elections were competitive despite the efforts of government officials to manipulate and control them. In four presidential elections – 1836, 1840, 1856, and 1875 – the winner won by less than 10 percent of the vote, and in 1836 and 1848 the opposition candidate prevailed. The average margin of victory in presidential elections in Colombia was the smallest in South America during the nineteenth century. Legislative elections were often similarly competitive, and the opposition party typically won some legislative seats, although there were a few periods, such as between 1886 and 1904, when the opposition was almost entirely excluded from the legislature. The opposition also usually held some state and municipal offices. In 1853, for example, the Conservatives captured nearly as many provincial governorships as did the ruling Liberal faction (Safford and Palacios 2002, 210). Even during the periods of Liberal dominance during the 1860s and 1870s, the Conservatives typically controlled the states of Antioquia and Tolima (Bushnell 1993, 129–130). Similarly, the Radical Liberals held power

in some states during the period of Conservative dominance in the late nineteenth century (Bushnell 1993, 142).

Although Colombian elections in the nineteenth century were often competitive, they were not democratic. For most of the nineteenth century, only a relatively small percentage of the population could vote, and turnout was relatively low. The early constitutions of Gran Colombia (1820, 1821, and 1830) and Nueva Granada (1832 and 1843) granted suffrage only to free males who met certain income or property requirements and were not in dependency relationships (Bushnell 1963, 19; Posada-Carbó 2012). The early constitutions also imposed literacy requirements but repeatedly postponed them until 1850 (Posada-Carbó 2012, 15).

The liberal 1853 constitution briefly established universal male suffrage, which led to a dramatic increase in voter turnout: 8.6 percent of the population voted in 1856, as Table 6.4 indicates (Bushnell 1971, 241–242). Nevertheless, the expansion of voting rights in Colombia was short lived. The 1863 Constitution of Ríonegro federalized Colombia, allowing each state to set its own suffrage requirements, and five out of the nine states enacted literacy or income requirements in its wake (Bushnell 1971, 238; Posada-Carbó 2000b, 216; Bushnell 1984, 45). In 1886, a new constitution restricted the franchise for the entire nation, granting suffrage rights only to male citizens of twenty-one years of age who had a profession or means of subsistence, who were literate, and who met certain income or property requirements (República de Colombia, Registraduría del Estado Civil 2017).<sup>58</sup> As a result, voter turnout dropped considerably: Valid voters constituted an average of 3 percent of the total population in the twelve elections for which there are data from 1860–1883 (Bushnell 1971, 1984). Although voter turnout began to climb again in the 1870s, it did not approach the levels it had attained in 1856 under universal male suffrage (Bushnell 1971; Delpar 1981, 108; Bushnell 1984; Posada-Carbó 2012, 24).

To make matters worse, fraud and intimidation were widespread in elections during the nineteenth century, especially after 1863. The forms of fraud were numerous and took place at all stages of the electoral process. Electoral registries were frequently robbed or purged, and ballot boxes were often stuffed or stolen. Some people voted numerous times, while other eligible voters were not allowed to vote at all. The property or literacy requirements were often selectively applied to the opposition: In 1897, for example, government officials in the state of Tolima disqualified Liberals on the grounds that they could not spell words such as “particularísimamente” (Bergquist 1978, 96). Fraud often marred the process of counting the ballots as well: “He who does the counting elects” was a popular saying during the nineteenth century (Posada-Carbó 2012, 30; Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 34).

<sup>58</sup> Colombia retained universal male suffrage in departmental and municipal elections after 1886 (Posada-Carbó 2000b, 211, 217).

TABLE 6.4 *Presidential elections in Colombia, 1819–1930*

Year	Winner of election	Party of winner	Winner's % of the vote	Valid votes as a % of total population
1819	Simón Bolívar	None	100	
1821	Simón Bolívar	None	84.7	
1825	Simón Bolívar	None	95.7	
1830	Joaquín Mosquera	None	31.3	
1832	Francisco de Paula Santander	None	75.3	
1833	Francisco de Paula Santander	None	80.1	
1836	José Ignacio de Márquez	Conservative	38.6	
1840	Pedro Alcántara Herrán	Conservative	36.9	
1844	Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera	Conservative	45.8	
1849	José Hilario López	Liberal	43.2	
1852	José María Obando	Liberal	78.8	
1856	Mariano Ospina Rodríguez	Conservative	46.2	8.6
1860	Julio Arboleda	Conservative	73.2	3.0
1863	Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera	Liberal	78.7	
1864	Manuel Murillo Toro	Liberal	43.7	1.8
1865	Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera	Liberal	67.0	1.9
1867	Santos Gutiérrez	Liberal	45.3	2.6
1869	Eustorgio Salgar Moreno	Liberal	53.1	2.8
1871	Manuel Murillo Toro	Liberal	57.5	3.2
1873	Santiago Pérez	Liberal	72.5	3.9
1875	Aquileo Parra	Liberal	23.9	4.9
1877	Julián Trujillo	Liberal	99.8	1.3
1879	Rafael Núñez	Liberal	90.4	2.2
1881	Francisco Javier Zaldúa	Liberal	85.6	2.6
1883	Rafael Núñez	Liberal	69.0	5.9
1885	Rafael Núñez	National	100.0	
1891	Rafael Núñez	National	79.7	
1897	Manuel Antonio Sanclemente	National	78.5	
1904	Rafael Reyes	Conservative	43.9	
1909	Ramón González Valencia	Conservative	59.5	
1910	Carlos E. Restrepo	Republican Union	53.5	
1914	José Vicente Concha	Conservative	89.1	6.2
1918	Marco Fidel Suárez	Conservative	54.0	6.7
1922	Pedro Nel Ospina	Conservative	61.7	10.2
1926	Miguel Abadía Méndez	Conservative	99.9	5.1
1930	Enrique Olaya Herrera	Liberal	44.9	11.1

Source: Latin American Historical Elections Database.

Notes: The data from 1819–1832 as well as 1863, 1886, and 1909–1910 represent the vote in Congress or in a constituent assembly; the data from 1833–1852 and 1891–1904 represent the vote of the electoral college; and the data from 1856–1860, 1864–1883, and 1914–1930 represent the results of the popular vote.

All sides engaged in electoral manipulation, since local authorities controlled the electoral process and no party ever had a monopoly on power across all states or levels of government. Governors were quite powerful in Colombia, but they had no official role in setting up the electoral boards that oversaw elections, which prevented them from dominating the electoral process (Posada-Carbó 1997, 265).<sup>59</sup> Until 1888, municipal councils and assemblies typically appointed the local electoral authorities and there was no national electoral authority, which meant that whoever controlled the local authorities was in a position to manipulate the elections. Even after 1888, control of elections was decentralized since state assemblies gained responsibility for appointing the electoral authorities.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, whichever party controlled the national government had important resources at its disposal, such as the military, which it could use to influence outcomes. Officers often marched their troops to the polls and instructed them how to vote, even forcibly recruiting civilians to swell their numbers.<sup>61</sup> The votes of the troops could potentially determine the results of elections, given the relatively small size of the Colombian electorate in most of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the military as well as the police influenced elections by intimidating opposition voters. The government often stationed troops at the polls to block opposition voters from voting and it sometimes circulated rumors that the troops would be impressing civilians in order to frighten off potential opposition voters (Deas 1996, 173). In some cases, the military even helped overthrow recalcitrant opposition governments in states and municipalities. Carlos Holguín, a Conservative politician, noted that during the period of Radical Liberal rule every presidential election “implied the necessity of overthrowing local governments” (cited in Posada-Carbó 1995, 111).

The opposition responded to government electoral manipulation in various ways. In some cases, frustration with government electoral manipulation led the opposition to abstain from elections or to engage in revolts. These strategies, however, usually provoked state repression and cost the opposition an opportunity to win representation in the legislature and other offices. In other cases, the opposition engaged in tit-for-tat strategies, participating in elections but engaging in the same electoral hijinks that it often criticized. The opposition was particularly likely to employ this latter strategy in those areas of the country it controlled.

<sup>59</sup> The Colombian states were referred to as provinces, departments, and states at different periods in the nineteenth century, and their executives were referred to as presidents or governors.

<sup>60</sup> State assemblies were also responsible for scrutinizing and certifying the electoral returns (Delpar 1981, 108).

<sup>61</sup> Not all soldiers were eligible to vote, however; nor could they always be counted on to vote for the ruling party (Deas 1996, 172; Posada-Carbó 1997, 268).

<sup>62</sup> The Liberal politician Salvador Camacho Roldán calculated that the troops constituted about one-eighth of the votes in the state of Cundinamarca and swayed the outcome of the elections in Bogotá (Delpar 1981, 107).

At the same time, the opposition frequently called for democratic reforms that would reduce government electoral intervention, guarantee civil and political liberties, and ensure the opposition some political representation. According to Mazzuca and Robinson (2009, 294), “starting in 1891, every Liberal convention, program, and manifesto demanded electoral reform, together with the abolition of the *Ley de Caballos*,” the harsh 1888 law restricting the media. But the opposition Liberals lacked the influence in the legislature necessary to enact these reforms. In the late nineteenth century, the Liberals typically held only one seat in the lower chamber and none in the Senate. Thus, it was not until splits occurred within the ruling Conservative Party that major democratic reforms could be enacted.

#### SPLITS WITHIN THE RULING PARTY

The Conservative Party underwent a couple of important splits in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which helped lead to democratization. The party first divided in the early 1890s as a result of disenchantment with the policies pursued by the Nationalist-Conservative government of Rafael Núñez and his vice-president and successor, Miguel Antonio Caro. Conservative dissidents, who became known as Historical Conservatives, opposed many of the economic policies of the Núñez and Caro administrations as well as their repressive laws and the political exclusion of the Liberals (Bergquist 1978, 36–41). In 1891, Historical Conservatives proposed their own presidential candidate, Marceliano Vélez, whom Liberal leaders instructed their co-partisans to support. Nevertheless, the incumbent Núñez controlled the electoral machinery and he easily defeated Vélez amid widespread abstention and charges of fraud and intimidation (Bergquist 1978, 41–42; Delpar 1981, 150–151; Park 1985, 275–276).

The split within the Conservative Party deepened once Caro took over the government. Caro’s refusal to modify the government’s policies led to a Liberal revolt in 1895, which the Conservatives easily suppressed. To the disappointment of the Liberals, the Historical Conservatives sided with the government during the rebellion, although they did try unsuccessfully to negotiate a peace settlement involving constitutional reforms (Bergquist 1978, 48–49). In the years that followed, the Caro administration continued to resist major reforms, leading Historical Conservatives to publish an 1896 manifesto entitled “*Motives of Dissidence*,” which outlined their objections to the government’s policies.

In the 1897 presidential elections, the Nationalist-Conservatives once again prevailed thanks in part to electoral fraud. Although the Liberal candidate, José Miguel Samper, triumphed in Bogotá where elections were conducted fairly, the governors intervened in the provinces to ensure the victory of Manuel Antonio Sanclemente, the Nationalist-Conservative candidate (Bergquist 1978, 74; Delpar 1981, 168–169). In the wake of the election, the Historical Conservatives continued to promote their program of political and

economic reform, which included measures to restore civil liberties and guarantee minority representation and honest elections. The Liberals supported these proposed reforms, with their leader Rafael Uribe Uribe arguing in Congress in 1898 that they were the only means to ensure peace in Colombia:

Colombia's biggest problem is that of peace. The problem can only be solved in one way: by giving justice to the Liberal Party. And that justice can only be achieved by approving the proposed reforms ... Give us the freedom to make public and defend our rights with the vote, the quill, and our lips; otherwise, nobody in the world will have enough power to silence the barrels of our rifles. (Cited in Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 295)

Although the legislature approved some of the Historical Conservative's proposals, including a repeal of the restrictive media law, the Nationalist-Conservatives controlled the Senate and, under the instructions of President Sanclemente, they blocked the electoral reform (Bergquist 1978, 77–80; Delpar 1981, 176; Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 296).

Much as Uribe Uribe predicted, the Liberal Party took up arms shortly after the electoral reform proposal ran aground. The directorate of the party was reluctant to go to war, but the failure of the reforms, along with the country's deteriorating economic and fiscal situation, set off revolts in a few provinces in October 1899, which quickly spread throughout the country. The Historical Conservatives sided with the government in the War of a Thousand Days but pushed unsuccessfully for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, engaging in repeated dialogue with Liberal leaders. Frustration with the continued bloodshed led the Historical Conservatives to carry out a coup in July 1900 that brought the vice-president, José Manuel Marroquín, to power. Although Marroquín brought many Historical Conservatives into his government, he obstinately refused to make concessions to the Liberals and instead engaged in harsh repression (Bergquist 1978, 151–153). As a result, the war dragged on until 1903.

The final peace treaty did not make any major political concessions to the Liberals but only stated that the government would consider the reform proposals that had been discussed in Congress in 1898 (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 298). Nevertheless, as soon as the war ended, some liberalization took place (Bergquist 1978, 196). The hardline minister of war, Aristides Fernández, resigned under pressure in 1903. The Marroquín administration then lifted the state of siege and replaced Fernández's authoritarian press decree with the more liberal press law of 1898. The government also repealed the decree that gave the executive the right to name all the members of the Electoral Council.

In the 1904 presidential elections, Historical Conservatives supported General Rafael Reyes, who ran against Joaquín F. Vélez, the candidate of the Nationalist-Conservative faction. Reyes emerged victorious in an extremely close election that was marred by fraud and took months to be resolved (Bergquist 1978, 222–223; Covo 2013). Reyes won in part because he enjoyed

the support of Liberals as well as Historical Conservatives, but also because President Marroquín reportedly withdrew his support for the candidacy of Vélez once the latter announced that he would launch an investigation into the secession of Panama (Bergquist 1978, 222–223). In the aftermath of the war, Panamanians had rebelled with the support of the United States and achieved their independence, which angered many Colombians.

As we have seen, to deter future rebellions, Reyes sought to strengthen the coercive capacity of the state by professionalizing the military, collecting weaponry left over from the war, and developing state infrastructure. In addition, Reyes forged an alliance with Uribe Uribe and appointed Liberals to his cabinet and to other positions in the executive branch (Bergquist 1978, 226). Reyes also shut down Congress and convened a constituent assembly in which Liberals comprised one-third of the members (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 299; Ríos Peñaloza 1991).<sup>63</sup>

The constituent assembly quickly passed a constitutional amendment that called for guaranteed minority representation in all government legislative bodies (Colombia 1906, 63). A subsequent act, Law Number 42, mandated the use of the incomplete list to achieve minority representation (Colombia 1906, 273–274; Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 300). Under the incomplete list, two-thirds of the seats were to be reserved for the party that finished first in the elections in each district and one-third for the runner-up. Previously, Colombia had used the complete list in which all seats went to the party that finished first in each district.

Although Reyes ended the political exclusion of Liberals, he governed in an authoritarian manner. Not only did Reyes shut down Congress and declare a state of siege in 1905, but he declined to reopen the legislature, governing instead through the compliant constituent assembly, which rubber stamped his decrees (Ríos Peñaloza 1991; Duque Daza 2011, 195). The constituent assembly granted Reyes extraordinary powers in economic and fiscal matters as well as a ten-year term, rather than the six-year term to which he had been elected (Bushnell 1993, 158; Bergquist 1978, 228–229). In addition, Reyes exiled or imprisoned many of his foes, including both Liberals and Conservatives, and he replaced all of the existing members of the Supreme Court (Barbosa 2015; Cajas Sarria 2013, 457–458).

Reyes' economic policies and his dictatorial ways prompted another split within the Conservative Party that ultimately led to his downfall. Many Historical Conservatives as well as Liberals quickly became disenchanted with his regime and some of them began to participate in plots against him as early as 1904 (Bergquist 1978, 229). The catalyst of Reyes' downfall, however, was an agreement that the government signed with the United States in 1909 recognizing Panamanian independence in exchange for an indemnity and the future

<sup>63</sup> One Liberal and two Conservatives – one from each of the two main Conservative factions – represented each department in the assembly.



use of the canal. This agreement triggered a wave of student-led protests and led dissident Conservatives and Liberals to form a new party, the Republican Union, which won a large share of seats in the May 1909 congressional elections (Bergquist 1978, 245).<sup>64</sup> Shortly thereafter, Reyes resigned and fled Colombia, and the legislature subsequently chose General Ramón González Valencia to serve out Reyes' original six-year term as president.<sup>65</sup>

The new president convoked popular elections for a new constituent assembly in February 1910 (Duque Daza 2011, 196). The Republican Union won a majority of seats in the constituent assembly, and it elected Carlos Restrepo, a Conservative leader of the Republican Union, as Colombia's new president by a vote of 23–18 (Bergquist 1978, 252–253; Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 269). Under the leadership of the Republican Union, the constituent assembly enacted a broad array of constitutional reforms that laid the groundwork for a more democratic Colombia. Liberals played a central role in the constitutional assembly, especially Nicolás Esguerra who was one of the founders of the Republican Union and was the main architect of the constitutional reforms (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 302).

The constitutional reforms (Articles 25–34) strengthened horizontal accountability and weakened the power of the president in an effort to prevent a return to the personalistic rule of the Reyes and Núñez administrations (Bergquist 1978; Acuña Rodríguez 2017, 107–108; Duque Daza 2011, 200–209; Melo 1989). Article 25 reduced the presidential term from six to four years and Article 28 banned the immediate reelection of the president (República de Colombia 1939, 7–8). Under the reformed constitution, the president would no longer have the power to select the magistrates of the Supreme Court and the Superior Tribunals, although the president retained the right to name ministers, governors, and mayors and the power to veto laws (Duque Daza 2011, 205–206). Article 41 gave the Supreme Court the responsibility of “guarding the integrity of the constitution” and of ruling on the constitutionality of laws and decrees, which any citizen was allowed to challenge (República de Colombia 1939, 10; Cajas Sarria 2013, 459). The reformed constitution stipulated that Congress was to meet every year and it was given new responsibilities, including electing the members of the Supreme Court and choosing the designates who would replace presidents in the event of their resignation, leave-taking, or demise (República de Colombia 1939, 6). Congress also gained the right to censure members of the executive branch as well as Supreme Court Justices (Article 20).<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Although the Republican Union dominated the Chamber of Representatives, supporters of Reyes still controlled the Senate in 1909 (Melo 1989, 220).

<sup>65</sup> González Valencia, a Historical Conservative, had been elected as vice president in 1904, but was removed by Reyes in 1905 (Bergquist 1978, 248).

<sup>66</sup> The president also retained the right to declare a state of siege in the event of a foreign war or an internal uprising, but any emergency decrees enacted would cease to have an effect once the

The constituent assembly also made changes to the country's electoral laws. It modestly reduced suffrage restrictions, decreasing the income and property requirements necessary to vote. Article 44 stipulated that only male citizens who knew how to read and write or had an annual income of 300 Colombian pesos or property worth at least 1,000 pesos would be able to vote in elections to the presidency and lower chamber of the legislature.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the assembly guaranteed the representation of minority parties, although it left it to ordinary law to determine which system would be used to award seats.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, a split within the ruling Conservative Party led to the emergence of a dissident coalition, the Republican Union, which enacted important constitutional reforms that helped bring democracy to Colombia. The constitutional reforms of 1910 strengthened horizontal accountability, reduced restrictions on the franchise, and guaranteed minority party representation. To be sure the reforms had some deficiencies: They lacked a bill of rights, they maintained some suffrage restrictions, and they did not do enough to combat voter fraud (Duque Daza 2011, 206; Acuña Rodríguez 2017). Nevertheless, they represented an important step forward in the struggle for democracy in Colombia.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA

In the aftermath of the constitutional reforms and the professionalization of the military, Colombia began to have relatively peaceful and free and fair elections. During the ensuing four decades, elections took place in relative calm and all sides accepted the results (Bergquist 1978, 247). As Bergquist (1978, 247) has argued: "The unstable politics of the previous century, the politics of fundamental ideological contention and partisan exclusiveness, of chronic civil war and ephemeral constitutions, was succeeded after 1910 by a new era of remarkable political stability." Colombian governments began to consistently respect constitutional procedures and allow the exercise of civil and political liberties, declining to repress opposition leaders or overturn opposition electoral victories. The political opposition, meanwhile, eschewed armed revolts, focusing on winning power at the ballot box. In the words of Safford and Palacios (2002, 266), "civil war was delegitimized as a form of political competition."

Bipartisanship became the norm after 1910. Minority parties not only won a significant share of seats in the legislature, they also formed alliances with the

war or uprising had ended. Moreover, Article 29 stipulated that the president would be held "responsible for acts or omissions that violate the Constitution and its laws" (República de Colombia 1939, 8).

<sup>67</sup> The Senate continued to be elected indirectly by Electoral Councils whose members were chosen by the Departmental Assemblies (República de Colombia 1939, 10).

<sup>68</sup> In 1916 the legislature enacted an electoral code mandating the use of the incomplete list, the system that had been in use since 1905 (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 303).

ruling parties and held ministerial positions. President Restrepo (1910–1914), for example, resisted pressure from Conservatives to exclude the Liberals, naming three Liberals as well as various Conservatives to his cabinet (Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 284–296). In defending his bipartisanship, Restrepo remarked: “I have been a Conservative, but in the post that has been awarded to me I cannot work as a member of any political entity. From the Presidency, I will see Colombians only as compatriots whose rights I must protect equally” (Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 278). Most subsequent administrations also practiced bipartisanship. Conservative President José Vicente Concha (1914–1918) forged an alliance with the Liberal faction led by Rafael Uribe Uribe and included various Liberals in his cabinet. The Conservative administration of Marco Fidel Suárez (1918–1921) similarly governed through a bipartisan cabinet, as did the Liberal administration of Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930–1934) (Bergquist 1978, 256–257).

With armed uprisings largely a thing of past, elections became the focal point of political contestation and voter turnout rose sharply. The number of votes cast nearly tripled in the two decades after 1914, rising from 337,597 in 1914 to 942,009 in 1934 (Jaramillo and Franco-Cuervo 2005, 307). Approximately 28 percent of adult males voted in the 1914 elections, 30 percent voted in the 1918 elections, and 48 percent in 1922 (Posada-Carbó 1997, 260). Opposition parties sometimes abstained from elections after 1910. For example, the opposition refused to participate in the 1926, 1934, 1938, and 1949 presidential elections on the grounds that they would not be fair (Safford and Palacios 2002, 267). Nevertheless, even when opposition parties abstained from the presidential elections, they typically participated in legislative and local elections.

Although Colombia retained some income and literacy restrictions in national elections, these restrictions became less meaningful over time because a growing proportion of people met the requirements. Posada-Carbó (1997, 258–259) reports that by the turn of the century many working-class people already earned more than the required sum owing to inflation. Fewer people met the literacy requirement initially, but the literacy rate grew rapidly in Colombia during the twentieth century, increasing from 34 percent in 1900 to 51.9 percent in 1930, 69.6 percent in 1960, and 89.7 percent in 1990 (Thorpe 1998, 354). Moreover, the literacy requirements could often be satisfied by merely signing one’s name, and the income and literacy restrictions did not apply to elections for municipal councils and departmental assemblies.

Some fraud and intimidation in elections continued to take place after 1910. The 1922 elections, in which a Conservative candidate, General Pedro Nel Ospina, defeated a Liberal candidate, General Benjamín Herrera, was notoriously fraudulent, and in its wake the Liberal Party published a 422-page document documenting the fraud.<sup>69</sup> A recent study found that in 508

<sup>69</sup> The Conservative government published a report disputing many of the Liberals’ claims.

out of the 755 municipalities, the reported vote totals exceeded the authors' estimates of the maximum potential franchise, which they based on the 1918 Colombian census (Chaves, Fergusson, and Robinson 2015, 125). Some fraud and intimidation also took place at the local level in other post-1910 elections.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, fraud and intimidation in elections generally declined after 1910, and electoral violence became much less common. The executive branch lost much of its influence over the electoral authorities, which made it difficult to control elections. Law 80 of 1910 gave Congress the right to appoint the members of the Great Electoral Council, which supervised the electoral process. The Great Electoral Council chose the members of the Departmental Electoral Councils, which in turn elected the members of the electoral boards of each district (República de Colombia 1939, 105; República de Colombia, Registraduría del Estado Civil 1988, 31–32). The Electoral Juries of each municipality, meanwhile, were elected at the local level using the incomplete-list system, which ensured that minorities had representation (República de Colombia 1939, 105–106; Posada-Carbó 1997, 266). Thus, local electoral authorities were largely independent from the president as well as the governors, and no single party could control them (Posada-Carbó 1997, 265–266).

As a result, candidates supported by the government often failed to win. There were numerous cases in which incumbents were defeated in local elections after 1910, and the opposition won control of local governments (Posada-Carbó 1997, 262–263 and 275). Turnover also occurred at the national level. For example, the candidate of the incumbent Republican Union party lost badly in the 1914 presidential elections. Similarly, Conservatives lost the 1930 presidential elections even though they held the presidency at the time.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the opposition pushed for further reforms to reduce fraud and government intervention and to gain greater representation for minority parties. There were more than ten electoral reforms discussed in Congress between 1910 and 1930, many of them proposed by Liberals (Posada-Carbó 2000b, 218; Montoya 1938, 31–57). These measures sought to strengthen the secret ballot, create an identity card for voters, reorganize the electoral authorities, and establish obligatory voting and proportional representation, among other goals. Some of these measures passed. Liberals, for example, helped enact legislation in 1920 to prevent Conservatives from presenting two lists of candidates in order to try to win the seats set aside for the minority as well as those of the majority (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 315). Thanks to a split in the Conservative Party, Liberals also managed to pass a law in 1929 mandating a form of proportional representation known as the quotient rule, which provided representation to minority parties based on their share of

<sup>70</sup> In 1918, for example, a violent uprising took place in Santa Marta because of allegations of electoral fraud – it left two people dead and two wounded (Posada-Carbó 1997, 268). Similar incidents took place in 1916, 1922, and 1923 (Posada-Carbó 1995, 9).

the vote (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 313–314; Montoya 1938, 61–64). The same law created an identity card that citizens would need in order to vote, although this proved ineffective (Mayorga García 2010; Montoya 1938).<sup>71</sup>

The existence of a strong opposition party thus helped bolster democracy in Colombia after 1910. The Liberal Party's strength and large presence in the legislature – Liberals generally held one-third of the legislative seats – meant that it only had to win support from a fraction of Conservatives to enact reforms. In addition, the party's national presence helped it monitor and denounce local-level fraud and intimidation.

The Liberal Party's strength and organization, along with a split within the ruling Conservative Party, also enabled the Liberals to win the presidency in 1930, thus consolidating the country's transition to democracy. Once the Conservatives moved into the opposition, they, too, played an important democratizing role. They monitored and protested electoral abuses and helped restrain the more authoritarian impulses of the governing Liberals. In addition, the strength of parties in Colombia reduced the temptation of the opposition to call on the military to intervene since it could gain power and exercise influence via elections.

The professionalization of the military also aided Colombian democracy after 1910. As we have seen, the strengthening of the armed forces in the first decade of the twentieth century, along with the memory of the bloody War of a Thousand Days, discouraged the opposition from taking up arms. The coercive capacity of the state was considerably lower in Colombia than in Argentina or Chile, however, and the Colombian state never exercised a monopoly on violence throughout the country. As a result, the Colombian military could not suppress the widespread fighting between Conservatives and Liberals that broke out in the late 1940s and lasted through the 1950s, a period known as *La Violencia*. This brutal fighting, which caused an estimated 200,000 deaths, led to the breakdown of democracy and military discipline in Colombia during this period. The Colombian armed forces also struggled to defeat the guerrilla forces that emerged beginning in the 1960s, which further undermined the country's democracy.

Nevertheless, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Colombian military proved capable of maintaining internal peace, which encouraged the opposition to focus on the electoral path to power. Although Conservative officers dominated the military in the early twentieth century, the armed forces largely stayed out of politics. The generals allowed the Republican Union to take power in 1910, and the opposition Liberals to do so in 1930. In this way, the Colombian military paved the way for the initial emergence of democracy in the country.

<sup>71</sup> Liberals also repeatedly proposed laws to prevent the military from voting on the grounds that officers and troops typically voted for incumbents – they finally passed such a law in 1930 (Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 65–66, 84–85, 100–101; Posada-Carbó 1997, 269).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, Argentina and Colombia democratized in the early twentieth century for many of the same reasons that Chile and Uruguay did. The professionalization of the military helped lead to democratization by bringing an end to the revolts that had plagued both sets of countries in the nineteenth century. Once armed struggle was foreclosed, opposition parties began to focus on the electoral path to power, pushing for democratic reforms that would level the electoral playing field. Argentina and Colombia, like Chile and Uruguay, had developed strong opposition parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and these parties used their influence to promote reform. The opposition parties could not enact reforms on their own, owing to resistance from the ruling party, but splits within the ruling party led to the emergence of dissident factions that pushed through the reforms.

The democracies that arose in Argentina and Colombia were weaker than in Chile and Uruguay, however. In Argentina, democracy was destabilized by the fact that only one strong party arose: the UCR. This party supported democratic reform when it was in the opposition, but once it took power, there was no strong opposition party in Argentina to contest elections, protest electoral abuses, and promote further reform. Moreover, because the opposition had no chance of defeating the ruling party on its own, it repeatedly called on the military to intervene.

By contrast, the main destabilizing factor in Colombia was the continued weakness of the armed forces. Although the professionalization of the military made it impossible for the opposition to overthrow the central government, it did not obtain a monopoly on violence throughout Colombia. Partly as a result, there was a resurgence of local-level violence between Conservatives and Liberals at mid-century that undermined Colombian democracy.

Despite these problems, the reforms that Argentina and Colombia implemented at the outset of the twentieth century proved important. Although neither country developed a strong democracy, Argentines and Colombians would continue to struggle to maintain the democratic principles and institutions that were first established in the early twentieth century.