

The Roots of Strong Democracies

Chile and Uruguay

For most of the nineteenth century, the governments of Chile and Uruguay routinely intervened in elections to ensure that their preferred candidates won, and the opposition, especially in Uruguay, engaged in periodic armed revolts, which led to state repression. The turn of the century, however, brought dramatic changes to both countries. In the 1890s, Chile began to hold highly competitive and relatively free and fair elections, and the opposition largely respected the outcomes, rather than resorting to armed revolts. A similar transformation took place a couple of decades later in Uruguay. Moreover, both countries managed to remain democratic for most of the twentieth century.

What led to the establishment of democracy in Chile and Uruguay during this period? And why did democracy remain relatively stable in both countries, particularly compared to the rest of the region?

The professionalization of the military, which took place in Chile in the late nineteenth century and in Uruguay in the early twentieth century, represented a crucial first step in the democratization process because it helped the state establish a monopoly on the use of violence. As a result, the opposition in both countries gradually abandoned the armed struggle and began to focus on the electoral path to power. The decline in revolts, in turn, led the state to engage in less repression and to allow for greater civil and political liberties.

The development of organized parties also played a crucial role in the emergence of democracy in the two countries. As we have seen, strong parties arose in Chile and Uruguay in the late nineteenth century thanks both to the geographic concentration of the population as well as the existence of an intense but relatively balanced religious or territorial cleavage. Opposition parties in both countries used their influence to promote democratic reforms in the nineteenth century, but the ruling parties generally blocked or watered down their proposals. The opposition was only able to enact transformative reforms when major splits occurred within the ruling party that gave the opposition

temporary control of the relevant law-making bodies. In Chile, the split helped the opposition enact an 1890 reform that established the secret ballot and stripped the government of control of the electoral process. In Uruguay, a split within the ruling party gave the opposition control of the 1917 constituent assembly, which allowed it to push through measures establishing universal male suffrage, the secret ballot, and proportional representation.

In the wake of these reforms, both Chile and Uruguay established relatively strong democracies, which lasted, with only brief interruptions, until the 1970s. Neither country initially became a full democracy because important suffrage restrictions remained and some electoral shenanigans, such as vote buying, continued. Nevertheless, governments scrupulously observed civil and political rights and administered relatively free and fair elections in which the opposition at times defeated the incumbents.

REVOLTS AND MILITARY PROFESSIONALIZATION IN CHILE

Although Chile has traditionally been viewed as a country that enjoyed considerable political stability during the nineteenth century, for much of the century it suffered from frequent revolts. Chile, for example, experienced major civil wars in 1829–1830, 1851, 1859, and 1891, along with numerous smaller revolts and a long-running conflict with the Mapuche indigenous population in the south (see Table 5.1).¹ These revolts, which were encouraged by the initial weakness of the armed forces, deepened authoritarian rule in Chile. It was not until the Chilean government professionalized its military in the late nineteenth century that the opposition revolts subsided and democracy gradually emerged.

Chile had only a weak military in its first decades as a republic. Independence had been won in large part by the Army of the Andes, which was composed of and led mostly by Argentines (Ossa Santa Cruz 2014; Collier and Sater 1996, 37). Although the Chilean General Bernardo O'Higgins subsequently assembled a Chilean army of almost 5,000 soldiers, this army was ill paid and poorly organized and equipped (Terrie 2014, 114–115; Nunn 1976, 23; Hillmon Jr. 1963, 34–35). According to Nunn (1976, 20): “By 1823, when O'Higgins fell, the army's thirteen-year history was one of privation, poor organization, inconsistent support, and generally incompetent leadership. Seven years later the situation was worse.” Military officers lacked training and the troops were undisciplined. There were sixteen military mutinies in 1825–1829 alone, most of which were motivated by dissatisfaction with the lack of payment of military salaries (Varas 2017, 88; Maldonado 2019, 24–26).

¹ In an 1867 pamphlet, Liberals and Radicals maintained that the military and national guard had suppressed more than 100 conspiracies and mutinies, in addition to the two civil wars, since 1833 (cited in Valenzuela 1985, 142).

TABLE 5.1 *Major revolts in Chile, 1830–1929*

Year	Description of revolt	Type of revolt (outcome)
1829–1830	Conservatives with the assistance of Army of the South overthrew the Liberal government because of an electoral dispute. The rebels mobilized 2,200 troops.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1837	Colonel José Antonio Vidaurre and 1,000 men rebelled against Peru-Bolivia war. The rebels assassinated Minister Diego Portales but they were defeated.	Military coup (suppressed)
1851	Liberals in the Society of Equality rebelled with the support of the Valdivia battalion. The government suppressed the uprising.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1851	Opposition presidential candidate, General José de la Cruz, rebelled with support of some troops and Liberals/Radicals. The rebels surrendered.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1859	Radicals led by mining millionaire José Pedro Gallo rebelled and assembled a 2,000-men army but were defeated by the military.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1859–1881	The Mapuche carried out a series of intermittent revolts in response to settler incursions in the south. The uprisings were brutally repressed.	Popular uprising (suppressed)
1891	The congressional opposition rebelled against President José Manuel Balmaceda. The army remained loyal, but the navy helped the opposition triumph.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1924	A military junta led by General Luis Altamirano took power and sent President Arturo Alessandri into exile.	Military coup (took power)
1925	Military officers arrested Altamirano and a new governing junta with a civilian head invited Alessandri to resume his presidency.	Military coup (took power)

Source: Latin American Revolts Database.

During the 1830s, the government restructured the military and reduced its size to put the government on sounder fiscal footing. An 1834 law fixed the size of the army at 3,000 men and it remained near this number for most of the next several decades (Arancibia Clavel 2007, 132; Somma 2011, 397). As a result of these efforts, military spending began to decline, falling to 37.5 percent of government expenditures in 1835, 32 percent in 1845, and 26 percent in 1855 (Somma 2011, 397). At the same time, however, the government expanded the national guard in order to help suppress internal rebellions and serve as a counterbalance to the military (Nunn 1976, 41; Collier and Sater 1996, 56; Hillmon Jr. 1963, 44).² By the 1850s, the national guard exceeded

² In response to opposition conspiracies in 1832–1833, the Prieto administration also created a secret police, which helped stifle opposition activity and lasted for thirty-two years (Nunn 1976, 43).

60,000 men, but its troops were poorly trained and equipped and it was gradually disbanded in the late nineteenth century (Wood 2011, 86–88; Somma 2011, 398).

The initial weakness of the military encouraged revolts. Opposition revolts were particularly common in the immediate post-independence period. Galdama (1964, 230) reports: “From 1826 to 1830 Chile lived in a state of constant disturbance. Different congresses and supreme directors succeeded each other and executed such measure of organization as they could and soon fell, defeated by revolts and military coups that had no more justification than the caprice of their leaders.” One of these revolts led to the Chilean civil war of 1829–1830. In this war, Conservatives, who were angry about the disputed election of the vice-president as well as the fraud that the government had committed in the previous legislative elections, rebelled against the governing Liberals. The weakness and lack of discipline of the military, combined with the support the opposition received from army units in the south, enabled the Conservatives to prevail.³

The 1829–1830 civil war ushered in an era of relatively stable Conservative rule in which presidents generally served out their terms, but it did not bring an end to revolts. To the contrary, there were at least twenty attempts to overthrow the government between 1830 and 1837 (Heise González 1978, 207; Terrie 2014, 130). Many of these efforts originated among the Liberal officers and leaders who had been purged after the 1829–1830 civil war. In 1833, Liberals planned two insurrections, known as the Arteaga Conspiracy and the Conspiracy of the Daggers, both of which sought unsuccessfully to topple the government (Wood 2011, 92–95). In 1836, General Ramón Freire, who had led the Liberal army in the 1829–1830 civil war, hatched a plan, with the support of some other Liberal leaders, to invade southern Chile with two warships rented from the Peru–Bolivian Confederation (Arancibia Clavel 2007, 135–136).⁴ The invasion failed, but the Chilean government subsequently declared war on the Peru–Bolivian Confederation and assumed emergency powers, shutting down Congress and suspending constitutional rights (Wood 2011, 100–101). In June 1837, Colonel José Antonio Vidaurre, who opposed the war, rebelled with more than 1,000 men and took as a hostage the minister of war, Diego Portales. The rebels called for a return to constitutional government, the toleration of political opposition, and the abrogation of the mass discharges of Liberal officers that had taken place after the 1829–1830 civil

³ The Conservatives had on their side important military leaders, such as General José Joaquín Prieto and Colonel Manuel Bulnes, who commanded army units in the south. In the decisive battle at Lircay, the Conservative army of the south defeated the smaller Liberal or Constitutional army, which consisted principally of the Santiago garrison (Fernández Abara 2017, 55; Collier and Sater 1996, 50; Somma 2011, 357).

⁴ The Peru–Bolivian Confederation was an alliance that brought together northern and southern Peru and Bolivia in a single state from 1836 to 1839.

war. The uprising was eventually suppressed with the assistance of 1,800 civic guard troops, but not before the rebels executed Minister Portales.

Chile did not experience another major uprising until 1851. The catalyst of the 1851 rebellion was the election of Manuel Montt, as the hand-picked candidate of the incumbent president, General Manuel Bulnes.⁵ The Society of Equality, an organization that grouped together liberal intellectuals and artisans in Santiago, opposed Montt, and in April 1851 they enlisted a recently retired army colonel, Pedro Urriola, to carry out an uprising in Santiago that included troops from his Valdivia battalion. The government suppressed the uprising but only after bloody fighting that led to 110–160 deaths, including Colonel Urriola (Wood 2011, 220). Another series of uprisings by Liberals occurred later that year in the northern cities of La Serena and Copiapó, after Montt's disputed election. The most serious threat to the government, however, came from the south where the opposition presidential candidate, General José María de la Cruz, denounced Montt's victory as fraudulent and rebelled at the head of more than 3,000 troops from the southern army. The government assembled an army of similar size and fought the rebels to a standstill at the bloody Battle of Loncomilla on December 8, 1851. Cruz subsequently signed a peace agreement in which he recognized Montt as president in exchange for the government's agreement to allow the rebel soldiers to rejoin the national army with their ranks and pensions intact (Collier 2003, 101).

Another rebellion took place in early 1859 when Radical Liberals opposed to Montt carried out brief uprisings in Santiago and Valparaíso (Collier 2003, 223). The rebels also organized rural guerrilla bands that carried out numerous attacks in both northern and southern Chile before finally being dispersed by government troops. The greatest threat to the government, however, came from the rebel army assembled by a mining millionaire, Pedro León Gallo, in the northern mining town of Atacama.⁶ Gallo, who subsequently helped found the Radical Party of Chile, organized an army of more than 1,800 artisans and miners whom he armed with weapons seized from local ships and troops or manufactured in the region's foundries. The rebel army scored some initial victories, but it failed to attract any major defections from the military itself, which sealed its fate (Encina 1949, 304–305).⁷ The government sent an army of 3,000 men to the north where they defeated the rebels (Somma 2011, 367–368; Collier 2003, 227).

⁵ Montt was a former interior minister in Bulnes' cabinet who had managed to alienate many Conservatives as well as Liberals with his authoritarian ways.

⁶ Although Gallo had originally been a supporter of Montt, he turned against the government in part because of a disagreement over a concession that his family had purchased to establish a railway (Somma 2011, 336).

⁷ President Manuel Montt may have improved the loyalty of the military by taking a hard line on those who revolted in the 1850s (Somma 2011, 366; Collier 2003, 192, 204–205).

The various revolts provoked harsh state repression, leading to the imposition of states of siege and the enactment of laws restricting civil and political liberties. The government, for example, assumed emergency powers in the wake of various rebellions in the 1830s as well as during the 1851 and 1859 rebellions and the 1852 military mutiny (Collier 2003, 192, 228; Arancibia Clavel 2007, 129; Loveman 1993, 335–336, 341–342; Wood 2011, 100–101). Revolts also frequently led the government to arrest, imprison, exile, and even execute members of the opposition. In April 1837, for example, the government convicted three citizens of conspiracy for what Chilean historian Diego Barros Araña described as “conversations that in better times would hardly have been noticed” (cited in Loveman 1993, 336). In the aftermath of the June 1837 rebellion, the government shot eleven of the mutineers, and it executed another twenty-four rebels after the 1851 revolt, and perhaps even more during the 1859 civil war (Collier 2003, 28, 192; Amunátegui Solar 1946, 122).⁸

The opposition abandoned the armed struggle after 1859 in part because it was a costly strategy. Collier (2003, 28) estimates that a total of 4,000 people perished in the civil wars of 1851 and 1859. At least 1,800 soldiers died at Loncomilla alone, and hundreds more perished at the other battles of the 1851 civil war (Somma 2011, 363; Collier 2003, 101).⁹ And, of course, the costs of rebellion must also include the many people wounded, arrested, or exiled as a result of these wars.¹⁰ Santos Tornerio, the editor of the Chilean newspaper, *El Mercurio*, reported that there were “few families in the country that did not have someone who was killed or wounded, thrown into preventive detention, imprisoned, or persecuted” during the 1859 conflict (cited in Zeitlin 1984, 56).

Perhaps more importantly, the opposition came to realize it had little chance of defeating an increasingly powerful military. According to Somma (2011, 399–400), “from the 1860s onward it became clear that armed insurgency was far from being an effective way of accessing power.” As the century progressed, the Chilean government strengthened and professionalized its armed forces, which made it increasingly easy to suppress revolts.¹¹ Investments in infrastructure, such as telegraph lines, railroads, and shipping, also helped suppress revolts by improving military transport and communications.¹²

⁸ In 1852, the government passed a law declaring that during conflicts the sentences of war councils would be implemented without appeal, which led to the precipitous executions of many civilians during the 1859 revolt (Amunátegui Solar 1946, 122).

⁹ Such was the carnage at Loncomilla that, according to Hillmon Jr. (1963, 112), it “served to kill militarism in Chile.”

¹⁰ According to Zeitlin (1984, 56), the Montt administration deported 2,000 people after the war.

¹¹ Beginning in 1862, the government also sought to ensure military loyalty by rotating army units throughout Chile, which prevented them from establishing ties to the local population (Soifer 2015, 222–223).

¹² One newspaper, *El Ferrocarril*, credited investments in telegraphy with having shortened the 1959 civil war by several months (Hillmon Jr. 1963, 120).

Chile strengthened and professionalized its armed forces largely in response to international conflicts. The country fought major wars against Peru and Bolivia in 1836–1839 and 1879–1883, it fended off attacks from Spain in the 1865–1866 Chincha Islands War, and it had a long-running border dispute with Argentina, which almost led to war in the 1890s. The conflicts spurred massive buildups in troops and military equipment and exposed some of the shortcomings of the Chilean military, which the country sought to address in the aftermath of the wars. Chile's victories in the wars against Bolivia and Peru also helped build up political support for the military by strengthening nationalist forces who sought to maintain the country's regional military preeminence (Schenoni 2020). When the War of the Pacific broke out in 1879, the military quickly mobilized more than 50,000 men, and although it reduced its troop size after the war, the army continued to have twice as many soldiers as it had previously (Arancibia Clavel 2007, 181–183; Sater and Herwig 1999, 36).

The export boom, which occurred earlier in Chile than elsewhere in South America, financed the growing expenditures on infrastructure and the military. Between 1820 and 1870, Chilean exports grew at a rate of 5.1 percent annually, the highest rate in South America (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 62). The country's exports continued to grow rapidly between 1870 and 1929, albeit at the somewhat reduced rate of 3.6 percent per year (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 86).

Chile's efforts to professionalize the armed services date to the 1840s, but they gathered force over time. In the 1840s, the government reopened its military academy, established a school for corporals and sergeants, and began sending officers to train in French military schools – it also purchased artillery from France (Arancibia Clavel 2007, 156–158; Hillmon Jr. 1963, 76, 93). In 1858, the Chilean military received a French mission that consisted of four officers who provided training in infantry, cavalry, artillery, and military engineering (Ramírez Necochea 1984, 39–40; Resende-Santos 2007, 126). In the years that followed, the military sought to reorganize its internal structure along French lines, and it continued to acquire French weapons and to send Chilean officers to be trained in France.

During the 1880s, the Chilean government turned toward Germany to lead its military modernization efforts. In 1885, the administration of Domingo Santa María (1881–1886) hired Emil Körner, a German artillery captain and instructor at the Prussian Artillery and Engineering School, to supervise the reform effort. In spite of the resistance of some Chilean officers, Körner revamped military training along Prussian lines, creating a war academy in 1887 for junior officers, which required high scores on an entrance exam: Only 5 percent of applicants were admitted each year (Sater and Herwig 1999, 44). That same year, Körner also established a military school to train noncommissioned officers (Arancibia Clavel 2007, 212–213). In addition, the armed forces sent 130 Chilean officers to Germany for further training between 1895 and 1913 (Resende-Santos 2007, 138–141).

Körner believed that modern militaries had to maintain large standing armies, which required compulsory service. As a result, Chile became the first Latin American country to institute obligatory military service, adopting a conscription system based on the one in Germany. The size of the army expanded considerably, reaching 6,000 troops by 1894 and 9,000 by 1896 (Somma 2011, 397). At the direction of Körner, the Chilean government also spent massively on German weapons, purchases which were financed with German loans. By the late 1890s, the government had signed contracts to import fifteen million German marks of weapons and planned to purchase enough weapons to equip a standing army of 150,000 men (Resende-Santos 2007, 134). The Chilean government also invested heavily in its navy during this period, increasing the size of its naval forces from 17 warships and 2,000 sailors in 1890 to 29 warships and 7,000 sailors in 1902 (Resende-Santos 2007, 134).

The gradual strengthening and professionalization of the Chilean armed forces made it increasingly unlikely that the opposition could prevail in a revolt. As a result, the opposition mostly abandoned the armed struggle after 1859. The only major opposition revolt that occurred after 1859 took place in 1891 and the opposition only revolted in this instance once it obtained the support of the navy. As revolts came to an end, the government began to respect political and civil liberties more consistently. Chilean presidents, for example, did not impose any states of emergency between 1860 and 1890, a period in which there were no opposition revolts (Loveman 1993, 347). Instead of carrying out revolts, opposition leaders began to focus exclusively on the electoral path to power. According to Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1983, 29), after 1859 the opposition “correctly perceived that representative institutions were in their best interests and the only alternative they had once the military solution was precluded.”

PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN CHILE

Political parties played a key role in the emergence of democracy in Chile. Parties first arose in Chile during the mid-nineteenth century and these parties gradually developed strong organizations and enduring loyalties. The parties participated in elections, but for most of the nineteenth century these elections were far from democratic. Nevertheless, as they grew stronger, opposition parties gained increasing representation in the legislature, which they used to promote democratic reform. In 1890, a split within the ruling party gave the opposition control over the legislature, which enabled the enactment of a reform that helped bring democracy to Chile.

A religious conflict gave birth to political parties in Chile during the mid-nineteenth century. Conservatives who were unhappy with the government of Manuel Montt because of its intervention in Church affairs broke from the government in 1856 and formed a group that became the Conservative Party. Supporters of the government, meanwhile, formed the National Party

the following year. The National Party was more personalistic than ideological, but it embraced many liberal positions, including the secularization of the state.

The Liberal Party also took official form in 1857, although some of its members had been collaborating loosely since the 1840s (Scully 1992, 217). It tended to support secular policies, but the party's platform became increasingly amorphous over time because of internal divisions and shifting alliances. Some of the more hardline Liberals eventually split off to form the Radical Party, although other members remained Liberals in name but acted independently from the party. The Radical Party, which did not become a cohesive organization until 1863, embraced anti-clericalism to a greater degree than did the other parties.

Thus, from the outset, the main cleavage that separated the parties, especially the Conservatives and the Radicals, was the church–state issue, and the enactment of secularizing policies by Liberal governments in the late nineteenth century only deepened this religious cleavage. The Conservatives were the strongest supporters of the Church, whereas the Radicals were its most vehement critic.

The four parties did not differ dramatically in terms of their leadership, social composition, or economic interests.¹³ As Remmer (1984, 15) argues, the parties all “represented a very narrow upper class and their members shared the same fundamental socioeconomic interests and outlook.” Elites sometimes changed parties, but most had loyalties to one party or another.

Over time, the parties developed broad and enduring ties to the electorate, which consisted not just of elites but of people of all social classes.¹⁴ According to Valenzuela (1996, 249), Chilean parties in the nineteenth century “were able to generate loyalties among the populace ... They forged strong organizations binding together sizeable numbers of the more militant and politically engaged individuals that exist in any national society.”

Each party had its zone of influence. The Conservative Party, for example, developed particularly high levels of support in devoutly Catholic areas of central and southern Chile (Valenzuela 2000, 192). The Radical Party, meanwhile, was especially strong in the north, especially in the mining

¹³ The Conservative Party has often been described as the party of the landed elites, but this is somewhat of an exaggeration. Like other parties of this period, its leadership included many prominent landowners, but it also drew its leaders from numerous other sectors as well (Valenzuela 2000, 191–192; Remmer 1984, 72–73). The Radical Party was led mostly by wealthy mining families located in the north of the country, but it also had numerous leaders among the landowning, merchant, and banking elites of southern Chile (Heise 1982, 323–325). The Liberals were a very heterogeneous group, including both landholding elites as well as the new elites in mining, finance, and commerce (Heise 1982, 315). Many of the Nationals had banking interests, but they, too, were a heterogeneous party (Remmer 1984, 15).

¹⁴ By 1877–1878, farmers/agricultural workers and artisans/industrial workers represented the two largest occupational categories in the electoral registry (Madrid 2019a, 8; República de Chile 1879, 316).

towns. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Conservatives and the Radicals as well as the Liberals had developed significant levels of support in provinces throughout the country (Urzúa Valenzuela 1992, 342–362).

The four parties dominated the Chilean legislature from 1861 to 1890. In some years, they accounted for 100 percent of the legislative seats and in no year in this period did they represent less than 85 percent of the seats (Heise González 1982, 310–335; Obando Camino 2017, 76; Scully 1992, 58). The rise of the Liberal Democratic Party, which represented supporters of the former president José Manuel Balmaceda, reduced the dominance of the four main parties beginning in the 1890s, but they usually maintained control of three-fourths of the seats in the legislature through the 1924 elections.

The Conservatives and the Radicals developed the strongest ideological principles and organizations, and they gradually displaced the Liberals as the largest parties. The Conservative Party celebrated its first national convention in 1878, in which it defined its program and mobilized its cadres. It followed that up with additional national conventions in 1884, 1891, and 1895, and it gradually developed a complex hierarchical and territorial structure (Guilisasti Tagle 1964, 22–23; Heise González 1982, 317–318). At its base, the Conservative Party had Communal Assemblies and Communal Directorates, both of which reported to the Departmental Directorate, which, in turn, took orders from the Provincial Council and the General Directorate. The Communal Assemblies elected the members of the Communal Directorate as well as the candidates for the legislature and the councils from lists provided by the leadership (Heise González 1982, 317–318). The General Directorate, which was composed of 500 people, selected the members of the Governing Board and the party's presidential candidate (Heise González 1982, 318).

The Conservatives benefited from a dense Catholic organizational network composed of charitable associations, schools, workers' societies, and religious communities (Valenzuela 2000, 190–191). Priests and other church workers supported the Conservative Party from the pulpit, lent the considerable Church resources to the party, and campaigned on its behalf, even though the Church hierarchy was careful to maintain some distance from the party (Valenzuela 2000, 202–210). The Conservative Party sought to defend the Catholic Church, but it was not controlled by the Church, and it took centrist positions on many issues (Valenzuela 2001, 265–266).

The Radical Party developed a more decentralized, democratic, and participatory organization. In its first couple of decades, it lacked a national party leadership structure, relying instead on autonomous assemblies, which were held in Copiapó in 1863, in La Serena in 1864, and in Santiago and Concepción in 1865 (Scully 1992, 218; Remmer 1984, 17). In 1888, it held its first national convention, which provided it with a national organization

for the first time (Snow 1963, 58). At this convention, which was attended by sixty-three departmental delegates representing forty-three assemblies throughout Chile, it developed a detailed party program and party regulations and it elected a party president and a Central Governing Board (Durán Bernaldes 1958, 24; Palma Zuñiga 1967, 59–60; Snow 1963, 58; Guilisasti Tagle 1964, 134; García Covarrubias 1990, 85–86). By the time the Radicals held their second convention in 1899, they had eighty-five Communal Assemblies (Remmer 1984, 67).

The party established a clear hierarchy that ran from the Governing Board to the Provincial Directorates to the Communal Assemblies (Heise González 1982, 326). Nevertheless, the Communal Assemblies, which gradually diffused throughout the country, continued to play a key role in the party (Gazmuri 2019, 177–179). They met as frequently as once per week and were responsible for designating the party's candidates in elections, electing the governing board, formulating the party's policies, educating members, and recruiting future leaders of the party (Heise González 1982, 327). The Radical Party also received considerable assistance from the Masonry, which established its first grand lodge in Chile in 1862 – by 1872 it had ten lodges in the country (Collier and Sater 1996, 117). Associations of firefighters as well as various clubs, such as the Reform Club, also became important bases of support for the Radical Party (Gazmuri 2019).

By contrast, the Liberal and the National parties had weaker organizations and ideologies. Whereas the Conservatives and the Radicals had “exemplary discipline, abiding rigorously the resolutions of their leadership,” both the Liberal Party and the National Party had relatively weak party discipline (Heise González 1982, 291). The Liberal Party lacked firm party principles, and it frequently split between members who supported the government, dubbed the government Liberals, and those who opposed it, called the opposition or loose Liberals (Remmer 1984, 18; Heise González 1982, 309). Scully (1992, 49) argues that the Liberal Party was “the most organizationally fragmented [party] and the one with the weakest ideological underpinnings.” Nevertheless, the Liberal Party held the presidency from 1871 until 1891, and it used its control of the electoral authorities to consistently win the largest share of seats in the legislature during this period.¹⁵

The National Party, by contrast, constituted the smallest of the four main parties. It had a highly personalistic structure and suffered frequent splits and defections throughout the nineteenth century. According to Urzúa Valenzuela (1968, 32), the National Party was “a typical example of a party that owes its birth to the personal influence of certain leaders (personalistic party), [and] whose electoral strength is maintained only as long as those leaders maintain their status and political power.”

¹⁵ After 1891, the Conservatives and the Radicals had the largest legislative contingents.

Leaders of all four parties established newspapers to communicate with their supporters and help diffuse their ideas, which contributed to the growth of partisanship. According to Remmer (1984, 15):

By the end of the Liberal Republic two important dailies supported the Nationals: *El Mercurio* of Valparaíso and *La Epoca* of Santiago; the government Liberals' viewpoint was expressed by *La Tribuna* and *La Nación* of Santiago and *El Comercio* of Valparaíso; the Conservatives' by *El Independiente* and *El Estandarte Católico* in the capital and *La Unión* in Valparaíso; the Radicals' by *El Heraldo* in Valparaíso; while *La Libertad Electoral* in Santiago spoke in favor of the opposition or independent Liberals.

Party leaders also established newspapers in smaller towns and cities. The Radicals, for example, not only founded *La Ley* in Santiago and *El Deber* in Valparaíso but also *El Sur* in Concepción and *El Constituyente* and *El Atacama* in Copiapó (Heise González 1982, 328).

As Chapter 4 discussed, the parties, especially the Conservatives and the Radicals, developed relatively strong organizations and partisan loyalties thanks in part to the relative balance between Liberal and Conservative forces in the country. In addition, the concentration of the population in Chile and the absence of internal geographic barriers made it easier to build national parties. Chile was a relatively small nation for most of the nineteenth century, although the subjugation of the Mapuche and Chile's victory in the War of the Pacific enabled it to significantly expand its territory at the end of the century. Even after it expanded its frontiers, the majority of the country's population (55 percent in 1907) was concentrated in the ten provinces that made up the central region, an area that constituted only 12.5 percent of Chile's land and was easily traversable (República de Chile 1907). Chile's extensive coastline also facilitated transport along the length of its territory, as did its significant railway lines. By 1900, Chile already had 2,817 miles of railroad track, and by 1930 it had 5,553 miles, giving it the third highest ratio of railway track to territory in South America (Summerhill 2006, 302).¹⁶

Chile enjoyed regular elections throughout the nineteenth century, but only a small percentage of the population participated in these elections. Indeed, during the first three-quarters of the century, voter turnout constituted only 1.5 percent of the population, and even in the last quarter century, voters only represented 3.1 percent of the population. A central obstacle to increased voter participation was the 1833 constitution, which restricted suffrage to literate Chilean males over twenty-one years of age (twenty-five if unmarried) who met certain income requirements (or who had property or capital). Although the income restrictions were relaxed beginning in 1874, the literacy requirement

¹⁶ Chile also expanded its telegraph lines rapidly in the late nineteenth century, and by 1900 it already had 10,400 miles of lines (Banks and Wilson 2014).

remained. This restriction disenfranchised most adult citizens since a large majority of Chileans were illiterate during the nineteenth century.

Voter participation was also low in the nineteenth century because the results of most of the elections, especially presidential elections, were pre-determined. Before 1890, elections were largely controlled by the executive branch, especially the minister of interior, which ensured that candidates supported by the president won the vast majority of races. To be sure, members of the opposition sought to manipulate elections as well, but the government had many more ways of intervening since it controlled the state, the national guard, and the electoral authorities. As one government agent wrote to the Chilean minister of interior in the mid-nineteenth century, "if there should arise an opposition, we have a thousand means to make it fail" (cited in Valenzuela 1996, 242). The minister of interior and his agents compiled lists of preferred candidates, bought votes, distributed pre-marked ballots to supporters, and prevented opposition voters from gaining access to the voting tables. Perhaps most importantly, the executive branch used its control of the voter registration process to disqualify potential opposition voters and to stack the electoral registries with supporters of the government, including national guard troops and state employees.

During the first several decades after independence, the opposition frequently abstained from elections or competed only in selected races because of the dim prospects of winning. According to Collier (2003, 35), "in seven of the eleven legislative elections held between 1833 and 1864 the opposition scarcely bothered to run candidates at all." During this period, the opposition typically won no more than three or four seats in the lower chamber of the legislature (Urzúa Valenzuela 1992; Valenzuela 2012, 60; Donoso 1967).

Once it abandoned the armed struggle, however, the opposition began to compete more systematically in elections. Although the electoral playing field was tilted against them, opposition parties typically won 20 percent or more of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies beginning in 1858 (Urzúa Valenzuela 1992; Valenzuela 2012, 60; Heise González 1982). Chilean presidents permitted opposition candidates to be elected to the legislature during this period in order to keep the social peace or to satisfy powerful interests, as long as the opposition victories did not threaten the government's control of the legislature.¹⁷ As the Conservative leader Abdón Cifuentes (1936a, 148) pointed out: "If one or another congressional candidate of the opposition emerged victorious, it was because the opinion of a Department was so unanimous or energetic that it could not be overcome, without provoking scandalous outrage, or because it was in the government's interest to allow the appearance

¹⁷ The executive often included ruling party dissidents on the government's lists of official candidates to appease local notables and increase its chances of winning races (Valenzuela 1996, 236; 2012, 58). These dissidents at times defected to the opposition after the elections.

of freedom.”¹⁸ Each party had strongholds where its partisan ties ran deep, which enabled it to sometimes overcome the disadvantages it faced.

As opposition parties grew stronger in the 1860s and increasingly focused on the electoral path to power, they began to promote a variety of democratic reforms, including measures that would expand the suffrage, level the electoral playing field, and strengthen the attributions of Congress. The executive branch used its legislative influence to block these reforms, however. For example, in 1864 a Liberal and a couple of Radical legislators proposed loosening the suffrage requirements, but the government easily voted down their proposal (Heise González 1982, 52–53). A stronger push for electoral reform came in the late 1860s with the founding of the Reform Club (Estelle Méndez 1970). Liberals and Radicals associated with this movement proposed various reforms, but allies of the executive branch blocked most of these proposed reforms, including measures to expand the suffrage and reduce the executive’s control over the electoral process (Anonymous 1878, 312–313; Heise González 1982, 52–53). Congress did pass a minor reform in 1869 that made some changes to the administration of the electoral registry and stripped the right to vote from members of the army and navy (Heise González 1982, 50–51; Encina 1950, 504–506; Valenzuela 1985, 102). This reform did not significantly diminish the executive’s ability to control elections, however, since national guard troops retained the right to vote, and they were much more numerous than members of the military.

Opposition parties in Chile tended to energetically support democratic reforms because they recognized that such measures would strengthen their position in the legislature and improve their chances of winning elections. Members of the ruling coalition, by contrast, tended to oppose such reforms or seek to water them down to preserve their control of elections and their dominance in the legislature. Thus, when parties left the ruling coalition, they tended to become much more enthusiastic about democratic reform, but when they joined the ruling coalition, their enthusiasm tended to wane. For example, the Conservative Party only became a strong advocate of democratic reform after it left the ruling alliance in mid-1874 and joined the opposition (Valenzuela 2012, 62; Heise González 1982, 313–314; Madrid 2019a, 8). Similarly, the Liberal Party’s support for democratic reform waned once it took over the government beginning in 1871.¹⁹ Indeed, Liberal governments, such as those headed by Domingo Santa María and José Manuel Balmaceda, became aggressive practitioners of electoral manipulation.

Although the opposition typically held a significant number of seats in the legislature during the late nineteenth century, it could not enact legislation

¹⁸ Valenzuela (1985, 66–67) notes that the opposition was more likely to win if the head of the local national guard unit had close ties to local elites and opted not to intervene in favor of the official candidates.

¹⁹ Some Liberals continued to support reform, effectively joining the opposition.

without the support of members of the ruling coalition. Nevertheless, splits within the ruling coalition were frequent and these splits provided opportunities for the opposition. Because of the fragmentation of the party system, Chilean presidents typically had to govern through coalitions from the 1860s onward, and these coalitions were often unstable.²⁰ To persuade opposition parties to join the ruling coalition, the executive often had to grant policy concessions. Changes in the minister of interior could also strengthen the opposition because most of the legislators in the ruling coalition owed their seats to the minister who presided over their election. Once this minister was replaced, it was common for some of these legislators to defect to the opposition or at least become a less dependable vote for the ruling coalition.

Splits within the ruling coalition paved the way for the enactment of the two most important democratic reforms that occurred during this period. The first reform was enacted in 1874 following a split that brought the Liberals to power.²¹ The opposition proposed a reform that: mandated cumulative voting, which increased the likelihood that the opposition would win legislative representation;²² allowed literacy to count as sufficient proof that voters satisfied the income requirements on the franchise; and stripped control of the voter registration process away from the municipalities, which the executive dominated, putting it in the hands of the largest taxpayers in each district. Although the president and his ministers objected to these provisions, they had a difficult time blocking them, given the splits that had undermined the government's control of the legislature. In the end, the government agreed to a compromise bill that effectively eliminated the income requirement and weakened the government's control of voter registration but restricted the use of the cumulative vote to lower chamber elections. The 1874 reform significantly expanded and diversified the electorate, leading the number of voters in legislative elections to increase from 25,981 in 1873 to 80,346 in 1876, and 104,041 in 1879 (Valenzuela 1985, 150; Borón 1971, Table 3).²³

The 1874 reform initially helped reduce electoral intervention by the executive and expand opposition representation in the legislature. The 1876 and

²⁰ As a result of frequent splits within the ruling coalition, the average duration of cabinets declined from more than two years prior to 1861 to less than one year beginning in the 1870s (Scully 1992, 46–47; Heise González 1974, 285–288; Somma 2011, 431–432).

²¹ For a detailed discussion of this reform and its enactment, including an analysis of a roll-call vote on a key provision, see Valenzuela (1985) and Madrid (2019a).

²² Cumulative voting granted citizens as many votes as positions to be filled in a district but allowed them to concentrate their votes on a single candidate, which increased the likelihood that minority parties could win seats.

²³ Valenzuela (2012, 225) estimates that about 30 percent of the adult male population in Chile was registered to vote in 1878. By the late nineteenth century, the electorate included people from all social classes, with farmers and agricultural workers, along with artisans and industrial workers, constituting a large majority of registered voters (República de Chile 1879, 316; 1882, 32).

TABLE 5.2 *Presidential and legislative elections in Chile, 1831–1924*

Election year	Presidential electoral votes (winner vs. runner-up)	Legislative seats (government vs. opposition)	Valid votes (as a % of the population)
1831	207–186	48–4	1.3
1834		55–0	0.6
1836	145–14		
1837		51–0	0.8
1840		43–9	2.1
1841	154–9		
1843			1.1
1846	164–0	50–3	1.8
1849		51–4	1.3
1851	132–29		
1852		51–3	
1855		55–3	
1856	207–0		
1858		57–15	1.3
1861	214–0	41–31	
1864		49–23	
1866	191–15		
1867		81–15	
1870		59–40	1.6
1871	226–58		1.5
1873		86–10	1.3
1876	293–14	43–37	2.1
1879		84–22	4.7
1881	287–12		2.9
1882		102–6	3.0
1885		96–17	3.2
1886	324–0		2.0
1888		94–29	3.5
1891	255–0	54–40	2.7
1894		66–28	4.2
1896	137–134		4.8
1897		68–26	4.8
1900		52–42	4.9
1901	172–79		5.7
1903		38–56	5.6
1906	164–97	53–41	6.1
1909		52–43	7.1
1910	268–0		7.9
1912		62–56	8.4
1915	174–173	65–53	4.3
1918		51–67	5.0
1920	175–174		5.2
1921		68–48	
1924		75–43	5.0

Source: Latin American Historical Elections Database.

Note: Presidential and legislative elections in Chile were often held in different years.

1879 elections witnessed less executive intervention than in previous years in part because the opposition used its influence in the committees of the largest taxpayers to resist the executive's attempts to intervene (Heise González 1982, 67–69; Ponce de León Atria and Fonck Larraín 2017, 181–183; Valenzuela 2012, 63; 1985, 122).²⁴ Nevertheless, government electoral intervention increased again during the 1880s under presidents Domingo Santa María (1881–1886) and José Manuel Balmaceda (1886–1891) (Donoso 1967, 308; Ponce de León Atria and Fonck Larraín 2017, 183–187; Valenzuela 2012, 63). Santa María and Balmaceda were both Liberal leaders who had been strong proponents of electoral reform when they served in Congress. Balmaceda, for example, had written a well-known political tract calling for electoral freedom in which he declared that there was “no idea more general, more practical, more full of importance than electoral liberty” (Heise González 1982, 74). Once they gained the presidency, however, they aggressively sought to control elections. As president, Santa María proudly declared: “They have called me an interventionist. I am. I belong to the old school and if I intervene [in elections] it is because I want an efficient, disciplined parliament that collaborates with the desires of government to advance the public welfare” (Góngora 1981, 22; Valenzuela 1998, 269).

The government could no longer disqualify opposition voters as easily thanks to the 1874 reform, but it had other tools at its disposal (Valenzuela 2012, 63). The executive and his allies manipulated the lists of the largest taxpayers to maintain control of the electoral authorities, and they also resorted to vote buying and even violence on occasion (Heise González 1982, 71; Valenzuela 1985, 123; Donoso 1967, 313). The high level of executive intervention led the opposition Conservatives to boycott the elections in 1882 in protest, and many Conservative voters stayed away from the polls in 1885 as well (Valenzuela 2012, 63). As a result, voter turnout declined considerably in the 1880s, and government supporters captured a large majority of seats in the legislature. According to Heise González (1982, 65), the government won 102 seats out of 109 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the 1882 elections, 96 seats out of 115 seats in the 1885 elections, and 94 out of 126 seats in 1888.

The ruling coalition split again under Balmaceda, however, leading a large majority of the legislature to join the opposition. The split stemmed in part from Balmaceda's economic policies. From the outset of his administration, Balmaceda spent massively on public works, including schools, hospitals, government offices, roads, bridges, railways, and docks, which he funded in large part through taxes on the export of nitrates. He created a Ministry of Public Works that by 1890 accounted for more than 30 percent of the government's budget (Collier and Sater 1996, 151). Spending on education also skyrocketed under Balmaceda, tripling between 1886 and 1890. These spending

²⁴ The opposition also used its influence in the committees of largest taxpayers to benefit its own candidates (Heise 1982, 68).

policies alienated fiscal conservatives and members of the financial community (Blakemore 1974, 73–75; Zeitlin 1984).²⁵

Balmaceda also managed to antagonize domestic and foreign investors in the nitrate industry through his efforts to extract more resources from them. By 1888, nitrate taxes had risen to 41 percent, up from 27 percent just six years earlier (Zeitlin 1984, 107). Seventy percent of the Chilean nitrate industry was in British hands by 1890 and British investors objected to many of Balmaceda's policies (Blakemore 1974, 22). John North, the British investor and so-called Nitrate King, hired Julio Zegers, a prominent Liberal politician, to defend his interests, and Zegers in turn hired numerous other prominent Liberal deputies and politicians for his legal team. Many of these politicians, like Zegers, subsequently played prominent roles in the opposition to Balmaceda (Blakemore 1974, 126–127; Ramírez Necochea 1969, 74–75). Meanwhile, Antony Gibbs and Son, another prominent British investment firm with nitrate and railway interests, hired Senator Eulogio Altamirano to defend its interests, and Altamirano also ended up leading the opposition to Balmaceda in the legislature (Blakemore 1974, 142–143).

Although foreign and domestic investors, especially those with ties to the nitrate industry, helped mobilize congressional opposition to Balmaceda, the president's authoritarian tendencies also played an important role in his undoing. Significant opposition to Balmaceda first emerged when he tried to impose his minister of finance and public works, Enrique Salvador Sanfuentes, as his successor. Balmaceda ultimately backed down, but many members of the legislature did not trust him to refrain from further electoral manipulation. Opponents of Balmaceda accused him of trying to organize his own party and they believed that he was using the dramatic increase in state spending to build a political patronage machine (Blakemore 1974, 174).

The growing opposition led Balmaceda to lose his majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in late 1889, the first time this had happened to a president in Chilean history. By November 1889, Balmaceda controlled no more than 45 of the 123 seats in the two chambers of the legislature (Encina 1952, 178–179; Heise González 1982, 90; Terrie 2014, 188–189). The opposition included Conservatives, Nationals, Radicals, independent Liberals, and even some disaffected government Liberals. Balmaceda responded to the growing dissent by clamping down on the opposition and seeking to circumvent the legislature. These measures simply aggravated the discontent, however, causing more politicians, including many so-called government Liberals, to abandon him.

²⁵ There is a significant historical debate over the causes of the elite split under the Balmaceda administration and the ensuing 1891 civil war. Some scholars emphasize Balmaceda's authoritarian tendencies as the principal cause (Blakemore 1974; Amunátegui Solar 1946; Encina 1952), whereas others focus on his economic policies, which alienated both foreign and domestic economic interests (Ramírez Necochea 1969; Vitale 1975; Zeitlin 1984). There is plenty of evidence to suggest that both factors played a role.

To rein in Balmaceda, the opposition renewed its push for democratic reform. During its long post-1873 reign in the opposition, the Conservative Party had become the staunchest congressional proponent of democratic reform. The Conservatives initially made little headway with their reform proposals, but when the Balmaceda administration lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the Conservative Senator Manuel José Irrarrázaval was emboldened to try again.²⁶ In a speech in the Senate on October 28, 1889, he noted that his previous reform proposal had been rejected, but “the political change that has since occurred in the Chamber [of Deputies] has encouraged me to propose it again to the Senate.”²⁷ According to Irrarrázaval, the committees of largest taxpayers that supervised the elections were too easily manipulated by the government, and it was therefore necessary to entrust the electoral system to autonomous municipalities (Cifuentes 1936b, 282).²⁸ He and others therefore proposed an electoral reform as well as a law creating autonomous municipalities.

The Balmaceda administration briefly flirted with the possibility of negotiating a reform with the Conservatives because it hoped to persuade them to join the government. This effort failed, however, and the government then sought to block the reform proposals (Blakemore 1974, 160–161; Encina 1952, 205–208; Terrie 2014, 192). The minister of justice and public education argued that “intervention by the Government in electoral proceedings cannot be cured through laws, and that only time, education, and self-sacrifice would correct it.”²⁹ Government Liberals also objected to provisions that would make intendants and governors unpaid positions, thereby reducing executive influence over them (Terrie 2014, 192; Salas Edwards 1914, 234–235).³⁰ The Balmaceda administration proposed its own constitutional reforms, but these measures were rejected by the opposition because they did nothing to weaken presidential powers or reduce executive control over elections (Blakemore 1974, 162–163; Terrie 2014, 192).

By contrast, the other opposition parties quickly threw themselves behind the reform proposals of the Conservatives. In a Senate speech, the Radical Senator Manuel Recabarren voiced his approval of the reforms, although he noted that “it should not be forgotten that when [the Conservative Party]

²⁶ Irrarrázaval, a wealthy landowner, had spent years studying electoral and municipal reform, traveling to the United States as well as Europe to study foreign models of government (Cifuentes 1936b, 280–282; Encina 1952, 198–199).

²⁷ *Boletín de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, Extraordinary Session 5, October 28, 1889, p. 78.

²⁸ See also Irrarrázaval’s long speech to the Senate in *Boletín de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, Extraordinary Session 7, November 4, 1889, pp. 105–113.

²⁹ *Boletín de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, Extraordinary Session 27, December 16, 1889, p. 343.

³⁰ See, for example, Deputy Fernando Cabrera Gacitúa’s speech opposing these measures in *Boletín de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, Ordinary Session 22, July 8, 1890, pp. 344–345.

was in power, it rejected [similar reforms] when the Liberal Party asked for them.”³¹ The opposition elected Irarrázaval as head of the joint committee that was to elaborate the reform, while at the same time excluding government Liberals from the subcommittee that they created to establish the bases of the reform (Salas Edwards 1914, 234). In short order, the committee wrote up a draft of the reform and submitted the proposal to the legislature with the support of all of the opposition members on the committee (Terrie 2014, 193; Cifuentes 1936b, 286). The pro-government Liberals opposed the reforms and refused to sign the committee’s report, but they could not block the proposed measures since they represented a minority of the committee (Salas Edwards 1914, 234). The Balmaceda administration then sought to stall the reforms by refusing to call an extraordinary session of Congress to discuss the committee’s proposals. Nevertheless, when the legislature reconvened in June 1890 for its ordinary session, it quickly approved the electoral reform law, which was promulgated on August 21, 1890 (Encina 1952, 277).

The 1890 electoral reform law contained a large number of provisions, the most important of which were the measures that helped establish ballot secrecy. According to Valenzuela (1998, 275–76), the law “made a great effort to assure the secret vote,” even going so far as to include a drawing that indicated where the voters should wait, where the voting desks and tables should be placed, and how the desks where voters would cast their ballots should be constructed. The law specified that voters would cast their ballots at isolated desks that would provide total privacy (any windows in the room had to be covered). Article 55 stipulated that the desks would contain ballots for all the candidates on white paper of uniform size, although citizens were also allowed to bring their own ballots (Anguita 1912, 128–129). Voters were supposed to place their ballots in white envelopes, which were provided by the electoral authorities, and then return to the main voting table where they would place their ballots in the ballot box.

The 1890 reform clearly had an important democratizing effect since the competitiveness of elections in Chile increased dramatically in the wake of its enactment and candidates supported by the government began to lose much more often. In spite of this reform, however, the secrecy of the vote was not always rigorously enforced in rural areas where agricultural tenant workers (*inquilinos*) were in thrall to the traditional landowning elites.³²

³¹ *Boletín de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, Extraordinary Session 35, January 8, 1890, p. 476.

³² Some scholars have suggested that Chile did not truly establish the secrecy of the vote until the government introduced the single state-provided Australian ballot in 1958 (Baland and Robinson 2008; Scully 1992, 134–135). Indeed, Hellinger (1978) and Baland and Robinson (2008) show that after the passage of this reform support for right-wing parties decreased significantly in areas where agricultural tenant workers represented a larger share of the population, presumably because the landowning elites could no longer influence their tenants’ votes. Nevertheless, the decline in *inquilino* support for right-wing parties after 1958 also presumably stemmed from the rise of the Christian Democratic Party and the rural organizing efforts that it and the left-wing parties undertook during this period.

The 1890 law also ensured greater representation for minority parties by extending the cumulative voting procedure to the elections of senators, presidential electors, and municipal councilors, which had previously used the complete-list system. To ensure fair vote counting, the 1890 reform also specified that the opening of the ballot boxes and the counting of the votes would take place in the presence of representatives of the candidates. It also eliminated the voter registration cards that enabled the executive's agents to disqualify opposition voters and control the votes of some state employees (Heise González 1982, 91; Valenzuela 1998, 275).³³ In addition, under the new law, voters would no longer have to reregister to vote every three years – voter registration would last indefinitely.

Whereas the electoral reform bill was signed into law in 1890, the municipal autonomy law stalled in the legislature because of the growing conflict between the president and the Congress. Executive–legislative relations steadily deteriorated over the course of 1890. The legislature repeatedly censured government ministers, but Balmaceda refused to remove them and instead sought to dissolve the legislature. Government agents also attacked a meeting of Conservatives in Santiago, and soldiers and police violently repressed a wave of strikes throughout the country.³⁴ In late December 1890, the congressional opposition drew up a statement, signed by nineteen senators and seventy deputies, that declared Balmaceda unfit to continue in office (Blakemore 1974, 191). When the legislature refused to approve a budget for the administration, Balmaceda decreed on January 4, 1891 that the previous year's budget as well as other essential laws would be renewed.

In the wake of Balmaceda's decree, the opposition rebelled with the support of the Chilean navy and its leader, Admiral Jorge Montt. On January 7, 1891, the navy sailed its warships out of Valparaíso with the leaders of the opposition aboard, including the president of the Chamber of Deputies, and the vice-president of the Senate. Other members of the opposition went into hiding in Santiago. The army remained loyal to Balmaceda and government agents brutally repressed the opposition and shut down the opposition media. The navy, however, blockaded Chile's ports and gained control of northern Chile and its nitrate revenues, which the opposition used to purchase arms abroad and assemble an army of its own. Emil Körner, the head of the German military mission in Chile, joined the side of the congressionalist opposition and helped train and direct their troops. After several months of fighting, the opposition army defeated Balmaceda's troops in two bloody battles in August 1891 that produced more than 7,000 casualties (Somma 2011, 374). When the opposition army entered Santiago, Balmaceda sought asylum in the Argentine embassy

³³ Previously, national guard and police commanders as well as some government officials had collected the voter registration cards from their subordinates, returning them on election day when they would go to vote in a bloc (Valenzuela 1996, 244).

³⁴ The strikes were largely unrelated to the congressional opposition to Balmaceda.

where he committed suicide on September 19, 1891, the day after his term officially ended.

With the end of the Chilean Civil War, Congress quickly approved the municipal autonomy law, and it was promulgated on December 22, 1891. The law stripped control of the municipalities from the central government, creating Assemblies of Electors (composed of all eligible voters within each municipality) that were responsible for electing municipal officials as well as for approving municipal budget, taxation, and financing agreements (Valenzuela 1977, 193). Perhaps most importantly, the law gave the municipalities control of the electoral process, including registering voters, composing the polling officials, and administering the elections on election day.

Thus, pressure from increasingly strong opposition parties, combined with a split within the ruling coalition, enabled the enactment of important democratic reforms in 1890–1891. The opposition allied with ruling party dissidents to push through these reforms despite the resistance of the government.

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN CHILE AFTER 1891

The electoral and municipal reforms of 1890–1891 helped democratize the Chilean political system. In the wake of the reforms, the executive lost control of the electoral process. Chilean presidents could no longer impose their successors, nor could they unilaterally determine the makeup of Congress. The minister of interior ceased to compose official lists of candidates and to intervene extensively in elections (Valenzuela 1996, 249; Heise González 1982, 93). According to Remmer (1977, 210): “Whereas the intervention of the executive had previously deprived elections of all their meaning, their outcome was now largely determined by the number of votes counted.” Similarly, Valenzuela (1998, 268–269) argues that in the wake of the 1890 electoral reform, “the Chilean political regime began to meet the minimum requirements of a democracy with incomplete suffrage.”

Between 1891 and 1924, a period which was dubbed the Parliamentary Republic, the legislature dominated the executive branch. During this period, cabinet members were responsible to the parliament and were frequently removed at the legislature’s request.³⁵ Because the legislature was divided, presidents struggled to cobble together the alliances necessary to approve legislation. Five parties – the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Radical Party, the National Party, and the Liberal Democratic Party – usually had representation in the legislature, and no party typically held a majority of seats. As a result, the parties formed alliances: One pact centered on the Liberals and was dubbed the Liberal Alliance; the other pact revolved around the

³⁵ Between December 1891 and September 1924, the Ministry of the Interior switched hands almost 100 times and the average cabinet lasted only four or five months (Remmer 1984, 63).

Conservatives and was called the Conservative Coalition.³⁶ The composition of these alliances changed frequently, and they were often based more on political opportunity than on ideology.

Competition in elections was typically intense. The first elections that took place after the Chilean civil war, the general elections of October 1891, were not competitive at the presidential level, given the existence of a consensus candidate: Admiral Jorge Montt. Nor were they free and fair since the former supporters of Balmaceda were excluded.³⁷ Beginning in 1894, however, supporters of Balmaceda were reintegrated into politics – they formed the Liberal Democratic Party – and elections became much more competitive and democratic. For example, in the 1894 elections, four out of the five cabinet ministers who ran for legislative posts were defeated, and the government accepted the outcome (Heise González 1982, 107). As Table 5.2 indicates, in the 1896 presidential elections, only three electoral votes separated the top two finishers, and in 1915 and 1920, the winner prevailed by a single vote. Of equal importance, alternation in power became common during this period. In 1901, Germán Riesco, who represented the Liberal Alliance, was elected president even though the Conservative Coalition was the incumbent government.³⁸ Similarly, in 1915, the Liberal president, Ramón Barros Luco, passed the presidential sash to the candidate of the Conservative Coalition, Juan Luis Sanfuentes; and in 1920 Sanfuentes handed over power to the candidate of the Liberal Alliance, Arturo Alessandri.

To be sure, Chile did not become a full democracy during this period. Some electoral abuses continued, although these abuses tended to be perpetrated by local officials and agents of the parties rather than the central government (Remmer 1977, 210–211). Parties bought votes, stacked the registries full of their supporters, and sought to disqualify voters of other parties (Ponce de León Atria 2014, 6–7; Ponce de León Atria and Fonck Larraín 2017). The municipalities controlled the voter registry and the electoral process so the parties depended in large part on their influence with local officials in order to obtain favorable outcomes (Ponce de León Atria 2014, 6–7; Valenzuela 1977, 194). Money came to play an increasingly important role in electoral campaigns.³⁹ Indeed, a contemporary observer from the United States argued

³⁶ The Conservatives and the Liberals initially represented the two largest parties in the Chamber of Deputies, but they were overtaken by the Radicals in 1918.

³⁷ Even the 1891 elections demonstrated democratic progress in that the government did not intervene in them extensively. The son of the minister of interior lost his campaign for congress by eighty-seven votes in this election, and the minister declined to overturn the results (Heise 1982, 101).

³⁸ There was also alternation in power in 1896 since the incumbent president, Admiral Jorge Montt, did not belong to any party.

³⁹ Remmer (1984, 81–82) estimates that the average amount spent to win a seat in the Senate during this period was 100,000 Chilean pesos, roughly US\$30,000, and the average amount to win a seat in the Chamber of Deputies was 10,000 pesos, approximately US\$3,000.

that “the most serious danger to Chilean public life arises from the almost universal use of money to influence the result of elections” (Reinsch 1909, 525). Nevertheless, as he acknowledged, this was a problem that plagued Western democracies in general.

Suffrage restrictions also undermined Chilean democracy throughout the early twentieth century. Neither women nor illiterates could vote, and together they represented more than 70 percent of the adult population during this period (Remmer 1984, 83). The Chilean literacy rate rose sharply in the twentieth century, however, climbing from 31.8 percent in 1895, to 50.3 percent in 1920, to 89.8 percent in 1970, which made the literacy requirement less of an obstacle over time (República de Chile 1925, 303; 1970, 40). As a result, voter turnout increased as Table 5.2 indicates, climbing from 3.6 percent of the population in 1888 to a high of 8.5 percent of the population in 1912 (Borón 1971, table 3; Nazer and Rosembliit 2000, 227). In 1914, however, the legislature enacted a reform that required the voter registry to be freshly compiled every nine years, which led to a temporary reduction in voter registration and turnout (Ponce de León Atria 2014, 17; Scully 1992, 66).

Nevertheless, the regime that was established in Chile at the outset of the 1890s was quite democratic by the standards of the time. Moreover, Chile enacted further reforms over the course of the twentieth century that would help deepen democracy. In the late 1920s, for example, the government created new institutions to oversee voter registration and elections, which were staffed by public employees, and these institutions gradually helped reduce electoral manipulation (Ponce de León Atria and Fonck Larraín 2017, 191; Ponce de León Atria 2014, 19–21; Hasbun 2016). Even more importantly, Chile granted suffrage to women in 1949 and to illiterates in 1970, and it improved voting secrecy in 1958 by requiring voters to use a single, government-provided ballot.

As we have seen, the professionalization of the military played an important role in the establishment of this democratic regime by bringing an end to the opposition revolts that had plagued Chile before 1860. Military professionalization did not bring an end to military coups, however. In 1924, the military overthrew the government of Arturo Alessandri, ushering in an era of authoritarianism and instability that did not end until the reelection of Alessandri in 1932. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, military intervention remained less common in Chile than most of the other South American countries. Indeed, beginning in 1932, Chile enjoyed a long period of democratic rule that was not broken until the 1973 military coup.

The emergence of strong political parties in Chile during the nineteenth century played an important role in the establishment and maintenance of this democratic regime. Strong opposition parties pushed through the democratic reforms that helped establish democracy in the 1890s and they oversaw the implementation of these reforms by monitoring the polls and protesting

electoral abuses when they encountered them. The strength of the opposition parties also ensured that they could compete in elections, enabling the opposition to capture large numbers of seats in the legislature and even the presidency on occasion. This gave the opposition a large stake in the democratic system and discouraged it from calling on the military to intervene. Thus, Chile's relatively strong multiparty system undergirded its democratic and highly competitive regime for much of the twentieth century.

THE ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY IN URUGUAY

Uruguay was slower than Chile to democratize. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, it constituted an unstable authoritarian regime that was plagued by controlled elections, frequent opposition revolts, and periodic state repression. During the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, however, Uruguay stabilized and democratized. Opposition revolts came to an end, and the state began to respect civil and political liberties more consistently. Most importantly, in 1918 Uruguay enacted a new constitution that mandated the use of the secret ballot, proportional representation, universal male suffrage, and obligatory voter registration in elections.⁴⁰ With the advent of the new constitution, voter turnout rose considerably, electoral manipulation declined, and elections became increasingly competitive.

Democratization in Uruguay was driven by the same developments that helped bring it about in Chile. First, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Uruguayan state used its growing export revenues to professionalize its military. Although Uruguay was slower than Chile to strengthen its armed forces in part because it did not face pressing external conflicts, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century it had clearly established a monopoly on violence. Because the opposition could no longer hope to overthrow the government by force, it abandoned the armed struggle and began to push more aggressively for democratic reforms. In the absence of revolts, the government had fewer incentives to engage in state repression.

The development of strong parties also facilitated democratization in Uruguay. As Chapter 4 discussed, two strong parties emerged in Uruguay in the late nineteenth century: the Blanco Party and the Colorado Party. The opposition Blancos used their influence to win seats in the legislature and to promote democratic reform. The catalyst for democratic reform, however, was a split within the ruling Colorado Party. In the wake of this split, dissident Colorados allied with the Blancos, giving them enough votes in the 1917 constitutional convention to approve democratic reforms. As a result, the dominant faction of the Colorado Party negotiated a pact with the Blancos in which they agreed to support the reforms in exchange for concessions.

⁴⁰ The constitution was approved by a plebiscite in 1917, but it did not take effect until 1918.

REVOLTS AND MILITARY PROFESSIONALIZATION IN URUGUAY

During the nineteenth century, the Uruguayan state had even lower coercive capacity than Chile and was even more prone to revolts. State infrastructure was minimal until the late nineteenth century: The railroad was not built until 1868, and the Uruguayan countryside initially had few decent roads and virtually no bridges (McLaughlin 1973, 97, 111).⁴¹ Moreover, the government had few funds to spend on its military. The bureaucracy was tiny and the state controlled no resources – most state revenue came from customs duties (López-Alves 2000, 54, 226; Rock and López-Alves 2000, 184).

Uruguay formally established a national army in 1830, but initially it existed mostly on paper (López-Alves 2000, 54; Bañales 1970, 292). The problem was not the number of troops, which generally represented a larger percentage of the population than did the Chilean army, but rather their lack of training, discipline, and equipment (Somma 2011, 148–149).⁴² During the first half of the nineteenth century, soldiers were often armed with nothing more than knives and spears (López Chirico 1985, 27). Moreover, the rank-and-file soldier typically earned less than a rural peasant, which obliged the Uruguayan military to resort to widespread forced conscription (López Chirico 1985, 27–28; Bañales 1970, 292–293; Somma 2011, 152–153). As a result, the troops typically came from the poorest sectors of the population, had little discipline, and were often thrust into battle without much training. In 1861, the war minister complained that the army was composed mostly of criminals and vagrants (Somma 2011, 149).

To make matters worse, the officer corps was heavily politicized and lacked training. The Colorado Party gained firm control of the army in 1865 when the Colorado General Venancio Flores overthrew the Blanco President Bernardo Berro and purged the army of its remaining Blanco officers and soldiers (Casal 2004, 123). Even before that time, however, officers were promoted based on political connections rather than their expertise. As Moore (1978, 57) puts it: “A sort of spoils system obtained in which the adherents of the president were appointed to and advanced in the military hierarchy, while the military ‘favorites’ of the outgoing administration were relegated to reserve status.” Owing in part to the political appointments, the number of officers in the army reserve grew, which represented a significant drain on the Treasury (Moore 1978, 57; McLaughlin 1973, 102–103). In 1860, the regular army had 9 generals, 126 commanders, 261 officers, and only 895 soldiers (López Chirico 1985, 26; Bañales 1970, 293). There were occasional efforts to improve the training of officers. For example, in 1823, 1843, 1844, and 1858, the government

⁴¹ One contemporary source suggested that it cost three times as much to transport a ton of goods from Montevideo to the town of Durazno, which was 113 miles to the north, than it did to ship the goods from London to Montevideo (cited in McLaughlin 1973, 112).

⁴² In 1852, the army constituted 1.1 percent of the national population, and even in the late nineteenth century it generally represented at least 0.4 percent of the population (Somma 2011, 151–152).

established military schools for officers, but none of these schools lasted very long or changed the politicized culture of the military (Somma 2011, 149; López Chirico 1985, 211; Ferrer Llul 1975, 43).

The civic guard, which President Manuel Oribe created in 1835, had even less discipline, training, and equipment than the army. Moreover, troops from the civic guard, which became associated with the Blanco Party, sometimes fought against the Colorado-dominated regular army. Indeed, Blanco President Juan Francisco Giró reestablished the civic guard in 1853 specifically to counterbalance the army (Somma 2011, 150; López Chirico 1985, 29–30). A subsequent Blanco president, Bernardo Berro, continued these efforts, enrolling 16,000 troops in the civic guard while slashing the size of the army to 914 troops in 1860 (Bañales 1970, 293; Casal 2001).

Both the Blanco and the Colorado parties also maintained large militias, which drew on members of the army as well as the civic guard. Regional leaders from the party generally controlled these militias and used them to serve their own personal political ambitions. During wartime, the Colorado militias generally fought alongside the Colorado-dominated army, whereas Blanco officers and soldiers often defected from the army and fought with the Blanco militias.

The weakness of the military and the existence of party militias encouraged the opposition to rebel, and the rebels often mobilized thousands of troops (Somma 2011, 123). Not surprisingly, the opposition sometimes prevailed in the revolts or obtained important concessions, which encouraged further rebellions. There were approximately fifty revolts before 1904, including at least thirteen major armed insurgencies (Vanger 1963, 9; Somma 2011, 120; see Table 5.3). Some of the civil wars, especially the Guerra Grande (1839–1851), lasted years, so that Uruguay had more years of war than peace in the nineteenth century. In 1876, José Pedro Varela, an Uruguayan writer and politician, lamented that “it can well be said, without exaggeration, that war is the normal state of the Republic” (cited in Bañales 1970, 294).

The civil wars typically pitted Blancos versus Colorados, although in some instances, such as the 1855, 1875, and 1886 conflicts, different factions within the parties fought each other. The wars stemmed more often from disputes over power than ideology. The Blancos, for example, rebelled several times because the Colorado governments reneged on power-sharing agreements or sought to exclude them from power. During the early nineteenth century, foreign powers, including Argentina, Brazil, France, and Great Britain, intervened frequently in the conflicts, but after 1865, direct foreign intervention in Uruguayan civil wars largely came to an end, although both parties continued to purchase weapons abroad.

The wars had high human and material costs. For example, approximately 1,000 people are estimated to have died in the 1904 civil war, which is a very high death toll for a country that had a population of less than one million in 1900. The economic costs of the civil wars were also quite large. Military spending absorbed a large portion of the government’s budget during wartime. Based on

TABLE 5.3 *Major revolts in Uruguay, 1830–1929*

Year	Description of revolt	Type of revolt (outcome)
1832	Supporters of Juan Antonio Lavalleja failed to assassinate President Fructuoso Rivera and were defeated by Rivera's army with support from Argentina.	Military coup (suppressed)
1836	General Rivera rebelled against President Manuel Oribe after he was dismissed as head of the army. The revolt was defeated.	Military coup (suppressed)
1837–1838	Rivera rebelled against President Manuel Oribe and overthrew him with the help of 2,000 men, the French navy, and the Riograndese Republic.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1839–1851	<i>Guerra Grande</i> . Oribe and the Blancos rebelled against Rivera and the Colorados and laid siege to Montevideo. Oribe surrendered after lengthy war.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1853	The Colorado-led army rebelled against Blanco president Juan Giró and replaced him with a Colorado triumvirate. Blancos then unsuccessfully rebelled.	Military coup (took power)
1855	Dissident Colorados and some Blancos rebelled and seized control of Montevideo. President Venancio Flores resigned and new elections were held.	Elite insurrection (overthrown)
1858	A faction of the Colorado Party revolted against the Fusion government of Gabriel Pereira. The rebels were defeated and their leaders were executed.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1863–1865	Colorado General Venancio Flores led a rebel army of 3,000 that overthrew Blanco President Bernardo Berro with assistance of Brazil.	Elite insurrection (took power)
1868	Bernardo Berro and Blancos initiated a rebellion in which Colorado President Flores was killed. In revenge, Colorados killed Berro and many Blancos.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1870–1872	Blanco leader Aparicio Saravia rebelled against the Colorado government with 5,000 men. He ultimately signed a peace agreement and obtained concessions.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1875	Military officers deposed President José Ellauri after he named Blancos to his cabinet. Pedro Varela took his place.	Military coup (overthrown)
1875	<i>Tricolor Revolution</i> . Dissident Colorados revolted with support of some Blancos against the Colorado government of Pedro Varela. They were defeated.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1876	Under pressure from his minister of war, President Varela resigned and the minister Colonel Lorenzo Latorre assumed the presidency.	Military coup (took power)
1886	<i>Principistas</i> including Colorados and Blancos rebelled with 1,300 men against President Máximo Santos, but they were easily defeated.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)

TABLE 5.3 (continued)

Year	Description of revolt	Type of revolt (outcome)
1896	Aparicio Saravia initiated a revolt with 1,000 men but without support of Blanco leadership. They were quickly defeated.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1897	Blanco leader Aparicio Saravia rebelled with 3,000 men against Colorado President Juan Idiarte but signed a peace agreement after several battles.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1898	Following President Cuesta's decision to shut down Congress, military revolts occurred in February and July, but they were suppressed.	Military coup (suppressed)
1903	Saravia rebelled with 16,000 men when President José Batlle reneged on a peace accord, but war was averted when Batlle compromised.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1904	Saravia revolted with 15,000 men against Colorado President José Batlle, but Saravia was killed after several bloody battles and the Blancos surrendered.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)
1910	Some radical Blanco leaders revolted with 2,000 men, but most Blancos did not join the revolt and the Colorado government quickly defeated them.	Elite insurrection (suppressed)

Source: Latin American Revolts Database.

the research of the Uruguayan historian Eduardo Acevedo, the US embassy calculated that the forty-five revolts and one foreign war that Uruguay experienced between 1828 and 1925 had direct costs of \$201 million and created public debts of \$394 million in current dollars.⁴³ The wars also depleted the labor force and resulted in great destruction to infrastructure, firms, farms, and ranches.

The frequent revolts also deepened authoritarianism and subverted constitutional rule. According to Panizza (1997, 671), of the twenty-seven presidents who served between independence and 1910, nine were driven from power, two were assassinated, one was seriously wounded, twelve faced major revolts, and only three served out their terms without facing a major armed revolt. The government typically responded to the revolts by arresting members of the opposition, censoring the press, suspending civil and political liberties, and sometimes executing prisoners. Under the 1830 constitution, the president had the right to unilaterally impose measures in response to security threats and presidents used these emergency powers frequently. For example, in February 1833, the government suspended and arrested opposition legislators whom it accused of supporting the rebels (Loveman 1993, 297). In 1844, in the midst of the Guerra Grande, an opposition legislator denounced the president's growing

⁴³ Dispatch of US Minister to Uruguay, No. 141, May 25, 1906. Microfilm Roll 19, National Archives.

dictatorial powers and his “attacks on liberties and civil rights” (Loveman 1993, 297).

The Uruguayan government undertook some efforts to increase its coercive capacity during the late nineteenth century, but these efforts did not get very far. In contrast to Chile, Uruguay did not face major external conflicts in the late nineteenth century, which would have put greater pressure on it to strengthen its military. Uruguay did participate alongside Argentina and Brazil in the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–1870) against Paraguay, but it was a minor player in this conflict and its experience was a bitter one that undermined the country’s military capacity rather than strengthening it (Casal 2004, 119, 138–139). Uruguay sent 1,500 troops to fight in the war but it experienced massive desertions and high casualties: By the end, only 150–250 Uruguayan troops remained and the Oriental Division fought using Paraguayan prisoners of war (Moore 1978, 22; Casal 2004, 119, 126–127).

After the war, Colonel Lorenzo Latorre, who served as minister of war and then as president (1876–1880), built up the country’s infrastructure and sought to create a small but effective army that would have a monopoly on violence. He added two new military battalions and purchased modern weaponry, including Krupp artillery and Remington rifles (McLaughlin 1973, 169–170; López Chirico 1985, 33; Moore 1978, 27–28). Latorre also ordered the political chiefs of each department (the largest administrative unit in Uruguay) to confiscate weaponry in their districts and forbade the import of arms by private citizens in order to prevent rebels from gaining access to weapons (Bañales 1970, 296).⁴⁴

Latorre’s reforms, however, did not dramatically increase the state’s coercive capacity or bring a permanent end to the cycle of revolts. The military continued to be highly politicized and poorly equipped, and Latorre himself enacted significant military cutbacks toward the end of his term in order to reduce the government’s financial deficit (McLaughlin 1973, 239; López-Alves 2000, 93). Between 1876 and 1880, the number of active-duty military officers declined from 1,205 to 153, and the number of battalions dropped from eight to four (Rock and López-Alves 2000, 197). President Julio Herrera y Obes, the civilian president who took power in 1890, weakened the army further by retiring numerous officers and cutting the salaries of those who remained (Rock and López-Alves 2000, 198). In addition, the training of officers remained deficient. The government did not create an enduring military academy until 1885 and even this school did not have an immediate impact (Somma 2011, 159; López Chirico 1985, 37).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Latorre also provided weapons and funding to departmental political chiefs and promoted the development of rural police forces to deal with rural insecurity (McLaughlin 1973, 220; Moore 1978, 27). He stationed army battalions in the departments, but he moved them frequently to reduce the likelihood that they would conspire against him (McLaughlin 1973, 217).

⁴⁵ Prior to 1885, the government commissioned officers without regard to their educational qualifications, but after that year the government increasingly required officers to have military training (Moore 1978, 66).

The opposition Blancos, meanwhile, retained their ability to launch rebellions. In fact, the control that the Blancos gained of some departments beginning in 1872 strengthened them militarily by enabling them to deploy the local police forces and build up their militias. The national government generally refrained from intervening in these departments, and government efforts to reduce the Blancos' control of these departments led to revolts in 1897 and 1904.

It was not until the early twentieth century that Uruguay built up and professionalized its military, bringing an end to the cycle of revolts. The export boom and accompanying economic growth that Uruguay experienced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped finance the military modernization efforts. Exports grew from an annual average of \$76.1 million in 1870–1874 to \$332.6 million in 1925–1929 (in constant 1980 dollars), and the country's GDP rose from \$738 million to \$6,398 million (in constant 1990 dollars) during the same period (Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 86, 96). The strong economic growth that Uruguay experienced at the outset of the twentieth century discouraged revolts not only by financing military professionalization but also by increasing the economic costs of war. The price of land and livestock rose sharply during this period, and Blanco ranchers and businessmen gradually became unwilling to risk their increasingly valuable assets and investments by going to war (Vanger 1980, 9–10, 355; Bértola and Ocampo 2013, 107).⁴⁶

President José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903–1907) built up the military largely in response to a major Blanco revolt at the outset of his presidency. During the 1904 rebellion, the Blancos mobilized 10,000 rebel troops, but Batlle mustered militia units and expanded the military to 30,000 troops, including 8,000 regular army soldiers, creating the largest army in the history of Uruguay (Rock and López-Alves 2000, 201; Vanger 1963, 141; Moore 1978, 38). Even more importantly, the government troops were better armed than the rebels. In the run-up to the war, the military had outfitted its soldiers with modern weapons, including Krupp cannons, Maxim machine guns, and Mauser rifles (Somma 2011, 160). During the war, the government acquired 4,000 new Remington rifles, along with a shipment of Colt machine guns (Vanger 1963, 89, 95).⁴⁷ In addition, the government had the advantage of controlling the railroads and the telegraphs, which it used to communicate with officers in the field and rapidly transport troops to where they were needed. By the turn of the century, Uruguay had extensive telegraph networks and more than 1,600 kilometers of railroad track, up from 200 in 1876 (Vanger 1963, 142; Somma 2011,

⁴⁶ As one rancher said: "A law prohibiting revolutions is necessary because if they exist, cures for scabies [and other investments in livestock] are useless" (cited in López Chirico 1985, 39).

⁴⁷ The Blanco opposition also purchased weapons during this conflict, including 2,000 rifles, three cannons, and three machine guns, but they had to rely on voluntary contributions to pay for the weapons and then try to sneak them across the border (Vanger 1963, 123, 155).

161–162). The government's numerous military advantages enabled it to win a resounding victory in the 1904 war.⁴⁸

In the wake of this decisive victory, Batlle took a few steps that reduced the likelihood of subsequent rebellions. First, he granted the rebels an amnesty but little else. Past peace agreements had generally awarded significant concessions to the rebels, which encouraged further rebellions, but Batlle was in a much stronger bargaining position than previous presidents, given his decisive victory in the war. Second, Batlle required the immediate and complete disarmament of the rebels. The loss of weaponry meant that the Blancos would have to rearm themselves at great cost to carry out future rebellions. Third, Batlle stripped the Blancos of their control of the departments and abolished the urban military companies, ostensibly departmental prison guards, which had served as the base of the rebel army (Vanger 1963, 170). As a result, the Blancos could no longer use state employees in these departments to build up their militias; nor could they block the army from intervening in these departments to prevent uprisings. Fourth, Batlle maintained an army of 10,000 men, which was twice the size it had prior to the war (Moore 1978, 40). Moreover, the government made contingency plans so that the army could quickly be expanded to 80,000 men in the event of an uprising (Vanger 1980, 296).

Batlle also took steps to professionalize and depoliticize the military. He integrated some Blanco officers back into the army, thereby reducing the partisan nature of the military (Moore 1978, 40). He boosted military pensions and stripped some nonmilitary personnel, such as police officers and militia members, of their military status so as to boost the prestige of the military (Moore 1978, 40–41). Finally, he divided the military into three regional commands and increased the number of military units in order to make it more difficult for officers to coordinate to overthrow the government (Moore 1978, 49; Vanger 1963, 170, 251–252).

The professionalization efforts intensified after the end of Batlle's first term. During Batlle's second administration (1911–1915), the government hired a ten-person French military mission, although its arrival was postponed until after World War I (Moore 1978, 66). The mission, which lasted until World War II, overhauled the military academies and the training of officers along French lines. Tactical manuals were translated verbatim from French military sources and some Uruguayan officers were sent to France for training (López Chirico 1985, 43; Bañales 1970, 301). Uruguay also expanded the number of officers it trained domestically during this period. Between 1920 and 1932, 374 officers graduated from the country's Military School, which was more than had graduated in the three decades from the founding of the school in 1885 until 1919 (Caetano 1994, 79). During this period, the military's budget increased, and it acquired the most up-to-date weaponry from Europe and the

⁴⁸ In the battle of Tupambaé, for example, the military's machine guns devastated the Blanco cavalry and the rebel troops eventually ran out of ammunition (Vanger 1963, 147).

United States in sufficient quantities to arm 50,000 men (López Chirico 1985, 42). The government also granted the military greater control over spending and promotions, and Congress enacted a series of organic laws that banned patronage appointments in the military and sought to reduce political interference in the armed forces (Moore 1978, 44). The officer corps continued to be mostly Colorado, but no single faction predominated, and Blanco officers gained some ground (López Chirico 1985, 43; Bañales 1970, 302).

The professionalization of the military and the bitter memory of the 1904 war helped bring an end to the opposition revolts that had plagued the country throughout the nineteenth century. Blanco leaders came to realize that they had little chance of defeating the military and so they began to focus exclusively on the electoral route to power. A prominent Blanco, Basilio Muñoz, attempted another uprising in 1910, but the Conservative leadership of the Blanco Party opposed the revolt, as did the country's major economic interests (Vanger 1980, 64–67, 86–91). The rebels, who sought to prevent Batlle from being elected to a second presidential term, hoped that anti-Batlle sectors of the military would join them in revolt, but no such uprising occurred. President Claudio Williman (1907–1911) quickly mobilized 30,000 troops, which easily suppressed the revolt (Vanger 1980, 90–91; Nahum 1987, 17).⁴⁹ Aparicio Saravia's sons sought to foment another rebellion in 1911, but they were discouraged by the leadership of the Blancos on the grounds that they could not possibly succeed (Vanger 1980, 151–152). By 1917, Muñoz, the erstwhile rebel, had also become convinced that armed rebellion would be futile and for that reason persuaded the Blancos to sign a pact with the Colorados that year on the new constitution (Vanger 2010, 232).

Thus, in Uruguay, as in Chile, the gradual strengthening of the coercive capacity of the state helped bring an end to the frequent revolts that had created unstable authoritarian rule in the nineteenth century. The process took longer in Uruguay because the state had fewer resources and it did not face the type of external wars that had stimulated rapid military professionalization in Chile in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, the Uruguayan state had acquired a clear monopoly on violence, which led the opposition Blancos to abandon the armed struggle and increasingly focus on the electoral path to power.

THE RISE OF PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY IN URUGUAY

Political parties played a crucial role in the emergence of democracy in Uruguay, as in Chile. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Uruguay developed parties with strong organizations and widespread and enduring ties to the

⁴⁹ To discourage revolts, Williman also helped push through a law stipulating that rebels would be punished with fifteen to eighteen months in prison (Bañales 1970, 298–299).

electorate. Uruguayan parties arose based on a territorial cleavage, rather than a religious or ideological cleavage. Whereas urban areas, especially the country's capital, Montevideo, became the base of the Colorado Party, the countryside came to constitute the stronghold of the Blanco Party.

Nevertheless, Uruguay's small size and the territorial concentration of its population enabled both parties to gradually develop support and an organizational presence throughout the country. Uruguay was by far the smallest South American country in the nineteenth century, with only 68,000 square miles of territory. By 1908, 50 percent of the population lived in urban areas with Montevideo alone containing 30 percent of the total (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2021; Nahum 2007, 35). The country had no major geographic obstacles and possessed an extensive coastline that facilitated domestic as well as international travel. Uruguay also benefited from the early introduction of the railroads and the telegraph, which linked together different areas. By 1900, the country already had 1,074 miles of railroad track and 4,500 miles of telegraph lines, which gave it the highest ratio of track and lines to territory on the continent (Summerhill 2006, 302; Banks and Wilson 2014).

The two parties originated in a lengthy civil war, the Great War, which racked Uruguay from 1839 to 1851. During this conflict, followers of the former president, General Fructuoso Rivera, came to be known as Colorados because they wore a red emblem to distinguish themselves from followers of Rivera's successor, General Manuel Oribe, who wore a white emblem and became known as Blancos. Rivera's forces occupied Montevideo in 1838 and managed to hold it throughout the civil war, but the Blancos controlled the countryside and laid siege to the capital. By the time the civil war ended in 1851, strong partisan identities had developed on both sides based in part on geography (McLaughlin 1973, 34; Pivel Devoto 1942). Over time, each party made inroads in the other party's bastions, but territorial cleavages continued to structure the support of each party.⁵⁰

After the Great War came to an end in 1851, efforts to move beyond the partisan divide failed to prosper. During the 1850s, several fusion governments arose that included members of both parties, but these administrations did not significantly weaken partisan ties (Zum Felde 1985, 189–193; Castellanos and Pérez 1981, 16–26). Subsequently, a few military presidents, such as General Lorenzo Latorre (1876–1880), General Máximo Santos (1882–1886), and General Máximo Tajes (1886–1890), also included some Blancos in their cabinets, but all of these presidents belonged to the Colorado Party and their administrations were Colorado-dominated (McLaughlin 1973, 211–222, 264–266; López-Alves 2000, 71).

⁵⁰ The parties did not differ significantly in terms of ideology during the nineteenth century. Both parties, for example, were largely supportive of free trade and secularization (Somma 2011, 169–170; López-Alves 2000, 56).

The intermittent wars between Blancos and Colorados during the nineteenth century contributed to the development of strong partisan ties by fostering intense antagonisms. The civil wars took a toll not just on the direct participants in the conflicts but also on their friends and family members as well as civilians located in conflict zones. Both sides committed atrocities, including the slaughter of civilians and the execution of prisoners, which deepened antagonisms and hardened partisan loyalties. Referring to the mid-nineteenth century, Zum Felde (1985, 198) wrote: "All the creole families of Montevideo have a father, a brother, or a son in the armies; and the Blancos or the Colorados have killed a son or a brother in many of these families: All have deaths to avenge. The pain, blood, and hate are felt in their own flesh." These partisan loyalties were passed down across generations and tales of the heroism of their leaders and the treachery of the enemy infused popular culture. Not surprisingly, it became rare for people to change parties.

In addition to fighting wars, the parties competed regularly in elections, which also contributed to the construction of party organizations and identities.⁵¹ The parties engaged in numerous activities during electoral periods, including selecting candidates, carrying out propaganda and voter registration campaigns, printing and distributing ballots, and seeking to boost turnout by holding election banquets and transporting voters to the polls. In nonelectoral periods, the parties would sometimes hold conventions to define their platforms, craft their organizational structures and regulations, and select their leadership.⁵²

The two parties first developed meaningful organizations in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1854, Blanco leaders formed an executive committee, which created "a Society named the Blanco Party" and identified the responsibilities and desired characteristics of its members (Corbo 2016, 104–106). Subsequently, the leaders of the Blanco Party began to establish clubs to engage in debates and electoral activities, such as the National Club and the Youth Club (Fernández and Machín 2017, 144). Under the auspices of the National Club, the Blancos wrote their first comprehensive party program in 1872 (Lindahl 1962, 246–247; Hierro López 2015, 161–162). In 1887, the Blanco Party held a national convention that selected its national leadership and established departmental and sectional committees (Pivel Devoto 1943,

⁵¹ Until 1918, Uruguay held direct elections for the Chamber of Representatives every three years, but indirect elections for the Senate every two years and the presidency every four years. The president, who had a mandate of four years without the possibility of immediate reelection, was elected by the two chambers of the legislature meeting together. The entirety of the lower chamber was renewed every three years, whereas only one-third of the Senate was elected every two years – senators had six-year terms.

⁵² The departmental and sectional organizations typically chose the participants in the conventions who usually numbered in the hundreds (Lindahl 1962, 40–42, 230–233). After the parties split in the 1910s and 1920s, the different factions typically held their own conventions and elected their own leaders.

292). At this convention, the party also formally adopted the name of the National Party, although many people continued to refer to it as the Blanco Party (Corbo 2016, 199–202).

The Colorado Party was somewhat slower to develop and did not craft its first party program until 1907 (Lindahl 1962, 246–247). Beginning in the 1860s, Colorado leaders sought to establish a party that was organized from below and had numerous local clubs, but they initially made progress only in Montevideo. Batlle renewed these efforts during the 1890s, building a territorially based party with elected leaders and clubs that represented the different sections of each department (Hierro López 2015, 169–170). Under his leadership, the Colorado Party became a strong, programmatically oriented organization with a permanent nationwide structure that the Blancos felt pressure to imitate.

By the early twentieth century, both parties had established permanent national organizations that had branches or clubs in all the departmental capitals as well as in the judicial sections of cities and sometimes in rural areas as well. Each department and section had its own party officials who were responsible for organizing party activities in that area. In addition, the two parties had affiliated newspapers, which they used to propagandize. These newspapers often represented different tendencies within the parties. For example, the Colorado Party had *El Día*, which was Batlle's paper, as well as *La Mañana*, whereas the Blancos had *El Nacional*, *El Plata*, and *El País* (Fernández and Machín 2017, 227–244).

Party financing came mostly from party members: Wealthy members made monthly contributions and at times funded a newspaper as well. Members who held an elected position were expected to contribute a portion of their salary to the party.⁵³ The parties also frequently used state resources and personnel to aid their campaigns, and departmental political chiefs typically took charge of political campaigns in their constituencies (Vanger 1963, 175).

Both the Blancos and the Colorados proved extraordinarily durable, dominating elections and controlling the vast majority of political positions for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Third parties occasionally emerged during the nineteenth century, such as the *principista* parties, or parties of principles, which called for an end to violence and the enactment of democratic reforms (Castellanos and Pérez 1981, 38–39; Somma 2012, 19–22). The first of the *principista* parties, the Liberal Union, arose in 1855, but the movement reached its peak with the founding of the Radical Party in 1872 and its successor, the Constitutional Party, in 1880. These parties drew support from educated professionals in Montevideo, but they never gained much of a following elsewhere.⁵⁴ By the early twentieth century, the *principista* parties

⁵³ For example, in the early twentieth century, the Blanco Party required its members to contribute up to twenty pesos per month to the party (Vanger 1963, 191). The Batllistas even collected fees from ordinary civil servants who belonged to the party (Lindahl 1962, 244).

⁵⁴ The Constitutional Party won a few seats in the 1880s and 1890s.

had disappeared, and most of their members had returned to the Blancos or the Colorados (McLaughlin 1973, 277; López-Alves 2000, 57). Other parties, such as the Socialist Party, the Uruguayan Communist Party, and the Civic Union, a party with close ties to the Catholic Church, sprang up in the early twentieth century, but none of them won more than 5 percent of the vote.

Electoral data from nineteenth-century Uruguay are fragmentary, but the data that do exist suggest that both the Colorados and the Blancos had ample support across various departments. Diez de Medina (1994, 193) reports that in 1872 there were 2,494 people who were registered as Colorados and 1,188 registered as Blancos in Montevideo; there were 293 registered Colorados and 88 registered Blancos in Colonia; and 1,146 registered Colorados and 491 registered Blancos in Rocha. The 1887 legislative elections resulted in a lopsided victory for the ruling Colorados, which won two-thirds of the vote thanks in part to electoral manipulation. Nevertheless, the Blancos still managed to win at least one-quarter of the vote in fifteen out of the nineteen departments and it finished first in two of them (Pivel Devoto 1943, 362). The two parties together won 94 percent of the valid vote in 1887, although the Blancos competed in alliance with the Constitutional Party in a few departments. As Table 5.4 indicates, the two parties continued to win an overwhelming share of the vote in the early twentieth century, although the differences between the two parties narrowed somewhat.

The Blancos and the Colorados split on numerous occasions, but none of these ruptures became permanent. During the nineteenth century, the main division in each party was between idealists and personalists. The idealists supported democratic reform and compromise with the other party, whereas the personalists typically backed strong one-party leadership and advocated taking a hard line against the opposing party, even if that meant war or repression. The personalists were often allied with rural leaders and had their main base in the countryside, whereas the core supporters of the idealists were urban professionals. The divisions within parties led to intraparty warfare on a few occasions, such as in 1875 and 1886, but mostly the two factions coexisted uneasily with each other. At times, the idealists in the two parties cooperated with each other, as in the 1873 presidential elections, but partisan loyalties made such cooperation difficult (McLaughlin 1973, 146). Some of the idealists left the two main parties, at least temporarily, to join *principista* parties.⁵⁵

Initially, the Blancos and the Colorados traded control of the government, but in 1865 Venancio Flores overthrew Blanco President Bernardo Berro and established Colorado rule, which would last until 1958. Although the two parties had relatively similar levels of support, Colorado governments intervened in elections in the late nineteenth century to ensure they prevailed.⁵⁶ Until the 1870s, the president had influence over the departmental mayors who controlled

⁵⁵ Factionalism continued in the twentieth century, and the electoral law of 1910 made it worse by enabling factions to run separate lists in elections while still counting their votes for their party.

⁵⁶ The Blancos also committed infractions in the departments that they controlled.

TABLE 5.4 *Presidential and legislative elections in Uruguay, 1900–1929*

Election	Colorado votes (% of valid vote)	Blanco votes (% of valid vote)	Valid votes	Valid votes/ population (%)
1901 legislative elections	15,268 (55.0)	12,516 (45.0)	27,784	2.9
1905 legislative elections	27,163 (61.3)	16,645 (37.6)	44,292	4.3
1907 legislative elections	28,202 (63.5)	13,355 (30.1)	44,385	4.3
1910 legislative elections	26,787 (86.8)	Abstained	30,878	2.8
1913 legislative elections	38,011 (69.2)	14,792 (26.9)	54,949	4.2
1917 legislative elections	66,170 (51.5)	61,245 (47.7)	128,388	9.5
1919 legislative elections	98,602 (51.4)	85,982 (44.9)	191,677	15.0
1922 presidential elections	123,076 (50.4)	117,901 (48.3)	244,156	17.8
1925 legislative elections	134,617 (49.6)	127,207 (46.9)	271,468	16.9
1926 presidential elections	141,581 (48.9)	140,055 (48.4)	289,255	18.9
1928 legislative elections	144,070 (48.2)	145,159 (48.5)	299,017	18.5

Source: Latin America Historical Elections Database.

NB: Data for the Colorados and Blancos refer to the votes for all factions of these parties. There are minor discrepancies in the vote totals reported by the different sources.

the electoral registry.⁵⁷ Control of the registry enabled the government to purge opposition supporters and to register government supporters multiple times under different names or to allow them to vote even when they were not eligible (Somma 2012, 28). In addition, the president appointed the political chiefs who presided over each department.⁵⁸ The political chiefs and their employees, including the local police, could intimidate the opposition, block access to the voting centers, and even suspend the elections (McLaughlin 1973, 39). If necessary, the electoral authorities could even commit fraud, although Somma (2012, 27–28) suggests that fraud was not widespread.

Governmental electoral manipulation was also facilitated by the fact that only a small fraction of the adult population was eligible to vote, and turnout

⁵⁷ The mayors were popularly elected but many of them owed their election to the support of the president. The position of departmental mayor was eliminated in 1878 (Somma 2012, 9).

⁵⁸ The president and his advisers also typically picked the legislative candidates of the ruling party who were therefore beholden to the executive (McLaughlin 1973, 38). Nevertheless, the legislature was not always compliant.

tended to be quite low. State employees represented a large share of the electorate and the executive branch wielded influence over them.⁵⁹ Government bureaucrats often instructed their employees how to vote and because the vote was oral and public, it was possible to monitor compliance.

Suffrage rights were relatively broad during the independence and immediate post-independence period, but the 1830 constitution restricted the suffrage considerably. The 1830 constitution, which was not replaced until 1918, disenfranchised women, servants, day laborers, soldiers, drunks, vagrants, criminals, morally and physically incompetent individuals, and people under twenty years of age (eighteen if married). The constitution also denied suffrage to illiterates, but this measure only applied to people who came of age after 1840 on the grounds that many of the men who had participated in the wars for independence did not know how to read or write but should not be prevented from voting (Diez de Medina 1994, 76).⁶⁰ The voting restrictions were not always enforced, but they presumably deterred many people from voting, as did the fact that the results were largely predetermined. In addition, opposition parties at times encouraged abstention to protest electoral manipulation. As a result, voter turnout in Uruguay typically represented less than two percent of the total population during the nineteenth century. In some elections, turnout was particularly low. The Uruguayan newspaper *La Tribuna* reported that the 1868 legislative elections were “very peaceful – nobody came” (cited in McLaughlin 1973, 38).⁶¹

The Blancos often called for democratic reforms during the nineteenth century, but these measures were typically blocked or watered down by the Colorados who controlled the legislature. For example, in 1876 and 1884 the Blanco leader, Justino Jiménez de Aréchaga, proposed various reforms that included the expansion of the franchise, obligatory voting, direct elections, minority representation, and the secret ballot, but the Colorado Party stymied these proposals, although many of them were subsequently taken up in the 1918 constitution (González 1991, 143–145, 163–171). Subsequent reforms proposed by Blanco legislators, Carlos Berro and Martín Aguirre, in 1889 and 1894 also failed to advance in the face of opposition from Colorado legislators (González 1991, 179, 211–212).

Colorado governments did enact some democratic reforms but only measures that did not threaten their electoral dominance. As part of an 1897 peace agreement, President Juan Lindolfo Cuestas pushed through an electoral reform in 1898 that guaranteed minority representation in the legislature and municipal councils (González 1991, 233–234; McLaughlin 1973, 267–269).

⁵⁹ In 1916, the Uruguayan government had approximately 18,663 civilian employees, most of whom could be counted on to support the president – public employees were believed to represent approximately 15 percent of the electorate at the time (Vanger 2010, 125–126). Some scholars have suggested that they constituted as much as 40 percent of the electorate in earlier decades (Caetano 2015, 99).

⁶⁰ According to Somma (2012, 8), 30 percent of the population of Montevideo worked in one of the proscribed occupations in 1882, and 45 percent of the adult population was illiterate.

⁶¹ In the Department of Cerro Largo, no voters showed up at all for the 1868 elections so the political chief, along with the police force, selected the winners (McLaughlin 1973, 38).

Whereas previously Uruguay had used the complete-list system in which all seats had been awarded to whichever party finished first in each department, under the new incomplete-list system the first-place party in each department would receive two-thirds of the seats in that department and the runner-up would receive one-third of the seats. The Cuestas administration also enacted a law stipulating that being able to sign your own name would be considered sufficient proof of literacy for purposes of voting and that only people with authenticated written contracts would be classified as day laborers or domestic servants (González 1991, 229). These stipulations weakened the bans on voting by illiterates, day laborers, and servants since even illiterates could frequently sign their name and servants and day laborers did not typically have written contracts (Vanger 1963, 305). Nevertheless, none of these reforms brought an end to government electoral intervention.

Because elections were neither free nor fair, the Blancos at times refused to participate in them, calling for abstention in the 1854, 1867, 1872, and 1890 elections (Somma 2012, 20). In addition, Blancos sought to take advantage of the government's military weakness by carrying out uprisings. Although they did not succeed in taking power via these revolts during the late nineteenth century, the Blancos often obtained concessions in exchange for laying down their arms.

The most important of these concessions were power-sharing agreements that gave the Blancos political control of certain departments, typically units in which most people supported the Blanco Party. The first power-sharing agreement brought an end to the prolonged Revolution of the Spears (1870–1872). Under this pact, the Colorado government agreed to appoint Blancos as the political chiefs of four departments. The administrations that followed largely upheld the terms of this pact, but in the 1880s Colorado governments began to renege on the agreement, leading the Blancos to revolt again in 1896 and 1897.⁶² In 1897 a new pact was signed, giving the Blancos control of six departments, although by this time the total number of departments in Uruguay had grown to nineteen.

The power-sharing agreements increased the political influence of the Blancos. Because the political chiefs could easily manipulate elections in their departments, Blancos were able to win the legislative seats as well as other government posts in these departments (López-Alves 2000, 86). This gave the Blancos significant legislative representation. For example, the four departments awarded to the Blancos in the pact of 1872 provided them with four senators and twelve representatives in a legislature that had a total of thirteen senators and forty-two representatives (McLaughlin 1973, 88). Nevertheless, the power-sharing agreements did little to advance democracy in Uruguay, but

⁶² In 1882, for example, President Máximo Santos declined to appoint a Blanco as political chief of the Department of San José (McLaughlin 1973, 265). Moreover, in 1893 the government passed a new electoral law that sought to prevent the Blanco political chiefs from controlling elections in their departments (Weinstein 1975, 52).

instead institutionalized authoritarian rule by the parties in the departments that they controlled.

The power-sharing agreements came to an end after the Blancos' resounding defeat in the 1904 civil war, and the Colorados reasserted their dominance. After the war, the victorious president, José Batlle y Ordóñez, named his allies, all but two of whom were Colorados, as political chiefs in all of the departments (Vanger 1963, 175). Batlle also pushed through political reforms that helped the Colorado Party to expand their majority in the legislature.⁶³ Although the Blancos continued to call for democratic reforms during the early twentieth century, they did not control enough seats to enact the reforms on their own.⁶⁴ As a result, Uruguay remained firmly under authoritarian rule at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

THE SPLIT IN THE RULING PARTY AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

During the second decade of the twentieth century, a split occurred within the ruling Colorado Party that would help bring democracy to Uruguay. The principal catalyst of the split was Batlle's proposal to create a collegial executive – a body composed of nine people that would replace the president – which dissidents within the ruling party viewed as a way for him to maintain his influence after his second presidential term ended. The roots of the split ran much deeper than that, however. Batlle's social and economic reforms had antagonized conservative sectors of the Colorado Party, which were tied to wealthy business and agricultural interests. The conservative sectors of the Colorado Party, together with the Blancos, gained a majority in the 1917 constitutional convention, and they embraced democratic reforms partly to weaken Batlle's wing of the Colorado Party.

During his first term as president (1903–1907), Batlle proposed a number of social and economic reforms, but these measures encountered opposition and it was not until after his reelection that his reform project picked up steam. In his second term (1911–1915), Batlle dramatically expanded the role of the state and reduced the role of foreign capital in the Uruguayan economy, nationalizing banks, establishing state-owned railroads, and creating state monopolies in insurance and electrical production. He also expanded public education, pushed for a greater separation of church and state, and enacted the divorce law that he had proposed during his first term. In addition, he proposed a variety of laws to benefit workers, although many of these measures were not passed until after his second term was over. These reforms included the establishment

⁶³ Subsequent presidents made greater efforts to appease the Blancos. President Claudio Williman (1907–1911), for example, adjusted the number of representatives elected in each department in a manner that favored the Blancos and dropped the electoral threshold to win seats to one-quarter of the total vote (McLaughlin 1973, 273–274; Weinstein 1975, 56).

⁶⁴ From 1898–1913, the Blancos won an average of 22 percent of the seats in the lower chamber.

of an eight-hour workday and a six-day workweek, restrictions on child labor, occupational safety regulations, old-age pensions, and severance payments for laid-off workers (Nahum 1987, 28–34). These measures were part of Batlle's plan to win labor support and to ensure that "those who would be Socialists elsewhere should be Colorados in Uruguay" (Vanger 2010: 177).

Batlle's most controversial measures, however, were his proposed constitutional reforms, especially his proposal to create a collegial executive. Batlle argued that the collegial executive would prevent presidents from transforming themselves into dictators, but he also sought to ensure that the Colorado Party dominated the collegial executive. According to Batlle's proposal, all nine members of the collegial executive would initially belong to the majority party and only one member would be replaced each year.

Batlle's reform project, especially the collegial executive, met fierce resistance not only from the Blancos but also from various sectors of the Colorado Party. Opponents of the collegial executive viewed it as nothing more than a plan for Batlle to maintain his power after he left the presidency in 1915. The opposition newspaper *El Siglo* wrote that the collegial executive was Batlle's plan for "perpetual domination" and that it would lead to "eighteen years of Batlle as president" of the collegial executive (Vanger 1980, 213–214). Wealthy business and landed interests as well as the Catholic Church feared that Batlle sought to hold on to power in order to deepen his social and economic reforms, many of which they opposed (Castellanos and Pérez 1981, 212; Nahum 1987, 61–62; Vanger 1980, 218–219).

The opposition within the Colorado Party was led by Pedro Manini, a former disciple of Batlle who had served as his minister of interior from 1911 to 1912. Manini, who was elected to the Senate in early 1913, rounded up eleven Colorado senators who opposed the collegial executive and persuaded them to sign a statement in which they declared that they would approve the laws necessary for the election of the National Constitutional Convention (CNC), "only if they offer new and ample electoral guarantees and with the understanding that the election [of the CNC] will take place during the year 1914" (Giudici 1928, 447–448; see also Nahum 1987, 61–62; Vanger 1980, 223). The Colorado senators, who represented a majority of the Senate, sought the electoral safeguards in order to prevent Batlle from controlling the elections, which they hoped to delay so that it took place during the last year of his term when he would be politically weaker (Vanger 1980, 221).

Batlle supporters triumphed in the November 1914 Senate elections, however, and as a result the anti-collegialists lost their majority in the Senate. The Batllistas then used their control of both chambers to enact a law governing elections to the constitutional convention, but to win support from the opposition they included several democratic provisions in this law. First, they mandated the use of the secret ballot for the first time in the country's history. Second, voter registration was to be mandatory for all adult male citizens, including illiterates, although they would not be obliged to vote. Third,

registered voters would be fingerprinted to ensure that they were who they claimed to be and to prevent people from registering twice. Fourth and finally, the CNC election law provided for some minority representation, but in a way that ensured that the majority party would dominate. In each department, the party or list that finished first would receive two-thirds of the seats and the remaining third would be divided up among the other parties using proportional representation (Vanger 2010, 29).⁶⁵

The Blancos had long demanded some of these reforms, such as the secret ballot and proportional representation, but the Colorados had blocked them because they feared the reforms might weaken their stranglehold on power. In this case, however, Batlle and the Colorados were willing to make concessions because they needed to convince the Blancos and the dissident Colorados to participate in the elections for the constitutional convention in order to provide legitimacy for the new constitution (Giudici 1928, 470–471; Vanger 1980, 180).

Although the Blancos threatened to abstain from the elections to the constitutional convention, in the end they decided to participate, in part because of these electoral guarantees. Nationalist leaders believed that they had no real alternative to contesting the elections and that they had a real chance of defeating Batlle. As one senior Blanco leader, Aureliano Rodríguez Laretta, put it: “Although revolution would be the best and most efficient means, we cannot employ it ... We have to choose political means. It could be possible for us to win the great battle in the Constituent Assembly” (Vanger 2010, 37–38). The Blancos tried to forge an electoral alliance with the dissident Colorados, but the differences between the two groups were too great. Instead, both sides ran on independent tickets.

To improve their chances, the Blancos undertook a massive voter registration drive and demanded that the government extend the registration period and create more registration centers, which it agreed to do so as not to give the Blancos an excuse to abstain from the elections (Vanger 2010, 48). By the time the registration period ended, 150,225 people had been added to the voter registration rolls, of which 110,911 were literate and 39,314 were illiterate (Vanger 2010, 52). This brought the total number of registered voters to 223,020, which was triple the number of voters registered previously (Castellanos and Pérez 1981, 213).⁶⁶

The 1916 constitutional convention elections were the cleanest in Uruguay up to that date (Nahum 1987, 70). Voter turnout on election day, July 30,

⁶⁵ Despite these provisions, the Blancos and the dissident Colorados voted against the bill because of their opposition to the collegial executive. As the Nationalist leader Martín C. Martínez said in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies: “Our divergence with the majority of the Chamber is not over this or that point of the law on elections to the constitutional convention, as important as those might be. Our absolute divergence is over the very core of the question: over the convenience or inconvenience of constitutional reform.” See Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Representantes*, August 19, 1915, Extraordinary Session 5: 72.

⁶⁶ The Colorados also registered voters aggressively so that registered Colorados outnumbered registered Blancos by 129,745 to 93,275 (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 143).

1916, broke all previous records, equaling 10 percent of the population and 64 percent of registered voters (Castellanos and Pérez 1981, 213).⁶⁷ Nevertheless, turnout was significantly higher among Blancos than among Colorados: 72 percent of registered Blancos turned out to vote as opposed to 56 percent of registered Colorados (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 143; Moraes 2010, 107, 109). This may have been partly because Batlle had urged Colorados who opposed the collegial executive to abstain from voting, rather than vote for the opposition.

The outcome was a historic defeat for Batlle's wing of the Colorado Party, which won 41.2 percent of the valid vote, placing it a distant second. The Blancos captured 46.4 percent of the valid vote, and the anti-collegialist wing of the Colorado Party won another 9.9 percent of the valid vote. As a result, the Blancos and anti-collegialist Colorados gained a majority in the constitutional convention, controlling 127 seats to the Batllistas' 85 seats (Vanger 2010, 137).

The Batllistas lost in part because of the split since the two wings of the Colorado Party together captured a majority of the vote. Indeed, Batlle blamed the defeat on the split and on lower than expected voter turnout among the Colorados (Vanger 2010, 144). In addition, many of Batlle's proposed reforms were unpopular, especially among the elites. Business and ranching interests helped fund the Blancos' campaign, and the Rural Federation, which represented rural interests, issued a statement exhorting rural workers "to show up at the urns to vote for the anti-collegialist candidates, whatever their party doctrine" (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 18). The Catholic Church opposed his secularization measures, and the highest-ranking church leader in Montevideo urged parishioners to vote for candidates who were against separating church and state (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 17–18; Vanger 2010, 121).

The Batllistas were also hurt by the democratic provisions in the electoral law. The extension of the vote to illiterates helped the Blancos because most illiterates lived in rural areas, which were their strongholds (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 50). Indeed, the departments of the interior accounted for 89.9 percent of the illiterates who registered to vote in the 1916 elections (Barrán and Nahum 1987, 50). The extension of the vote to illiterates and the compulsory voter registration provision also meant that public employees, whose support the governing Colorados could typically count on, represented a smaller portion of the electorate. Whereas previously public employees had represented approximately 15 percent of the electorate, in the elections for the constitutional convention they represented only 5 percent of the electorate (Vanger 2010, 126). Most importantly, however, the establishment of the secret ballot made it difficult for the government to compel public employees and others to support the governing party since the government could no longer monitor how they voted.

⁶⁷ Some 146,632 people voted in the elections, which was almost three times as many people as in the 1913 legislative elections (Caetano 1999, 418).

In the wake of the elections, the new Colorado President Feliciano Viera announced a pause in the reforms and shook up his cabinet, bringing in three or four anti-collegialists, including a Blanco leader. Viera's efforts to reconcile with the Blancos and dissident Colorados failed, however, and the anti-collegialist Colorados, who were dubbed Riveristas, announced that they would run in alliance with the Blancos in the January 1917 legislative elections. The Blancos and the Riveristas agreed upon a joint platform, calling for reduced taxes and the use of the secret ballot and proportional representation in future elections.

Many Batllistas were so convinced they had been hurt by the democratic provisions in the law used to elect the constitutional convention that a month before the 1917 legislative elections, they used their legislative majorities to pass a new electoral law that eliminated the secret ballot, banned illiterates from voting, and eliminated proportional representation in the allocation of legislative seats. The new electoral law also expanded the number of legislative seats, adding seats in populous departments, such as Montevideo, which favored the Batllistas (Vázquez Romero and Reyes Abadie 1979, 224–226). Not surprisingly, the Batllistas fared much better in the 1917 legislative elections than they had in the 1916 elections to the constitutional convention, finishing first with 49.3 percent of the total vote. The Blancos, meanwhile, won 25 percent of the vote on their own, and 22.7 percent in alliance with the Riveristas, while the Riveristas won an additional 2.5 percent of the vote running on their own.⁶⁸ The Blancos blamed their loss on fraud and government intervention as well as the absence of a secret ballot (Maiztegui Casas 2005, 191–193; Vanger 2010, 194–196, 200). The ban on the voting of illiterates also presumably hurt the Blancos since turnout fell by 17,264 votes compared to the 1916 elections (Bottinelli, Giménez, and Marius 2012, 63, 73). In addition, the changes in the rules governing the allocation of seats gave the Batllistas a boost. Under the new rules, the Batllistas won sixty-seven seats in the legislature to fifty-six for the opposition, whereas under the old rules the Batllistas would have held only a six-seat majority (Vanger 2010, 200).

Although the Batllistas retained control of the legislature, the Blancos and the Riveristas together held a majority of seats in the constitutional convention. Nevertheless, any constitution they devised would need to be ratified by the electorate in a popular referendum. The likelihood that the referendum would be approved, however, was enhanced by the fact that the legislation setting up the constitutional convention stipulated that the referendum would use the secret ballot and that illiterates would be allowed to vote – the same rules that had helped the Blancos and the Riveristas triumph in the elections for the constitutional convention.

The main goal of the Blancos and Riveristas was to approve constitutional reforms that would weaken the Colorados' control over elections and provide

⁶⁸ The Blancos and the Riveristas ended up running separate tickets in some departments in the interior where interparty hostility made a joint ticket difficult (Vanger 2010, 192–193).

the opposition with greater political representation.⁶⁹ In March 1917, the Constitutional Committee of the CNC, which was controlled by Blancos and Riveristas, submitted its reform proposal to the convention, stating:

Representative democratic regimes rest on three solid foundations: the liberty of voters; the equality of citizens; [and] the representation in the assemblies of the country of the various forces of opinion according to their numerical strength. For the liberty of voters, we establish the secret vote. With universal suffrage, we proclaim the equality of citizens. But neither liberty nor equality is enough to assure a representative regime ... Proportional representation is the only system that realizes this work of justice.⁷⁰

The committee proposed including language in the constitution stating that males above eighteen years of age would be eligible to vote and that elections would use the secret vote and integral proportional representation. It also called for obligatory voter registration and for the police and military to abstain from involvement in electoral affairs so that the government could not use them to intimidate voters. Finally, the proposal stipulated that all electoral authorities would be chosen using the aforementioned electoral methods and that, until these requirements came into force, elections would use the electoral provisions set forth in the law on the elections to the CNC.⁷¹

The assembly quickly approved many of the recommendations of the committee, including universal male suffrage, the secret vote, proportional representation, and obligatory voter registration. Most of the proposals of the Blancos and the Riveristas received support from the Socialist Party and the Catholic Civic Unión party, both of which held two seats in the CNC. Some of these measures, such as the secret vote and proportional representation, even passed unanimously because Batllistas boycotted the CNC to obstruct the proceedings.⁷² The Blancos and the Riveristas together controlled 127 of the 218 seats in the assembly, which was enough votes to maintain a quorum only if nearly all their members attended.

Not all the democratic reforms discussed were approved. Although the Committee on the Constitution endorsed obligatory voter registration, a narrow majority of the committee rejected making voting compulsory. Proponents

⁶⁹ According to the Blanco leader, Aureliano Rodríguez Larreta, "it was agreed in the Constitutional Committee that the only reforms that should be formulated must be useful ones, the necessary ones, but not original ones that would raise resistance, not only in the minds of delegates, but in the people" (Vanger 2010, 207).

⁷⁰ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, March 21, 1917, Ordinary Session 24, pp. 164–165.

⁷¹ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, March 21, 1917, Ordinary Session 24, pp. 166–167.

⁷² Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, March 30, 1917, Ordinary Session 28, p. 246; Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 18, 1917, Ordinary Session, p. 323.

of obligatory voting argued that it was necessary to increase turnout and to ensure that the government did not block opposition supporters from voting.⁷³ Other delegates, however, maintained that obligatory voting would undermine the freedom of the voter, and they pointed out that the Blancos had frequently abstained from elections in the past. The Blanco leader, Aureliano Rodríguez Larreta, argued that “abstention is a precious right of citizens ... that right should never be renounced, because abstention is a political weapon of primary force that has been used by the parties of this country, and it may be, unfortunately, that we have to use it tomorrow.”⁷⁴ Although supporters of obligatory voting claimed to represent a majority of the CNC, they ultimately did not have enough votes to enact it.

Female suffrage was also hotly debated on the floor of the CNC, after having been rejected in the committee by a large majority. Women’s groups submitted letters to the CNC calling for women’s rights,⁷⁵ and the Socialist delegation proposed that the constitution recognize all people as citizens, rather than just men.⁷⁶ The Socialist delegation’s proposal was attacked by members of the other parties, however. The Colorado delegate Rogelio Mendiando, for example, stated that “the role of women is not in politics, Mr. President, the role of women is in the home.”⁷⁷ Juan José Segundo, a Blanco delegate, argued that “the fact of going to vote gives certain liberties to women, gives them a [dangerous] character.”⁷⁸

In the end, the Socialists and other proponents of female suffrage lacked the votes to include it in the constitution. To make matters worse, in its last days, the CNC voted to include a provision in the new constitution that stipulated that female suffrage in national or municipal elections could only be approved

⁷³ The Blanco delegate Washington Beltrán argued that “the secret vote loses importance if we don’t establish the obligatory vote. The government [and others] ... can force [their employees], if they have suspicious or contrary ideas, to abstain from the elections if suffrage is not obligatory.” See Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 11, 1917, Ordinary Session 29, p. 259.

⁷⁴ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 13, 1917, Ordinary Session 30, p. 286.

⁷⁵ The National Council of Women of Uruguay, for example, submitted a signed letter stating its desire that women obtain “full possession of political and civil rights, because it considers that only through their free exercise could women demonstrate their powers and develop their activities without obstacles.” See Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 25, 1917, Ordinary Session 35, pp. 356–357.

⁷⁶ The Socialist delegate, Celestino Mibelli, noted that there were numerous countries that granted women political rights and he argued that since scientists had shown that men and women did not differ in terms of their brains, “there was no motive for banning women, for preventing them from obtaining the same rights as men.” See Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 23, 1917, Ordinary Session 34, p. 345.

⁷⁷ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 27, 1917, Ordinary Session 36, p. 388.

⁷⁸ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, April 23, 1917, Ordinary Session 34, p. 346.

by a vote of two-thirds of the total members of both chambers of the legislature. The Socialist delegate Celestino Mibelli objected vigorously, arguing:

Currently, the Chamber can ... authorize female suffrage by a simple majority vote. By contrast, according to the amendment that is proposed, in the future it could only be conceded by a much larger quorum. This is, as can be seen, a reactionary proposal, which is contrary to all that is occurring in the world where the rights of women are winning step by step.⁷⁹

Despite his protestations, the CNC enacted this provision. As a result, women did not gain the right to vote until 1932, when both chambers of the legislature approved the relevant legislation, and they did not exercise the vote until 1938.⁸⁰

While these discussions were underway, two Batllista deputies, Juan Buero and Eugenio Martínez Thedy, submitted a bill to the legislature that significantly reduced the likelihood that the Blancos and Riveristas could gain approval of their proposed constitutional reforms. The bill specified that the constitution had to be approved by a majority of registered voters and not just a majority of those who voted (Vázquez Romero and Reyes Abadie 1979, 228). In the elections to the constitutional convention, 63.4 percent of the people in the Civic Registry had voted, but only 37.3 percent of them had voted for the Blancos and Riveristas. Thus, it would be practically impossible for the Blancos and Riveristas to reach the 50 percent threshold specified in the bill unless the Batllistas approved the reforms as well.

The Blancos and Riveristas denounced the bill and the CNC approved a resolution stating that they would not “accept the intervention of any authority that aimed to modify the legal standing” of the constituent assembly (Vázquez Romero and Reyes Abadie 1979, 228).⁸¹ There was little the Blancos and Riveristas could do to block the bill, however, since the Batllistas controlled both chambers of the legislature.⁸² The Chamber of Deputies quickly approved the bill on a 59–38 vote, and the bill then moved to the Senate where the Committee on Legislation recommended enactment of the law (Vanger 2010, 223).⁸³

⁷⁹ Many proponents of female suffrage argued that the 1830 constitution did not proscribe female suffrage because masculine nouns were often used to refer to women as well as men. Thus, they maintained that female suffrage could be enacted through an ordinary law under the 1830 constitution. Others contested this interpretation, however. See Uruguay *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Nacional Constituyente*, July 2, 1917, Ordinary Session 56, pp. 86–87.

⁸⁰ The CNC also had lengthy debates over how long foreigners would need to reside in Uruguay before they would become citizens (they opted for three years), and whether all state employees should be banned from electoral activities other than voting (they opted just to ban the military and the police).

⁸¹ One of the Blanco deputies, Washington Beltrán, called it “a coup by the State against the Constitutional Convention” (Vanger 2010, 221). Angered by his criticisms of the bill, Martínez Thedy challenged Beltrán to a duel with sabers, in which Martínez Thedy was wounded.

⁸² The legislature would also decide on the bill’s constitutionality since Uruguay did not have judicial review (Vanger 2010, 222).

⁸³ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara del Senado*, April 28, 1917, Ordinary Session 20: 219.

With their proposed constitution in jeopardy, the Blancos were forced to negotiate. In April 1917, the two sides formed a committee consisting of four Blancos and four Batllistas, which hashed out a compromise in secret negotiations.⁸⁴ The Blancos agreed to accept the separation of church and state but insisted that the Catholic Church be allowed to hold on to its valuable properties. The Blancos also agreed to a significantly modified version of the collegial executive: The new constitution would create a nine-member National Administration Council that would control most ministries, but the president would continue to exist and would control the ministries of war, interior, and foreign affairs. The council would be composed of six members of the majority party and three members of the minority party. The first president and the first council would be elected by the legislature in 1919 to serve four-year terms, which guaranteed Batllista dominance of these posts until 1923 since the Colorados controlled the legislature that would elect them. Subsequent presidents and councils would be elected directly by the people.

The Batllistas also made some important concessions, which helped establish democracy in Uruguay. They agreed to include provisions in the new constitution mandating the use of the secret ballot and proportional representation in elections, along with universal male suffrage and obligatory voter registration. Under the new constitution, the police and the military would not be allowed to take part in political activities, although they were eligible to vote. Another stipulation held that presidents could not be reelected until eight years had elapsed since their previous presidency. The Blancos demanded this provision to prevent Batlle from running for reelection in 1919, which he had repeatedly threatened to do.⁸⁵

The vast majority of delegates at the convention supported the pact, but the Riveristas, who had been excluded from the negotiations, bitterly opposed it. The Riverista leader, Juan Campisteguy, resigned as president of the constitutional convention in protest, and the Blanco leader, Alfredo Vásquez Acevedo, took his place. The convention approved the new constitution in October 1917, and the following month the electorate enacted it in a referendum. The Blancos and the Colorados, and even the Socialists, supported the ratification of the constitution, but the Riverista Party and the Civic Union called on their members to abstain (Vanger 2010, 255 and 259). As a result, voter turnout was significantly lower than in the previous two elections, but the constitution passed easily, with 95 percent of the vote.

⁸⁴ The Batllistas refused to accept the participation of the Riveristas in this committee.

⁸⁵ The pact also contained some secret side agreements. One agreement gave the Blancos the right to veto two of the Colorados' candidates for the National Administration Council, which they pledged not to exercise unless Batlle was nominated. In addition, the Colorados pledged not to enact the bill that would have required that the new constitution be approved by a majority of the people listed in the Civic Registry (Vanger 2010, 229).

Although the constitution became law in 1918, enabling legislation needed to be enacted before some of its provisions, including the secret ballot, were implemented. Some sectors of the Colorado Party sought to delay the enabling legislation until after the 1919 elections in order to maintain control of these elections.⁸⁶ In one acerbic 1918 exchange in the legislature, Blanco deputies denounced the Colorados for delaying the secret vote for tactical reasons:

"Why doesn't [the Colorado Party] want to implant the secret vote for the elections in November?" The Blanco Deputy Eduardo Ferrería asked.

"So as not to lose them." His co-partisan, Aureliano Rodríguez Larreta, responded.

"We, the Nationalists, are supporters of the secret vote." Ferrería later declared.

"And you will stop being [supporters] when you convince yourselves that the secret vote doesn't serve to get what you want." The Colorado Deputy Francisco Bruno replied.⁸⁷

The Colorados succeeded in delaying the implementation of the secret ballot for six years but, in the end, Congress passed the necessary legislation (Vanger 2010, 261).

THE EMERGENCE OF A STRONG DEMOCRACY IN URUGUAY

With the enactment of the 1918 constitution, Uruguay established a democracy that would rank among the strongest in Latin America in the decades that followed. In its wake, voter turnout expanded dramatically thanks mostly to the extension of voting rights to illiterates and the establishment of obligatory voter registration.⁸⁸ As Table 5.4 indicates, in the 1919 legislative elections, the first elections to be held under the new constitution, 191,677 people cast ballots, a 49 percent increase from the 1917 legislative elections. Turnout continued to increase in the years that followed, climbing to 299,017 voters in 1928. By 1928, voters represented 18.5 percent of the population, as opposed to only 4.2 percent in 1913 and 9.5 percent in 1917.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Many Colorados openly acknowledged their opposition to the secret ballot, which they viewed as something that had been forced upon them. As the Colorado Deputy César Rossi explained, the secret vote was enacted in "a pact in which each side had to cede something. Otherwise, you can be sure that the Colorado majority would not have accepted the inclusion [in the constitution] of the secret vote, which we consider contrary, above all in principle, to the fundamentals of a true democracy" Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Representantes*, July 8, 1918, Ordinary Session 61: 781.

⁸⁷ Uruguay, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Representantes*, July 8, 1918, Ordinary Session 61: 701–702.

⁸⁸ The establishment of the secret ballot and proportional representation may also have helped boost turnout by increasing trust in elections and reducing fraud and intimidation.

⁸⁹ Voters represented an even larger percentage of the eligible population: In 1925 and 1926 an estimated 82 percent of the native male population above eighteen years of age turned up at the polls (Caetano 1994, 91).

Under the new constitution, electoral competition became much more intense. The Colorados continued to win most national elections and they controlled the presidency until 1959, but they typically triumphed by razor-thin margins, and they even lost some important elections, such as the 1925 elections to the National Administrative Council and the 1928 legislative elections. Between 1919 and 1928, the winning party in presidential and legislative elections won by an average of only 2.4 percentage points. By contrast, the winner had triumphed by an average of 29.7 percentage points in legislative elections that took place between 1901 and 1917. The government's ability to control elections declined considerably thanks in part to the establishment of the secret ballot and the prohibition on state interference in elections. The establishment of universal male suffrage and obligatory voter registration also presumably helped increase competition since the opposition Blancos were stronger in rural departments where the illiteracy rate was high and voter turnout was traditionally low.

To be sure, Uruguay did not become a full democracy until the late 1930s when women acquired the vote.⁹⁰ Moreover, some voter fraud, intimidation, and vote buying continued to take place throughout the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, Uruguayan elections after 1918 were relatively free and fair, and represented a dramatic improvement over previous contests (Chasquetti and Buquet 2004; Caetano 1994, 69–70; Lindahl 1962; Nahum 1987, 98). A January 3, 1923 editorial in the *Montevideo Times* (Jan. 3, 1923) by a British sympathizer of the Blancos reported that: “The elections took place on November 26th, in perfect order everywhere, and with fewer complaints than usual as to underhanded or fraudulent practices. In fact – though the electoral laws are still open to improvement – they may be described as the fairest elections this Republic has yet known.”⁹¹

Further reforms were introduced over the course of the 1920s and early 1930s that helped strengthen Uruguayan democracy. In 1924, for example, the government enacted a law that created a nine-member National Electoral Court, along with a National Electoral Office and departmental electoral boards, that would oversee the electoral registry and supervise the voting process (Souza 2016). All the major parties oversaw these electoral organizations and assigned delegates to them, which helped ensure that they acted in a balanced fashion. In addition, a 1925 law required soldiers to stay in the barracks during elections and prevented authorities from intervening at the voting tables or from jailing voters until twenty-four hours after the election had ended (Nahum 1987, 99–100).

As we have seen, the professionalization of the military helped set Uruguay on a democratic path in the early twentieth century by bringing an end to opposition revolts. Military professionalization did not, however, bring an

⁹⁰ In 1932, the legislature established female suffrage, although women did not vote in national elections until 1938 (Caetano 1999, 420; Castillo 2022).

⁹¹ The editorial was included in a diplomatic dispatch by J. Webb Benton, the chargé d'affaires ad interim of the US Legation in Montevideo on January 4, 1923 (Box 8442 National Archives).

end to military intervention. Indeed, the military participated in or permitted coups in 1933, 1942, and 1973 that brought a temporary end to democracy. Nevertheless, the military intervened in politics less in Uruguay than elsewhere in the region and until 1973 avoided ruling directly. As a result, Uruguay experienced more years of democracy over the course of the twentieth century than any other Latin American country.

Uruguay's strong two-party system helped discourage coups and buttress the country's emerging democracy. The strength of the country's parties ensured not only that elections were closely contested, but also that the opposition consistently had significant representation in government institutions, which it used to monitor elections, contest electoral irregularities, and shape policy. The Colorados held the presidency until 1958, but the Blancos typically controlled at least 40 percent of the country's legislature and a majority of the country's departmental governments (Bottinelli, Giménez, and Marius 2012; Nohlen 2005b).⁹² The opposition Blancos therefore had a stake in the system, which ensured their commitment to democratic rule and discouraged them from calling on the military to intervene.

CONCLUSION

The development of professional militaries and strong opposition parties, along with splits within the ruling party, helped lead to the emergence of relatively strong democracies in Chile and Uruguay at the outset of the twentieth century. The professionalization of the military gave the state a monopoly on violence, bringing an end to opposition revolts in both countries. As a result, state repression declined, and the opposition began to focus on the electoral path to power. Although the military continued to intervene occasionally in politics in both Chile and Uruguay, it did so less than in other South American countries.

The emergence of strong parties in both countries helped ensure that elections were competitive and that the opposition could monitor the electoral contests and protest irregularities. Thanks in large part to its party organizations and linkages to the electorate, the opposition gained a significant presence in the legislature and other state institutions in both countries. This gave it a stake in democracy and discouraged it from promoting military coups. Of equal importance, the opposition's legislative presence enabled it to promote democratic reforms.

The opposition did not typically hold sufficient seats to enact democratic reforms, but splits within the ruling parties of both countries led ruling party dissidents to ally with the opposition, giving them control of the legislature in Chile and the constituent convention in Uruguay. In the wake of such splits, the opposition pushed through sweeping electoral reforms, which helped bring democracy to Chile and Uruguay.

⁹² The Blancos also typically held three or four seats on the nine-member National Administrative Council, which was even more powerful than the president (Lindahl 1962, 351).