

## Journal of Latin American Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/LAS>

Additional services for *Journal of Latin American Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898: The Performance of the Radical Party

Paula Alonso

Journal of Latin American Studies / Volume 25 / Issue 03 / October 1993, pp 465 - 487  
DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X00006635, Published online: 05 February 2009

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0022216X00006635](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0022216X00006635)

### How to cite this article:

Paula Alonso (1993). Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898: The Performance of the Radical Party. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 25, pp 465-487 doi:10.1017/S0022216X00006635

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

# Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898: The Performance of the Radical Party\*

PAULA ALONSO

Three main political parties regularly contested elections in Argentina in the late nineteenth century: the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN), the Unión Cívica Nacional (UCN), and the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR).<sup>1</sup> However, little is known about the nature of party competition, the contesting parties' electoral performances or the characteristics of their electoral support. Discussion of the electoral politics prior to 1912, when the vote became secret and compulsory for all Argentine males over 18 years of age, has been dominated by notions of corruption, repression and lack of opportunity for popular participation. While in other countries such assessments have been revised in recent years after unreformed elections were analysed in more detail, accounts of electoral repression are still dominant in discussions of the pre-1912 Argentine electoral system.<sup>2</sup>

According to the standard interpretation of the development of Argentina's political system, the PAN or 'landed oligarchy' dominated politics between 1880 and 1916. To maintain itself in power, the PAN employed fraud and electoral repression extensively, preventing the emerging new social forces (mainly the middle class) from exercising their right to vote. Although the law gave the right to vote to all Argentine

\* I would like to thank Jeremy Adelman, Alan Angell, Alexandra de Brito, Malcolm Deas, Ezequiel Gallo, Francis Korn, Carlos Malamud and Marco Palacios for detailed comments. My special thanks to Andrew Powell and Mora Gortari for helping me with the data. This article was written while I was a Research Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford and the University of Warwick.

<sup>1</sup> The Socialist Party, formed in 1894, is not included in this study as its incipient participation in the elections of 1896 and 1898 was 'symbolic'. It contested only a few electoral districts of the city of Buenos Aires.

<sup>2</sup> For recent reviews on the electorate and on the electoral practices of pre-reform England see for example F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties. The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989); J. A. Phillips, *Electoral Behaviour in Unreformed England. Plumpers, Splitters and Straights* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1982).

Paula Alonso is Lecturer in Latin American History and Politics, University of Bristol.

males over 17 years of age, the received view is that in practice the PAN kept this right restricted to a privileged few by means of electoral manipulation. Furthermore, the argument continues, the PAN's political and electoral malpractices impeded the development of party competition, frustrating any attempt by opposition parties to compete in elections during these years. The Radical Party, which emerged to oppose the PAN in the 1890s, and which represented the newly emerging middle class, abstained for many years from electoral competition until the passing of the 1912 electoral law. By making the vote secret and compulsory, it is argued, the 1912 law expanded the vote from the privileged few to the middle and working classes.<sup>3</sup>

The prevalent view of the country's political and electoral development has recently been challenged by Hilda Sabato. In a stimulating article which concentrates on the period between 1850 and 1880, she argues that the political system prior to 1912 was not based on the electoral participation of a privileged few, but on the mobilisation of the lower classes. These popular sectors (the peons, the journeymen and the unskilled workers) were marched to the polls on election day, directed by party factions. Elections were merely an expression of inter-factional fighting through the deployment of the socially marginal in contests that were violent, systematically manipulated and fraudulent. Nevertheless, Sabato argues, there was no pressure to change the system as different sectors of the population channelled their demands and manifested their opinions in ways other than going to the polls. According to this argument, 1912 had a major impact on Argentina's political life. It was not the case that the citizenry had to be expanded, as the prevalent view states, but that it needed to be created, given that the well-to-do had not previously participated in the country's electoral life.<sup>4</sup>

Although stemming from different perspectives, the prevalent view and

<sup>3</sup> Most works of Argentine historiography followed this line of argument, although differing in their accounts of oligarchical repression. Among the finest are: D. Cantón, *Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina. Historia, interpretación y balance: 1910-1966* (Buenos Aires, 1973); G. Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición. De la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires, 1965), pp. 147-56, and 'Hacia una democracia de masas', in T. Di Tella et al., *Argentina, sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires, 1965), pp. 206-27; J. L. Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought* (Stanford, 1963), pp. 183-218. For examples of some recent works that have also followed these traditional arguments see P. H. Smith, *Argentina and the Failure of Democracy. Conflict among Political Elites, 1904-1955* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1974), pp. 1-22; D. Rock, *Politics in Argentina, 1890-1930. The Rise and Fall of Radicalism* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 1-66; K. Remmer, *Party Competition in Argentina and Chile. Political Recruitment and Public Policy, 1890-1930* (Lincoln and London, 1984), pp. 24-33, 87-111.

<sup>4</sup> Hilda Sabato, 'Citizenship, Political Participation and the Formation of the Public Sphere in Buenos Aires 1850s-1880s', *Past and Present*, no. 136 (August 1992), pp. 139-62.

Sábato's argument have many points in common: both downgrade the nature of electoral contests and the electorate in the period prior to 1912. For the standard view, elections were simply an exercise in repression and manipulation by the elite, enabling them to keep the reins of power in their hands. For Sábato, elections did not imply party competition for the votes of individual citizens, but the mobilisation of the less qualified workers for street fighting on election day. More significantly, both views argue that the political system prior to 1912 failed to provide the basis for gradual progress towards a fully democratic system, either because the new social sectors were kept aloof from electoral participation by fraud, or because elections meant only the mobilisation of the socially marginal. The abrupt transition from a restrictive republic to a modern democracy placed considerable pressure on the political system, and was therefore partly responsible for the short life of the new democratic system.<sup>5</sup>

Through a detailed analysis of the elections of the city of Buenos Aires in the 1890s, this article offers an alternative explanation regarding the nature of the elections, the voters, the competition of political parties and of the development of Argentina's political system. It argues that party competition developed in the city of Buenos Aires in the 1890s and that elections were vigorously contested by all political parties. New quantitative data on the characteristics of the electorate of the city challenge the view that it was mainly composed of a privileged few or that it was restricted to the working class. The data also allow an analysis of the socio-economic composition of the parties' electoral support. Special attention is paid to the electoral performance of the Radical Party and to the nature of its electorate. As the UCR was the opposition party during these years, a closer look at its performance is of particular assistance in improving our understanding of the electoral politics of the period. The findings also raise significant questions for existing views on the meaning of the 1912 reform in the transition from a restrictive republic to a modern democratic system, at least as far as concerns Buenos Aires.

### *The political parties*

The PAN, the UCN and the UCR were the main parties regularly contesting the elections of the 1890s in Buenos Aires. The PAN, generally considered the representative of the landed elite, was originally created in

<sup>5</sup> This argument is fully developed in Remmer, *Party Competition*, esp. pp. 24-34, 221-2. Others, however, argue that 1912 only introduced a limited reform given that the vote was restricted to Argentine nationals and that large sectors of the working class and some members of the middle class were immigrants who had not acquired Argentine citizenship. Nevertheless, they consider that 1912 marked a transition from a restrictive republic to an open democracy. See Smith, *Argentina*, pp. 11-12; Rock, *Politics in Argentina*, pp. 34-9.

the 1870s as a League of Governors, a national coalition of provincial leaders who put their influence behind a presidential candidate to compete against the two *porteño* parties: Alsina's Partido Autonomista and Mitre's Partido Liberal or Nacionalista. In 1880, the PAN took Julio Roca to his first presidency (1880–6) after an electoral victory followed by a military triumph over the defeated candidate Carlos Tejedor, Governor of Buenos Aires. Tejedor's defeats provoked the decline of the *porteño* parties; many party members went over to the PAN.<sup>6</sup>

The decline of the *porteño* parties left Roca and his successor Miguel Juárez Celman (1886–90) without major opposition. This enabled the two presidents of the 1880s to introduce a series of institutional, economic and political changes that profoundly transformed the country. The establishing of Buenos Aires as the capital of the Republic, the disbanding of provincial militias, the establishment of common primary education for the whole country and the organisation of the judiciary were some of the institutional transformations introduced during the decade. The aim behind them was to centralise power in the hands of the central government as a means of consolidating the strength of the national authorities in an endemically rebellious country.<sup>7</sup>

Argentina experienced profound and rapid economic transformation during the 1880s. The relative political stability experienced during those years, the amount of capital invested, the expansion of the railways and massive European immigration combined to transform a backward country into what was soon to be one of the world's leading exporters of grain and meat.<sup>8</sup> In the political sphere, during the 1880s the PAN benefited from the absence of an organised opposition. Furthermore, the use of both formal constitutional prerogatives (such as federal intervention and impeachment) and informal instruments (money, influence and control of the administration), were used to maintain the unity of the party and to discourage the formation of opposition parties.<sup>9</sup>

The decade of the 1880s was also characterised by an ideological consensus about the country's need for peace, for strong central government and for economic progress.<sup>10</sup> After the revolution of 1880, it

<sup>6</sup> See Ezequiel Gallo, 'La gran expansión económica y la consolidación del régimen conservador liberal. 1875–1890', in E. Gallo and R. Cortés Conde, *Argentina. La República conservadora* (Buenos Aires, 1972), pp. 61–70.

<sup>7</sup> See Ezequiel Gallo, 'Argentina: Society and Politics, 1880–1916', in L. Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 362–3.

<sup>8</sup> For the economic development of Argentina see C. F. Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven and London, 1970), pp. 1–66.

<sup>9</sup> See N. Botana, *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880–1916* (Buenos Aires, 1977), pp. 65–213.

<sup>10</sup> For the ideological consensus achieved in the 1880s see T. Halperín Donghi, *Proyecto y construcción de una nación (Argentina 1846–1880)* (Caracas, 1980), pp. lxxvi–ci.

became a commonly held belief that Argentina's tradition of turbulent politics and frequent outbreaks of violence had hindered the country's potential economic progress and had retarded its national organisation. This general creed of peace and prosperity had important implications for the way in which members of the PAN defined the role of 'politics' and of political parties. Politics was the means peacefully to accommodate different interests and the PAN's coalition was the channel through which conflicts were resolved, candidatures agreed and revolts avoided. Political parties therefore had a limited role in society. In the PAN's view, they were only 'temporary associations' whose function was to bring a candidate to office, after which they should be dissolved 'to allow society to return to peace'.<sup>11</sup>

After a decade of political stability and economic growth, the economic and political mismanagement of Juárez Celman brought about a deep economic crisis and aroused strong opposition in the city of Buenos Aires.<sup>12</sup> An older generation of *porteño* politicians (such as Leandro Alem, Bartolomé Mitre, and Bernardo de Irigoyen) and a new generation of university students together founded the Unión Cívica (UC) in the last months of 1889. With the help of some dissatisfied army officers the UC launched a revolution against the National Government in July 1890, which, although defeated, forced Juárez to resign the following month, leaving Vice-President Carlos Pellegrini, a leading member of the PAN, in power for the remainder of the presidential term.

The UC had a short existence. In March 1891 Roca and Mitre, as presidents of the PAN and of the UC, reached an agreement under which electoral confrontation for the presidential election of 1892 would be avoided and the presidential candidate would be elected by the mutual agreement of the two parties. A section of the UC led by Alem and Irigoyen rejected this deal, split from the party and founded the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR). Mitre remained the leader of the UC which adopted the label of Unión Cívica Nacional (UCN). The electoral deal between the UCN and the PAN soon ended, following the presidential election of Luis Sáenz Peña (1892-4). After that, the UCN found itself in a peculiar situation. Inside and outside Congress it behaved as an independent party, at times supporting the government and at times not. For electoral purposes, however, the UCN resorted to temporary electoral alliances

<sup>11</sup> 'Mensaje del Presidente de la República, Julio A. Roca, al abrir las sesiones del Congreso Argentino, en mayo 1881', in H. Mabragaña, *Los mensajes. Historia del desenvolvimiento de la nación argentina redactada cronologicamente por sus gobernantes, 1810-1910* (Buenos Aires, 1910), vol. IV, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> For a political and economic history of Juárez's presidency see W. T. Duncan, 'Government by Audacity. Politics and the Argentine Economy, 1885-1892', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1981.

with the PAN. Two main reasons prompted the adoption of this strategy. First, the electoral system penalised minority parties as it did not allow for proportional representation. Secondly, as we shall see, had the PAN and the UCR not resorted to electoral deals in the city of Buenos Aires, they would have been defeated by the Radicals.

In the 1890s the Radicals became the greatest challenge to the PAN. The UCR was organised to oppose the institutional, economic and political transformations undertaken by the presidents of the 1880s. For the Radicals, the PAN had burst onto the political scene, disrupting the institutional, political and economic traditions enjoyed since the 1850s. The centralisation of power had resulted in the decay of the political life of the republic and in the divorce of government from public opinion. The previously healthy political life of the country, when powerful political parties competed against each other, had been replaced by the one-party predominance of the 1880s. Protectionist economic policies had come to replace Argentina's tradition of free-trade.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Radicals were a minority party in the 1890s, they became the most destabilising political force in the country. In their view, the PAN's betrayal of the country's traditions justified any attempt to topple the government and to this end they organised a series of revolutions, all of which were eventually defeated. However, the fact that the UCR also competed in elections against the government, becoming a well-organised force that posed a real electoral threat in Buenos Aires, has generally been overlooked.

### *The city of Buenos Aires*

In 1891, Bartolomé Mitre received the following letter from the remote region of Catamarca:

Elections in this province are very expensive because the rural population is very scattered and voters have to be brought long distances on horseback, we having to pay the cost of supporting men and animals for three days. Given this and the present poverty, there will be no local opposition this year.<sup>14</sup>

A vast and underpopulated countryside and the expense of managing elections were only some of the constraints faced by opposition parties in the provinces. To this should be added the political predominance of the PAN in the interior and the difficulties imposed by the electoral system of *lista completa* or 'winner takes all'. Under this system, the party list which

<sup>13</sup> These arguments and the events that prompted the formation of the UCR are further discussed in P. Alonso, 'The Origins of the Argentine Radical Party, 1889-1898', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> F. F. Avellaneda to B. Mitre, Catamarca, 16 Sept. 1891, *Archivo Mitre*, A8C18C53N13332.

obtained the most votes won all the contested seats of the district. As it did not allow for proportional representation, the system of *lista completa* discriminated against minority parties and discouraged the development of a multi-party system.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the city of Buenos Aires and the provinces each composed single electoral districts<sup>16</sup> and, as Aristóbulo del Valle explained to Miguel Cané, these large districts presented further difficulties for opposition parties:

Our transitory political parties lack sufficient organisation to extend successfully their action to all the localities. The influence of the local party gets lost in the vast area and mass of voters of the whole province. The influence of the governors is the only one which can triumph; through the channels of the administration, they can reach the outmost part of the territory.<sup>17</sup>

Politics in large cities was significantly different from that in the countryside, and Buenos Aires presented a sharp contrast to the interior. Traditionally, Buenos Aires had been at the core of the country's political activities. Its political life has always been agitated in comparison to that of the provinces – and it was certainly agitated in the 1890s. Buenos Aires had the largest population of the country and the most politically aware electorate. Its inhabitants demonstrated, rioted, went on strike, signed petitions, voted and were kept constantly informed by the 143 newspapers and magazines that circulated in the city at the time.<sup>18</sup>

Elections in Buenos Aires were more free from fraud and violence than those in the provinces. Even the electoral system of *lista completa* affected Buenos Aires differently from the rest of the country. While the capital comprised a single electoral district, it was smaller and more densely populated than the provinces. Its population was easier and less expensive to mobilise than that of the vast and underpopulated countryside.<sup>19</sup> All

<sup>15</sup> For the effect of electoral systems on party systems see the classic work of M. Duverger, *Political Parties. Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London, 1959), p. 205. For more up-to-date works on the subject see the series of articles in B. Grofman and A. Lijphart (eds.), *Electoral Laws and their Political Consequences* (New York, 1986); V. Bogdanor and D. Butler (eds.), *Democracy and Elections. Electoral Systems and Their Political Consequences* (Cambridge, 1983), Chapters 1, 2 and 13.

<sup>16</sup> On the representation of each district see C. R. Melo, 'Población y representación de los distritos electorales de la nación', *Revista del Instituto de Historia del Derecho Ricardo Levene*, No. 13 (Buenos Aires, 1962), pp. 106-27.

<sup>17</sup> Aristóbulo del Valle to Miguel Cané, 5 May 1890, *Archivo General de la Nación*, Archivo M. Cané, Leg. No. 3, No. 2202.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Duncan, 'La Prensa Política: Sud-América', in G. Ferrari and E. Gallo (eds.), *La Argentina del ochenta al centenario* (Buenos Aires, 1980), pp. 761-84. The figures come from p. 764.

<sup>19</sup> While in 1895 the city of Buenos Aires had a population density of 3,569.10 per km<sup>2</sup>, for example, the density of the Province of Buenos Aires, the wealthiest of the country, was 3.02, and of the Province of Salta, one of the poorest regions, was 0.72. *Segundo censo de la República Argentina (1895)*, vol. II (Buenos Aires, 1898), p. cxxv.



three political parties competing in Buenos Aires during the period found it easy to extend their organisation to the full complement of the 16 city wards. Furthermore, Buenos Aires was the centre of party competition in Argentina. The UCR and the UCN had their strongholds in the city; the PAN was powerful in the provinces, but electorally weaker in the capital. Even in the presidential elections of 1886, the powerful candidature of Juárez Celman lost (although narrowly) in Buenos Aires to a loose *porteño* coalition called the Partidos Unidos. The contrasts between the capital and the provinces make generalisations about voting patterns from Buenos Aires to the whole country unreliable.

Elections in Buenos Aires took place frequently. National elections for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency took place every six years, the re-election of half the seats of the Chamber of Deputies every two years and a third of the seats of the Senate every three, and to these must be added the municipal elections.<sup>20</sup> Electoral campaigns usually began around two months before each election. In the 1890s all three parties were organised into decentralised systems of committees and conventions, following the North American model. This new party organisation was intended to put an end to the old tradition of *caudillismo* in the selection of party candidates and to make sure that 'every citizen could be consulted about the political development of the party'.<sup>21</sup> Although all three contesting parties adopted identical internal organisation, the committees of the UCR functioned permanently throughout the year while those of the UCN and of the PAN emerged two or three months before elections and disappeared after the electoral contest.<sup>22</sup> The members of the party committees were in charge of mobilising the population during the electoral campaign and of selecting the candidates. The selection of the candidates involved campaigning; candidates would visit local committees to give speeches and search for support. Each faction filled the editorials of their respective

<sup>20</sup> There are two main reasons why this study is restricted to national elections and excludes the municipal ones. First, the electoral results for municipal elections do not appear as clearly published in the newspapers. Secondly, the electorate for municipal elections was different from that of the national elections. To be able to vote in the municipal elections of the city of Buenos Aires the law required that citizens should have paid a minimum of 10 pesos in direct tax or '*patente comercial o industrial*', or have a liberal profession and have lived in the city for a minimum of six months, or be a literate foreigner and have paid 50 pesos in direct tax or '*patente comercial o industrial*', and have lived in the city for a minimum of two years before the enrolment in the Electoral Register. See *Anuario Estadístico de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1891*, Año 1 (Buenos Aires, 1891), p. 447.

<sup>21</sup> *El Argentino*, 24 July 1895.

<sup>22</sup> The received views of party organisation generally point out that the UCR was the only party that followed the North American model. However, the UCN and the PAN were also organised in decentralised committees and held party conventions for the selection of candidates. The internal organisation of the political parties in the 1890s is discussed in more detail in Alonso, 'The Origins', pp. 114–29.

newspapers with attacks on their opponents and statements of the party's principles.<sup>23</sup> There were no significant distinctions between the campaigning methods of the three parties.

Elections took place on Sundays, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The city was divided into 16 electoral districts. In each ward *mesas escrutadoras* were placed in the local churches, under the authority of a group of male citizens randomly chosen by the local authorities.<sup>24</sup> Each party also ensured that they had a party faithful at each table to check fraud by the opposition, to attempt to perpetrate their own, and to encourage their followers to vote – before 1912 the vote was not secret and voters might easily be intimidated. Each voter stated on a piece of paper his name, address, number of inscription in the Electoral Register and the name of the candidates he voted for. Once the election was over the police were in charge of sending the registers to the Junta Electoral for the counting of the votes. When the counting was finished, the registers were sent to Congress, which was the highest authority for ruling on disputes over elections. Congressmen of all parties then had the opportunity of expressing their complaints.

It is hardly necessary to point out that elections in Buenos Aires were not exempt from the usual fraudulent acts and outbreaks of violence.<sup>25</sup> These occurred throughout the city, from its richest to its poorest areas. *The Economist* reported in 1892 that 'in one of the most aristocratic and wealthy parishes of the city a friend of mine saw a street porter vote five times under as many different names'.<sup>26</sup> Edwin Clark, an Englishman who spent some time in Argentina, remembered a more violent scene:

During my residence in Buenos Aires, a body of voters quietly going to the poll were driven back by a volley of musketry from the roof of a neighbouring building, and what is more remarkable, the perpetrators of the outrage maintained a right to retain the arms thus used at a time of profound peace.<sup>27</sup>

It would be impossible to quantify the impact of fraud on the electoral results. However, in analysing the unsavoury aspects of the electoral

<sup>23</sup> The newspaper of the PAN was *Tribuna*, that of the UCN was *La Nación*, and that of the UCR was *El Argentino*.

<sup>24</sup> For the regulations of the elections see Ley 893 (759), 'Régimen electoral', in *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* (Buenos Aires, 1880), pp. 1154-9; for an analysis of this law introduced in 1877, see D. Cullen-Crisol, 'Carlos Pellegrini: Leyes electorales y fraude en la Argentina (1877-1906)', unpubl. MA diss., Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1991, pp. 21-40.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the use of fraud in elections see Botana, *El orden conservador*, pp. 174-89; A. Belín Sarmiento, *Una República Muerta* (Buenos Aires, 1970), pp. 10, 13-21, 39-47; J. N. Matienzo, *El gobierno representativo federal en la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1910), pp. 225-52.

<sup>26</sup> *The Economist*, 21 May 1892.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, 8 July 1880.

contests a number of points need to be considered. Fraud was not a key feature of all the elections of the 1890s and we should not confuse an election day with a picture of a city in anarchy, close to civil war. While in some electoral districts the press reported 'some arguments and fist fights', most of the elections were described as 'without incident'.<sup>28</sup> Violence and intimidation formed part of the electoral process, but within limits. Outbreaks of violence in the 1890s were rare and ended once the election was over without producing any deaths.

Furthermore, fraud in the city of Buenos Aires was not 'institutionalised'. As mentioned before, the traditional view argues that fraud was imposed by the PAN, which systematically and successfully repressed opposition groups and the new social forces they represented.<sup>29</sup> However, as we shall see when analysing the electoral performances of the parties, the electoral results show that there was a high degree of party competition and that the opposition was a successful electoral force.

### *The electorate*

Who went to the polls in the city of Buenos Aires in the 1890s? In quantitative terms, only a small proportion of the city's total population and only a small percentage of those eligible actually voted. In 1895, the city of Buenos Aires had 663,854 inhabitants. The law established that Argentine males over 17 years of age were eligible to vote.<sup>30</sup> In the capital, these amounted to 51,089.<sup>31</sup> The law also established that those qualified to vote should be enrolled on the Electoral Register which stated name, address, employment, age and literacy. The Register was renewed every two years. In 1891 and 1896, only half of the population eligible to vote was enrolled on the Electoral Register,<sup>32</sup> and only half of those who had

<sup>28</sup> The quotations come from, 'Análisis electoral por parroquia', *La Prensa*, 23 March 1895. The press is a valuable source for the description of the elections, usually presenting a detailed report on the events of each ward.

<sup>29</sup> See note 3, above.

<sup>30</sup> Unlike most other countries, Argentina abandoned literacy or levels of income as requisites for eligibility to vote at a very early stage. For the history of electoral requirements previous to 1853 see Cantón, *Elecciones y partidos políticos*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>31</sup> *Segundo censo*, vol. II, pp. 11–12. It should be noted that a large part of the population of Buenos Aires was composed of foreigners. In 1895, foreign males in the city of Buenos Aires amounted to 206,071 and most of them were between 20 and 50 years old. *Segundo censo*, vol. II, p. 10. For the impact of immigration in Buenos Aires and the Litoral area see G. Germani, 'Mass Immigration and Modernization in Argentina', in I. Horowitz (ed.), *Masses in Latin America* (New York, 1970), pp. 289–330.

<sup>32</sup> That was 25,049 in 1891, 22,000 in 1895, and 24,200 in 1896. This is a relatively high number in comparison with the provinces, where only between 5 and 15% of those eligible to vote were enrolled in the Electoral Registers between 1860 and 1890. See G. O. E. Tjarks, 'Aspectos cuantitativos del estado económico y social de la ciudadanía Argentina potencialmente votante (1860–1890)', *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina Dr. Emilio Ravignani*, Año XI T.XI (Buenos Aires, 1969), no. 18–19, p. 30.

enrolled went to the polls.<sup>33</sup> In the intricate world of elections in the 1890s, the fewer the voters the 'cleaner' was the election. As Francisco Barroetaveña stated in Congress in 1896:

When the relation between the voters and the registered exceeds 75 %, it can be presumed there has been fraud in the election; *a fortiori* [sic] when that percentage exceeds 85 %, and more than *a fortiori* [sic] when it coincides exactly; then it can be presumed that the election is invalid.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the turn-out for the period in relation to the total population eligible to vote, Figure 1 shows that the numbers of voters varied from a low point in the by-election of July 1893 (9.2 %) to a high point in the first election of 1892 (26 %). The turn-out of 43 % in the presidential elections of 1898 was an exception to the general rule of low participation.

As has been pointed out, the rise of party competition in the 1890s did not reflect a rise in the number of voters. Comparison of the elections between the 1880s and early 1900s show that turn-outs, if anything, increased only slightly.<sup>35</sup> As we shall see later, this has important implications for the analysis of the performance of the Radical Party.

Who went to the polls? The standard interpretation argues that only a privileged few voted and that the 'popular sectors' were excluded. Sábato, on the contrary, says that only the socially marginal males voted, while the middle and upper classes remained indifferent to electoral politics.<sup>36</sup> However, these characterisations of the nature of the electorate are mainly based on comments taken from the press. Most newspapers were owned or financed by a political party, or very openly expressed their party preferences. It is generally found in their electoral reports that in those

<sup>33</sup> This amounted to 9,975 in 1891 and to 12,213 in 1896. For the election of 1896 for example, the turn-out represented only 1.8 % of the total population of the city, 23.9 % of the total population eligible to vote and 50.4 % of those enrolled in the Electoral Register. This is a small percentage if we compare it with the turn-out of the total population in Brazil in 1894 (2.2 %); Chile in 1888 (3.46 %); Great Britain in 1890 (12 %); France in 1890 (27 %) and the United States in 1880 (23 %). All these figures, however, refer to the turn-out of the whole country for national elections and these countries also had different thresholds for voter eligibility, which makes comparison problematic. For Brazil's figures see J. L. Love, 'Political Participation in Brazil, 1881-1969', *Luso Brazilian Review*, vol. VII, no. 2 (Dec. 1970), p. 4; for Chile, J. S. Valenzuela, *Democratización via reforma*, Appendix; for Great Britain, France and the United States see Wolfgang Zapf and Peter Flora, 'Differences in Paths of Development: An Analysis for Ten Countries', in S. N. Eisenstadt and S. Rokkan (eds.), *Building States and Nations. Models and Data Resources*, vol. I (Beverly Hills, London, 1973), pp. 193-6. <sup>34</sup> *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, 5 May 1896, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Botana, *El orden conservador*, p. 195.

<sup>36</sup> Sábato's argument on the low qualifications of the electorate is expanded in Hilda Sábato and Elías Palti, '¿Quién votaba en Buenos Aires?: Práctica y teoría del sufragio, 1850-1880', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 30, no. 119 (Oct.-Dec. 1990), pp. 401-24.

elections won by their party, the elections were described as 'clean' and the voters as 'the representatives of the best of the community', while those elections won by the opposition were reported as 'highly fraudulent' and the voters as 'the worse elements of the society'.<sup>37</sup> Comments in newspapers concerning the low qualifications of the voters were commonly used to 'illegitimise' a lost election. For a more accurate picture of the characteristics of the electorate we need to resort to quantitative methods. For this the national and municipal census and statistical books of the city of Buenos Aires are of little help. The information they contain refers to the whole population of the city, and the electorate was only a small percentage of it. Furthermore, all censuses used a different administrative division of the city in disaggregating the data.<sup>38</sup>

However, information on the electorate can be obtained from the Electoral Register of the city of Buenos Aires of 1896, the only source of

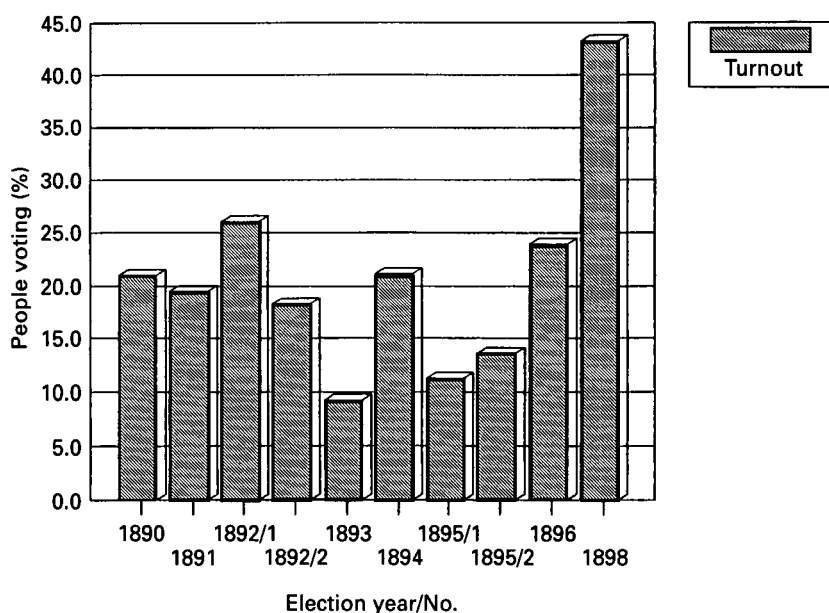


Fig. 1. Turn-out. Votes cast for national elections in the city of Buenos Aires, 1890–8 as a percentage of eligible votes. Sources: *La prensa*, 3 Feb. 1890, 8 Feb. 1892, 10 April 1892, 22 July 1893, 4 Feb. 1894, 3 Feb. 1895, 24 March 1895, 8 March 1896, 10 April 1896; *La Nación*, 16 March 1891, 10 April 1898.

<sup>37</sup> See for example the comments made by *La Nación* when reporting the elections won by the UC (Unión Cívica) in 1891. *La Nación*, 16 March 1891.

<sup>38</sup> Until 1904, the city of Buenos Aires had seven different administrative divisions: the church and parish, the police, the judiciary, the civic register, the schools, the municipality, and the electoral districts. None of the censuses previous to 1904 took the electoral division and, when in 1904 all six different divisions of the city were reduced to one, the electoral division had significantly changed.

precise quantitative information on the electorate of Buenos Aires in the nineteenth century that is currently available.<sup>39</sup> The Register is composed of all Argentine males over 17 years of age who willingly enrolled themselves to vote in the elections, and contains their names and addresses, level of literacy, ages and professions. In his memoirs, however, Angel Carrasco recalls that registration was merely 'the appetiser' of the fraudulent activities that later took place in the election.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, fraudulent registrations were a minority and the problem has been partly solved here by excluding from the samples of each ward those registrations which had already been nullified.

The Electoral Register of 1896 contains a total of 24,200 names divided according to the electoral districts to which the potential voters belonged. A random sample of 100 names from each of sixteen electoral wards was taken and has been divided according to eight different professional divisions following Szuchman and Sofer's classification.<sup>41</sup> This professional classification was made according to the age and training required for the job, its level of complexity, and the financial remuneration of each profession. For clarity's sake, this original classification has been simplified into three divisions, blue collar (working class), non-manual (middle class) and professional (upper class), and it is this classification that will be employed in the following discussion.<sup>42</sup>

Table 1 presents the composition of the electorate in 1896.<sup>43</sup>

Of the sample of 1,600 names taken, the average voter was 30 years old. Only 7.5 % of the electorate was illiterate, most of these being either *jornaleros* or sailors. This is a small figure taking into account the fact that, in the city of Buenos Aires in 1895, only 78 % of Argentine males over 6 years of age could read and write.<sup>44</sup> It is also a remarkably small figure if we compare it to the Province of Buenos Aires where illiterate voters composed 56.38 % of the electorate in 1889.<sup>45</sup> The *porteño* electorate of the 1890s was more highly qualified than the view on socially marginal males

<sup>39</sup> The Electoral Register was published by the *Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires, Nov., Dec., 1895; Jan., Feb., March, 1896).

<sup>40</sup> A. Carrasco, *Lo que yo vi desde el 80... Hombres y episodios de la transformación nacional* (Buenos Aires, 1947), pp. 38-9. For fraud during the enrolment see also Botana, *El orden conservador*, pp. 178-9.

<sup>41</sup> Mark D. Szuchman and Eugene F. Sofer, 'The State of Occupational Stratification Studies in Argentina', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1976), pp. 159-72.

<sup>42</sup> Walter's work has been followed in aggregating the professions in three categories. Richard Walter, 'Elections in the City of Buenos Aires during the First Yrigoyen Administration: Social Class and Political Preferences', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 48, no. 4 (1978), pp. 604, 610-13.

<sup>43</sup> The classification of the professions shown in Table 1 is only a small example of the more complete classification used in this work, borrowed from Szuchman and Sofer's work.

<sup>44</sup> *Segundo censo*, vol. II, p. clxxiii.

<sup>45</sup> Tjarks, 'Aspectos cuantitativos', Appendix, Table II.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the electorate in Buenos Aires by ward*

	Average age (in years)	Percentage literate	Percentage in each professional group		
			1	2	3
1 Catedral N.	29.0	NA	41.8	40.7	17.6
2 Catedral S.	31.7	99	14.3	64.8	20.9
3 S. Miguel	31.9	99	28.1	57.3	14.6
4 S. Nicolás	38.6	99	21.7	48.9	29.3
5 Monserrat	28.3	100	44.6	37.3	18.1
6 Piedad	28.6	92	50.0	41.1	8.9
7 Balvanera	28.4	99	43.3	46.4	10.3
8 S. Cristóbal	31.3	84	61.6	31.3	7.1
9 Socorro	28.3	95	40.4	41.6	18.0
10 S. Telmo	31.7	92	53.1	37.5	9.4
11 Concepción	29.9	100	33.7	50.0	16.3
12 Sta. Lucía	30.4	88	57.7	36.1	6.2
13 S. J. Evangelista	28.3	81	59.2	37.8	3.1
14 Pilar	28.6	92	57.6	29.3	13.1
15 Belgrano	27.0	89	56.0	37.4	6.6
16 Flores	32.8	78	61.2	29.6	9.2
Averages across all wards	30.3	92.5	45.3	41.7	13.0

NA, not available.

*Professions:*

*Group 1* (Working Class): Journeyman (jornalero), sailor (marino), mason (albañil), carpenter (carpintero), gardener (jardinero), tailor (sastre), rural labourer (peón), baker (panadero), shoemaker (zapatero), coach driver (cochero), cooper (tonelero), blacksmith (herrero).

*Group 2* (Middle Class): journalist (periodista), broker (corredor), musician (músico), cattle owner (ganadero), commissions agent (comisionista), manufacturer (fabricante), merchant (comerciante).

*Group 3* (Upper Class): notary (escribano), military man (militar), professor (profesor), doctor (doctor), lawyer (abogado), engineer (ingeniero), accountant (contador).

*Note:* Although the authors provide an English translation of the professions, in a number of cases I used my own translations. The interested reader may therefore find it easier to locate particular professions in Szuchman's listing in Spanish than in English.

allows. It is difficult to know if these 92.5 % of potential voters used their reading faculties to inform themselves on party issues or platforms published by the press before going to the polls. However, the large majority of the electorate could read at least the lists of candidates presented to them when they had to state on a piece of paper the list of their choice. Although more research on the relationship between parties and voters is needed, the qualifications of the electorate suggest that persuasion may have been a more common tool than force in the electoral politics of the 1890s.

What does the analysis by professions tell us? While the figures show that working class voters composed a large sector of the electorate

(45.3 %), they were closely followed by the members of the middle-class professions (41.7 %).<sup>46</sup> Against the received view, therefore, the electorate seems not to have been mainly composed of the privileged few or of the lower sectors. On the contrary, middle-class voters comprised a large percentage of the electorate. In six wards, middle-class inscriptions outnumbered those from the working class. This is less surprising if we take into account that the middle class grew significantly as a social sector between 1869 and the 1900s.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the upper sectors (professional group 3) composed only a minority of the electorate. This is to be expected given that they were a minority of the total population of the city as a whole. Nevertheless, their presence in the register should not be underestimated. In nine wards out of 16 they represented more than 10 % of the electorate.

How was the electorate spread throughout the city? When analysing the characteristics of the city of Buenos Aires, it has been generally pointed out that the city offered a remarkable juxtaposition of high and low sectors of the population.<sup>48</sup> However, the correlations<sup>49</sup> between the average property price in each electoral ward and professional groups 1, 2, and 3 presented in Table 2 offer no surprises.<sup>50</sup>

The strong positive correlation between house prices and professional groups 2 and 3 shows a larger presence of these groups in those wards

<sup>46</sup> The simple averages quoted may be subject to a bias if the numbers of each professional group are correlated with the numbers enrolled on the electoral register in each ward. However, weighted averages, with weights reflecting ward sizes, only change these figures by up to 3 %.

<sup>47</sup> Germani, *Política y sociedad*, pp. 220-3.

<sup>48</sup> For a description of the evolution of Buenos Aires see J. Scobie, *Buenos Aires. Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York, 1974); James Scobie, 'The Argentine Capital in the Nineteenth Century', in S. R. Ross and T. F. McGann, (eds.), *Buenos Aires: 400 Years* (Austin, Texas, 1982), pp. 40-52. For the development of the house market in Buenos Aires see Francis Korn and Lidia de la Torre, 'La vivienda en Buenos Aires, 1887-1914', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 25, no. 98 (July-Sept. 1985), pp. 245-58; C. Sargent, *The Spatial Evolution of Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1870-1930* (Arizona, 1974), pp. 29-30. James Scobie, 'Buenos Aires as a Commercial-Bureaucratic City, 1880-1910: Characteristics of a City's Orientation', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 4 (Oct. 1972), pp. 1035-73; F. Korn, *Buenos Aires 1895. Una ciudad moderna* (Buenos Aires, 1981), pp. 11-16, 47-50, 61-4.

<sup>49</sup> The Pearson correlation coefficient is a measure of association between two variables. It lies between +1 (positive association) and -1 (negative association). In this case the variables used are rankings and the coefficient is sometimes referred to as the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient. See S. Siegel and N. J. Castellan Jr., *Non-Parametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* (New York, 1988), pp. 235-7.

<sup>50</sup> Information on house prices in the districts of Buenos Aires was taken from 'Transferencia de inmuebles', *Anuario Estadístico de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, Año 1: 1891, Año 2: 1892, Año 3: 1893, Año 4: 1894, Año 5: 1895, Año 6: 1896, Año 7: 1897, Año 8: 1898). The index for property prices was made according to the average price per square metre of all the properties sold and bought each year in each district. It is the only information available in which the information is displayed according to the electoral division of the city.



Table 2. *Pearson's correlation of house prices and professional groups*

	1892	1894	1895	1896	1898
1	-0.84	-0.84	-0.84	-0.84	-0.64
2	0.71	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.59
3	0.76	0.76	0.75	0.78	0.59

Source: *Anuario estadístico de la ciudad de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1891-8).

where house prices were higher. The absence of group 1 in the wealthiest areas is reflected by the strong negative correlation. The explanation for this straightforward result, in spite of the alleged high degree of juxtaposition of different sectors of the population, can be found in the absence of immigrants on the Electoral Register. Though the city was characterised by the contiguity of the rich, the poor and all different degrees between them, the poorest sectors of the population were composed of immigrants who could not vote and were therefore not included in the Electoral Register. It should be mentioned that these straightforward results can confirm that the Electoral Register was a relatively 'clean' one, as 'suspicious' large sectors of working class voters were not found in wealthy areas or vice-versa.

In spite of the inevitable degree of arbitrariness that generally accompanies quantitative analyses,<sup>51</sup> the evidence taken from the Electoral Register of 1896 challenges the existing views on the characteristics of the voter in the nineteenth century. Exercise of the right to vote was not in practice restricted to members of the elite or to the socially marginal. Almost all members of the electorate knew how to read and write and, in terms of their social composition, they broadly represented all sectors of the population.

### *The parties' electoral performances*

Figure 2 displays the electoral results for all ten national elections that took place in the city of Buenos Aires between 1890 and 1898.

If we take into account only the contested elections (1892/1, 1894, 1895/2, 1896, 1898), the most outstanding feature is the high degree of party competition. With the exception of the presidential election of 1898, in which the PAN-UCN coalition obtained a comfortable 87% of the votes, the PAN-UCN won with only 55% of the votes in 1892 and with only 56% in 1896. The Radicals defeated the PAN-UCN coalition with only 51% of the votes in 1894, and was defeated by the UCN who won 52% of the votes in 1895. None of the parties had a comfortable majority.

<sup>51</sup> There is an unavoidable arbitrariness in ranking the voters in different social classes when we only know the profession they themselves state in the record.

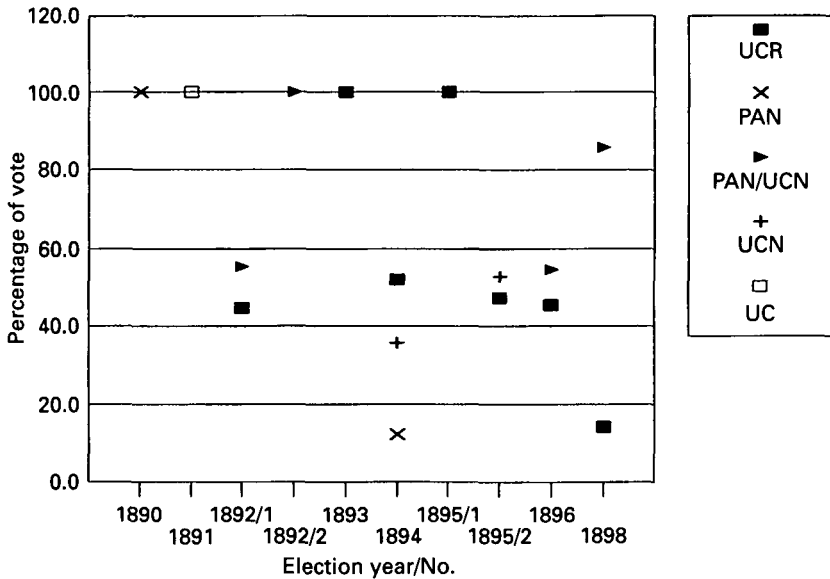


Fig. 2. *Party voting for national elections in the city of Buenos Aires, 1890-8.* Sources: *La Prensa*, 3 Feb. 1890, 8 Feb. 1892, 10 April 1892, 22 July 1893, 4 Feb. 1894, 3 Feb. 1895, 24 March 1895, 8 March 1896; *La Nación*, 16 March 1891, 10 April 1898.

On the contrary, the small margins show that each election had to be furiously contested.

Compilation of the voting returns from each of the sixteen wards of the city of Buenos Aires indicates the absence of regular voting alignments.<sup>52</sup>

Table 3. *The winning party in contested elections (by ward)*

	1892/1	1894	1895/2	1896	1898
1 Catedral N.	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
2 Catedral S.	UCR	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
3 S. Miguel	UCR	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
4 S. Nicolás	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
5 Monserrat	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
6 Piedad	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCN	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
7 Balvanera	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
8 S. Cristóbal	UCR	UCR	NA	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
9 Socorro	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
10 S. Telmo	UCR	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
11 Concepción	UCR	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
12 Sta. Lucía	PAN/UCN	UCN	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
13 S. J. Evangelista	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCN	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN
14 Pilar	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
15 Belgrano	PAN/UCN	UCR	UCR	UCR	PAN/UCN
16 Flores	PAN/UCN	UCN	UCR	PAN/UCN	PAN/UCN

<sup>52</sup> New electoral districts were added to the original 16 after 1894. San Bernardo was created in 1895, San Carlos, del Carmen and Vélez Sarfield were added in 1896 and in 1897 the district of Las Heras was created, while Balvanera was split into Balvanera

Table 4. *Percentage majority in each ward in contested elections*

	1892/1	1894	1895/2	1896	1898
1 Catedral N.	0.4	12.2	11.3	41.8	61.5
2 Catedral S.	17.9	13.0	52.2	24.6	13.0
3 S. Miguel	5.7	16.6	89.7	2.9	31.7
4 S. Nicolás	8.0	18.9	100.0	41.6	39.4
5 Monserrat	7.1	19.4	83.7	0.2	100.0
6 Piedad	51.8	4.2	83.1	70.7	94.9
7 Balvanera	39.2	32.1	47.7	13.2	60.8
8 S. Cristóbal	2.8	34.5	NA	3.7	100.0
9 Socorro	18.8	20.4	83.4	8.7	9.9
10 S. Telmo	24.7	2.4	40.1	34.1	98.4
11 Concepción	1.9	39.5	43.4	41.5	97.1
12 Sta. Lucía	97.8	0.5	40.8	27.4	69.5
13 S. J. Evangelista	2.8	7.4	82.9	96.1	38.6
14 Pilar	9.1	8.1	24.0	16.8	59.2
15 Belgrano	16.7	11.9	22.5	26.1	88.0
16 Flores	24.2	28.7	1.7	32.2	46.8

Furthermore, Table 4 illustrates that not only did none of the parties win consistently in any of the wards, but also that the margins by which they did win were very small.

Considering all the wards in all five contested elections, victories with more than 50% of the votes only took place in 22 wards out of a total of 79 contested districts. Again, these results challenge the standard view of one-party domination and institutionalised fraud. The total outcome of the elections, the absence of electoral alignments and the small margins of victory in each contested ward reveal a high degree of competition in the city of Buenos Aires in the 1890s. In this context, competition does not necessarily mean 'clean' competition. But it does mean that the government did not 'manufacture' elections, that their outcome could not be predicted, and that all parties contested elections with a fair chance of success.

### *The Radical Party*

There are three received ideas about the electoral performance of the UCR. It has been assumed that the UCR was in no condition to compete in elections against the PAN, and that it therefore had to resort to revolutionary strategies.<sup>53</sup> It has also been pointed out that the main

---

Norte and Balvanera Sud. As the purpose of this paper is to compare the elections of the whole period, the new wards have been left out of this analysis, and in the elections of 1898, Balvanera was counted as one electoral district.

<sup>53</sup> Eduardo P. Zannoni, 'La abstención radical', in *Hipólito Yrigoyen. Pueblo y Gobierno*, vol. I, pp. 9, 62.

failure of the UCR during this period, and one of the reasons for its immediate decline, was its ineffectiveness in mobilising the urban population.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the UCR has traditionally been seen as the party that was formed to represent the country's new social forces. There is little agreement however, on who constituted these social forces, and historians have suggested a wide diversity of social groups, ranging from the creoles or the 'popular' sectors, to a middle/upper-class coalition.<sup>55</sup> In spite of these disagreements, it has traditionally been argued that class played an important role in the organisation of the party and that its social composition was an important factor differentiating it from the 'elitist' PAN.

A number of factors should be taken into account when analysing the performance of the Radical Party. First, the UCR was a new political party. It began its electoral career with the UCN in 1891 and continued on its own from the elections of 1892 onwards. Secondly, the electoral system discriminated against minority parties as it did not allow for proportional representation. Thirdly, the UCR was the party of opposition and therefore could not count on the traditional resources generally available to a party in government – such as the vote of public employees. Finally, as was pointed out, the total electorate did not increase with the rise in party competition during the decade and, therefore, the UCR needed to win a part of the existing active electorate of Buenos Aires.

If we consider the electoral performance of the Radical Party, the results of Figure 2 show that the UCR was electorally rather successful. In fact, it represented such a threat that in order to defeat the UCR, the PAN and the UCN were forced to form electoral coalitions against the Radicals.<sup>56</sup> These electoral alliances were partly fostered by an electoral system that discriminated against minority parties and the formation of a multi-party system.<sup>57</sup> However, the tight margins of votes between the PAN/UCN and the Radicals shown in Table 4 imply that these electoral coalitions were absolutely necessary for the PAN and the UCN to defeat

<sup>54</sup> Rock, *Politics in Argentina*, pp. 44, 46.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Romero, *A History*, pp. 205-11; T. F. McGann, *Argentina, the United States and the Inter-American System, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 49-53; Ezequiel Gallo and Silvia Sigal, 'La formación de los partidos políticos contemporáneos: La UCR (1890-1916)', in T. Di Tella et al., *Argentina, sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires, 1966), pp. 149-70; P. Snow, *Argentine Radicalism* (Iowa, 1964), pp. 6, 14; Rock, *Politics in Argentina*, pp. 3-4, 26-8; Luis Alberto Romero 'El surgimiento y la llegada al poder', in L. A. Romero et al., *El radicalismo* (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 161-17.

<sup>56</sup> The UCN and the PAN formed electoral coalitions for the two elections of 1892, and the elections of 1896 and 1898.

<sup>57</sup> According to Duverger, in a multi-party regime, simple-majority single-ballot systems encourage strong alliances. Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp. 325-6.

Table 5. *Pearson's correlation of professional groups and votes of the Radical Party in 16 wards, 1892-8*

	1892	1894	1895	1896	1898
P <sub>1</sub>	-0.36	-0.36	-0.76	-0.34	-0.40
P <sub>2</sub>	0.38	0.31	0.56	0.16	0.40
P <sub>3</sub>	0.36	0.37	0.73	0.29	0.32

the UCR. When the PAN and the UCN failed to form electoral coalitions, as in 1894, they lost.

The Radicals demonstrated that they were well equipped to compete in elections. The fact that they triumphed only in the elections of 1894 should not overshadow the party's performance throughout the decade, as this was partly the result of the electoral system. Considering all wards contested throughout the decade, the Radicals won in 43 out of a total of 63 electoral districts contested between 1892 and 1896.<sup>58</sup> It should also be noted that, although the UCR lost to the UCN in 1895, the UCN won the election by resorting to fraud in two electoral districts. In the other contested wards, the UCR comfortably defeated the UCN.<sup>59</sup>

The electoral performance of the UCR dramatically declined in 1898. From the first months of 1896 until the death of Alem in July that year, the party suffered from divisions in its ranks. More significant splits took place in mid 1897 and, finally, only a small faction led by Bernardo de Irigoyen participated in the presidential elections of 1898.

What was the social basis of support for the UCR in the city of Buenos Aires? Table 5 shows the correlation between the electoral results of the UCR and the professional groups taken from the Electoral Register of 1896.<sup>60</sup>

The correlations show that the UCR consistently failed to gain support from the lower sectors of society. Its strength derived from the liberal, better-paid professions of group 3 (which includes lawyers, notaries, doctors, professors, engineers, accountants, military men) and the non-

<sup>58</sup> Again, 1898 has been excluded, as only a faction of the party contested the elections; the Radicals were defeated in all electoral districts. But even if we take into account the election of 1898, the UCR won in 43 out of the 79 wards contested since 1892.

<sup>59</sup> In 1895 the UCN concentrated the party's campaign on only two wards and, by the use of extensive fraud, won the elections, given that the electoral system awarded representation to the party that won most votes. The event was an exception in the 1890s and it was widely condemned by the press and by Congressmen of all parties. See *La Prensa*, 25 March 1895.

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that even though the electoral data cover an eight-year period we can only count on the Electoral Register of 1896. While ideally we should use more Electoral Registers of the period, this information is not available. We can only assume that the composition of the electorate did not change throughout the period; there is no obvious reason to think that it did.

Table 6. *Pearson's correlation of house prices and electoral results of the Radical Party in 16 wards, 1890-8*

1892	1894	1895	1896	1898
0.27	0.20	0.54	0.05	0.51

manual professions of group 2 (brokers, administrators, industrialists, commission agents, insurance brokers).<sup>61</sup> There appears to be no strong distinction in support for the UCR between groups 2 and 3. A similar, although less pronounced, pattern can be found in the correlation of votes for the UCR and house prices (Table 6). The evidence suggests that the Radicals did better in wards with higher house prices.

Cornblit found similar results in the elections of 1894 in the Province of Buenos Aires where the Radicals received stronger support in the most prosperous areas of the Province, while the PAN derived its strength from the more backward regions.<sup>62</sup> Why this was so is a question difficult to answer as we cannot rely on opinion polls, so frequently employed to analyse elections in the twentieth century.

It can be assumed that in the poorest sectors of the population, there was more temptation to sell votes and that a machine-type of politics had more chance of success among the lower classes and the poorer neighbourhoods. It can also be assumed that the PAN, being the party in government, could use government resources and therefore had greater opportunity for electoral engineering in the poorer wards. In spite of the efforts of some historians to portray the UCR as a popular party, the Radicals did not appeal directly to the support of the lower classes, nor indeed to any particular sector of the population. Their rhetoric was directed to 'the whole of the well-intentioned population of our country'.<sup>63</sup> It can be argued that the tenets of the UCR had little appeal to the lower sectors of the population. For the small entrepreneur and the manual worker, revolution meant financial instability and bad business. The ideas of a civic duty to resist an illegitimate government, and of a return to the 'glorious past' were expensive notions if they brought with them political and economic instability. Discourses on the death of the country's political life and attacks on government corruption were

<sup>61</sup> For the complete list of professions included in these categories see Szuchman and Sofer, 'The State of Social Stratification', Appendix B (high professional and low professional categories).

<sup>62</sup> Oscar Cornblit, 'La opción conservadora en la República Argentina', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 14, no. 56 (1975), pp. 619-21. With data for 1912 and 1916, and using a 'modernisation' index which included literacy, urbanisation and foreign population, Gallo and Sigal found positive correlations between 'modernisation' and electoral support for the UCR. These correlations were done for each province. Gallo and Sigal, 'La formación', pp. 153-4.

<sup>63</sup> *El Argentino*, 24 Oct. 1891.

probably more appealing to those in the liberal professions. Party competition, decentralisation of power, and morality of the public administration were values they could relate to and afford to struggle for, even at the financial cost of some political turmoil.

However, we should not accept easy conclusions regarding the socio-economic basis of the political parties' electoral support in the 1890s. The correlations between the UCR and the professional groups, although constant throughout the period, oscillate between 0.30 and 0.40 and therefore are not sufficiently strong to enable us to claim that social status was a crucial factor in determining the political preferences of the *porteño* voters. Only in the 1910s and 1920s did the relationship between class and party preference become more pronounced.<sup>64</sup> Although historians and political scientists have argued that socio-economic factors were important to the emergence of the UCR in the 1890s, the formation of the party can be more realistically explained by looking at other factors such as political circumstance and ideological clashes.<sup>65</sup>

### *Conclusion*

As we have seen, the standard accounts of Argentina's political development reduce nineteenth-century electoral politics to a matter of elite repression, a system that ended in 1912 with the expansion of the practice of voting from the upper class to the middle and working classes. New accounts, on the other hand, describe nineteenth-century elections as an inter-factional game where the socially marginal men were tools in the hands of party factions. This political system came to an end in 1912 when the law obliged the previously indifferent upper and middle classes to go to the polls.

However, a closer inspection of the electoral results of the 1890s in Buenos Aires and of the *porteño* voters challenges both these arguments. Elections were highly competitive, and involved all the sectors of the population. Even new political parties, such as the UCR, had a good chance of success. There is some incipient evidence of correlation between party preference and social status of a kind similar to the more marked patterns identifiable in the 1910s and 1920s.

This is not to say that elections in the 1890s closely resembled those after 1912. In the 1890s the vote was not secret, voters were at times intimidated and violence and fraud were a common part of the voting process.<sup>66</sup> However, these features of the nineteenth-century elections did

<sup>64</sup> See Walter, 'Elections', pp. 610–24.

<sup>65</sup> This argument is further expanded in Alonso, 'The Origins'.

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted, however, that some of these features did not disappear overnight from the post-1912 electoral practices.

not rule out party competition and the participation of all sectors of the population.

These new findings have important implications for the received views on the significance of 1912 in the country's political development. Party competition was not created 'overnight' by the reform, as has been argued.<sup>67</sup> It is true that the UCR did not again participate in elections until the passing of the law, but in the city of Buenos Aires other opposition parties did, and did so successfully.<sup>68</sup> In terms of final election results and the degree of party competition, the party performances of the 1890s were similar to those following the electoral reform. As regards the socio-economic characteristics of the electorate, there seems to be no significant difference between the electorate of the 1890s and that of the 1910s, only a slight increase in the participation of the middle sector and a decrease in that of the working and upper classes.<sup>69</sup>

There is always a danger in extrapolating from the 1890s to 1912 and further work is needed on the first decades of the twentieth century to enable one to arrive at stronger conclusions on the transition to a modern democratic system. However, taking into account the new evidence of the 1890s, the reform of 1912 seems to have been a significant step in expanding the number of voters, given that voting became compulsory.<sup>70</sup> But this was not primarily a matter of including previously neglected social sectors into the electorate. It was not the case that in 1912 the elite 'allowed' the participation of the middle and working classes for the first time or that the middle and upper classes were now forced to abandon their previous indifference. The features of the 1890s electoral practices in Buenos Aires – well-organised political parties contesting competitive elections involving all sectors of the population with some evidence of choice in their voting preferences – point to a more gradual process of political development in Buenos Aires.

<sup>67</sup> Remmer, *Party Competition*, pp. 221–2.

<sup>68</sup> For the performance of the Socialist Party see R. J. Walter, *The Socialist Party of Argentina, 1890–1930* (Austin, Texas, 1977), pp. 65–6; Jeremy Adelman, 'Socialism and Democracy in Argentina in the Age of the Second International', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 2 (May 1992), pp. 221–33.

<sup>69</sup> Walter, 'Elections', pp. 605–8.

<sup>70</sup> For the increased turn-out after 1912 see Cantón, *Elecciones*, pp. 43–58.