Forging Political Democracies in late Nineteenth Century Latin America

Argentina (1880-1916)

Paula Alonso

Director, Latin American and Hemispheric Studies Program, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University
Today’s talk

• Nineteenth Century Political History
  – How is the field defined today?

• Old and new ways of looking at the 19th century

• Argentina
  – The Nineteenth Century
  – Modern Argentina
  – Forging Democracy
Political History: How is the field defined today?

- Pierre Rosanvallon, “The Study of Politics in History”.

Societies are organized following a body of principles, which is what shapes the political organization. Politics is part of the political, as it is about the procedures that are put in place. But the political world is not reduced to that, because it is also about how society is shaped, how ideas are contested, how the economy is impacted and impacts these procedures.

Old and New Ways of Looking at the Nineteenth Century

• The traditional view (John Lynch)

• Challenges:
  ✓ Liberalism
  ✓ Constitutionalism
  ✓ Republicanism

• New Emphasis in River-Plate/Argentina
  • Fragile Viceroyalty
  • Autonomous provinces until 1852
  • National (Dis)Organization (1862-1880)
  • Oligarchy? 1880-1916
Modern Argentina 1880-1916

- **Economic Growth**
  - Average Annual Rate 5% (1880-1914)
  - 30% of all Latin American Exports (with only 10% of the population)
- Foreign Investment

- **Demographics**
  - European Immigration (6 million between 1856 and 1930).
  - Education (1884 Compulsory Elementary Education)
Railways in 1910
Modern Argentina 1880-1916

• State-Building
  - 1880 Buenos Aires became the Federal Capital.
  - Provincial militias were disbanded. National Army.
  - National Currency - Peso.
  - Compulsory National Elementary Education (1884).
  - Spanish became the official Language (1887).

• Political Changes
  - Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN), 1880-1916
  - Radical Civic Union (1891)
  - Socialist Party (1896)
Forging Democracy before 1912?

- Political Parties
  - Radical Civic Union
  - PAN
  - Socialist Party

- Political Press
  - Hybrids between pamphlets and newspapers
  - Freedom of the Press
  - Ideological Battles.

- Electoral World
  - Participatory
  - Competitive

- Social and Political Elites
Turnout in Buenos Aires, 1890-1910

Electoral Competition, Buenos Aires, 1890-1898

Conclusions

- Political Parties (UCR-PAN)
- Political Mobilization Continued under the PAN
- Elections became the only means to legitimize rulers
- Voting increased at fast rates before 1912
- The electoral calendar was respected
- Revolts continued but the concept of “citizens in arms” faded
- Political Press was free and vibrant
- Political opposition was exercised through different means
- Political Elites/Social Elites
• Leslie Bethell, Argentina since Independence, Cambridge University Press, 1993, Chaps by R. Cortés Conde and Ezequiel Gallo.