

# Electoral Juggling: A Comparative History of the Corruption of Suffrage in Latin America, 1830–1930\*

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*Abstract.* This article examines, from a comparative perspective, those electoral practices labelled as ‘corrupt’ in Latin America between 1830 and 1930, in order to gain a fuller appreciation of the significant role played by elections in the history of the region. The article starts by using the term ‘electoral corruption’ in its general sense, as often used by contemporaries themselves when referring to the various practices that, in their view, distorted the vote, and therefore the meaning of suffrage. From this general definition, the article moves on to distinguish between the different types of corrupt practice, with the aim of identifying the extent to which they affected electoral competition. By offering a revision of the assumptions that have hitherto served to undermine the historical meaning of the suffrage, this article aims to encourage the study of electoral history in the region. The examination of electoral corruption is therefore preceded by a brief survey of the historiography of Latin American elections.

As dusk fell upon Tuluá (Colombia) at the end of an election day in 1871, while the votes were being counted, one of the electoral tables was suddenly dragged away from the polling station by a man on horseback wielding a lasso. Caught by surprise, a crowd of spectators burst into laughter. Members of the electoral jury were astonished. Frustration followed among the Conservative partisans of Sergio Arboleda, who felt that their electoral performance had been affected by such an action. ‘This is discouraging’, concluded Arboleda, ‘it makes a bitter mockery of the institutions’.<sup>1</sup> Tuluá was not the only place where Colombian elections faced trouble. Nor was 1871 an exceptional year. Decades later, as the 1898 presidential elections approached, Carlos Martínez Silva commented in a sarcastic tone: ‘everything is conveniently ready for the final scene of this electoral comedy’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arboleda’s description of the events is reprinted in his *La constitución política* (Bogotá, 1952), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Martínez Silva, ‘Revista política’, in *El Repertorio Colombiano*, 28 January 1898, reprinted in his *Capítulos de historia política* (Bogotá, 1973), vol. 3, p. 125.

Complaints of electoral corruption abounded elsewhere in Latin America. ‘This country has never voted’, stated Joaquín V. González, senator from La Rioja, during his defence of the need to reform Argentine electoral practices in 1912.<sup>3</sup> That year, during the presidential elections in Chile – arguably one of the most anomalous Chilean presidential elections during the period covered by this essay<sup>4</sup> – the level of electoral fraud was such that, according to Manuel Rivas Vicuña, ‘the solution should have been to declare most of the election null and void’.<sup>5</sup> For years, elections in Peru were characterised by what was known as ‘el encierro y la toma de mesas’ (literally the physical appropriation of electoral tables): violent acts accompanied by electoral fraud. As the deputy Samuel Bayán y Palacios observed in 1914, ‘those electoral registers represent the spectre not the personality of the elector’.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, at first sight the various accounts by contemporaries would appear to be conclusive: Latin American elections were almost exclusively defined by fraud and violence; their results, far from being the expression of the popular will, were in fact the outcome of various governmental and partisan machinations. As Vincent Peloso has suggested regarding the Peruvian experience, condemnations of electoral practices issued by contemporaries have probably discouraged their study among modern historians.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, some historians that approached the subject merely echoed those denunciations. Latin American elections were ‘usually a pure sham’, concluded Charles Seymour and Donald P. Frary in 1919, while they observed that the population in the region ‘... had not shown their capacity for democracy in the European or the North American sense’.<sup>8</sup> Other historians subsequently remarked on the uniqueness of Latin American elections – ‘a curious phenomenon’, as C. E. Chapman referred to them in 1932. A curious phenomenon that failed to excite the curiosity of most modern scholars.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires, 1977), p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this observation to Samuel Valenzuela.

<sup>5</sup> See Manuel Rivas Vicuña, *Historia política y parlamentaria de Chile* (Santiago, 1964), vol. 1, p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Jorge Basadre, *Elecciones y centralismo en el Perú (Apuntes para un esquema histórico)*, (Lima, 1980), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> V. Peloso, ‘Liberals, Electoral Reform, and the Popular Vote in Mid-Nineteenth-century Peru’, in V. Peloso and B. Tanenbaum (eds.), *Liberals, Politics, Power. State Formation in Nineteenth-century Latin America* (Athens, GA, and London, 1996), p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Seymour and Donald Paige Frary, *How the World Votes. The Story of Democratic Developments in Elections* (Springfield, MA, 1918), vol. 2, pp. 266–87. The authors did, however, acknowledge that some positive democratic developments had taken place, above all in Chile and Argentina.

<sup>9</sup> C. E. Chapman, ‘The Age of Caudillos: A Chapter in Hispanic American History’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. XII (1932), p. 292. See my ‘Introduction.

There is little doubt that the expressions of electoral corruption, and the denunciations of their recurrence, had been at the centre of the struggles for power in Latin America since the introduction of modern forms of representation following independence. The purpose of this article is to revise those electoral practices labelled as ‘corrupt’, in order to gain a fuller appreciation of the significant role played by elections in the history of the region. Such a revision requires a comparative approach that examines the subject elsewhere, as electoral corruption seems to have been present wherever elections developed. I start by using the term ‘electoral corruption’ in its general sense, as often used by contemporaries when referring to the various practices that, in their view, distorted the vote, and therefore the meaning of suffrage – in theory, the faithful expression of the will of the electors. In Britain, of course, the expression regularly featured in the speeches and pamphlets of the reformers, and was the subject of significant pieces of legislation – thus providing it with a normative definition.<sup>10</sup> The term was also commonly used in Latin America. ‘The suffrage has been so much corrupted in recent years’, lamented a Colombian pamphlet in 1873, ‘... that the republic has become a shameful market of vices and unpunished crimes’.<sup>11</sup> In 1900, Juan Bautista González, a Chilean student of law, referred to ‘electoral corruption’ as the major cause for the ‘profundo malestar político que nos aqueja’.<sup>12</sup> In such publications, ‘electoral corruption’ or the ‘corruption of suffrage’ embraced various practices: mainly electoral fraud, violence and ‘cohecho’ – the purchase of votes. But, as González also noted, ‘electoral corruption’ could cover other ‘evils’ as well: ‘la venalidad, el caudillaje, los transfujios, el indiferentismo por la cosa pública, etc., etc’.<sup>13</sup> Thus, looking first at electoral corruption, as generally defined by contemporaries, is a good point of departure. From this general definition,

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Elections Before Democracy: Some Considerations on Electoral History from a Comparative Perspective’, in E. Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy. The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London and Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 1–15.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, G. F. S. Elliot, *Thoughts on Bribery and Corruption at Elections* (London and Edinburgh, 1853), and W. D. Christie, *The Ballot and Corruption and Expenditure at Elections* (London, 1872). On the legislation against electoral corruption in Britain, see C. O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, 1868–1911* (Oxford, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Anon., *Crítica política. Conceptos sobre varios asuntos de legislación de administración por un viejo patriota* (Estado de Boyacá, 1873), p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in J. Samuel Valenzuela, ‘La ley electoral de 1890 y la democratización del régimen político chileno’, *Estudios Públicos*, No. 71 (Santiago, winter 1998), p. 286.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

however, the article moves on to distinguish among the different types of corrupt practices, with the aim of identifying the extent to which they affected electoral competition.

References to Latin American corrupt electoral practices are commonplace, yet they have received little systematic attention from modern scholars.<sup>14</sup> There have been some valuable recent exceptions, such as Dolores Cullen's dissertation on Argentina, Iván Molina and Fabrice Edouard Lehoucq on Costa Rica, or Marta Irurozqui on Bolivia.<sup>15</sup> Cullen offers a thorough picture of the various electoral practices in a country whose politics were becoming more competitive; Molina and Lehoucq shed light on the nature of electoral fraud and how institutions affected electoral behaviour; and Irurozqui calls our attention to the 'discursive' elements of the denunciations of 'electoral corruption'. These contributions highlight the significance of a subject that cannot be examined in national isolation. A deeper understanding of electoral corruption in the region should consider at least the following questions: how can we define electoral corruption in the different societies during the period under study? What were the different expressions of electoral corruption? How did they evolve? To what extent did fraud, coercion or the purchase of votes condition or determine electoral results? In other words, what was the relative weight of electoral corruption vis à vis other forms of electoral practice, i.e. those considered 'genuine'? What measures were taken to combat electoral corruption, and how successful were they? And

<sup>14</sup> I refer here to the relative lack of monographs centred on the subject. There are of course several works where the issues of electoral fraud and violence have received special attention. See, for example, Botana, *El orden conservador*; Laurens B. Perry, *Juárez y Díaz. Continuidad y ruptura en la política mexicana* (Mexico, 1996), chapter 3; Richard Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-century Brazil* (Stanford, 1990), ch. 5; Carlos Malamud Rilkes, *Partidos políticos y elecciones en la Argentina: La Liga del Sur, 1908–1916* (Madrid, 1997); and Hilda Sabato, *La política en las calles. Entre el voto y la movilización. Buenos Aires, 1862–1880* (Buenos Aires, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> See Dolores Cullen, 'Electoral Practices in Argentina', unpublished D.Phil., thesis, Oxford University, 1994; Marta Irurozqui, 'Que vienen los mazorqueros. Usos y abusos discursivos de la corrupción y la violencia en las elecciones bolivianas, 1884–1925', in Hilda Sabato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones. Perspectivas históricas de América Latina* (Mexico, 1999), pp. 295–317, and Iván Molina and Fabrice Edouard Lehoucq, 'Political Competition and Electoral Fraud: A Latin American Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXX:II (Autumn, 1999), pp. 199–234. They are also the authors of *Urnas de lo inesperado: fraude electoral y lucha política en Costa Rica, 1901–48* (San José, 1999), which I did not have the chance to read while revising this article. However, I thank both Lehoucq and Molina for allowing me access to a draft of the introduction of this book, and for sending me some of their papers. See also Molina, 'Fraude electoral y cultura popular en Costa Rica, 1902–1948', paper presented at the 1997 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico. For a recent essay on electoral fraud in Colombia, see Luis Alarcón, 'Las elecciones en el estado soberano del Magdalena, 1857–1872. Entre la participación y el fraude', *Historia y Sociedad* (Medellín, December 1996), pp. 117–39.

finally, what were the peculiarities specific to Latin America of a phenomenon that was present wherever electoral democracy developed?

The study of these questions raises additional problems. How should historians judge the nature of electoral corruption when all the parties competing for power resort to such practices, or when denunciations of corruption become part of the various electoral strategies? As a student of French history has observed regarding irregular electoral tactics: 'Next to war, there is no modern phenomenon which has produced so much deliberately misleading evidence'.<sup>16</sup> In his work on the life of the 1857 Mexican constitution, Daniel Cosío Villegas also pointed out that it was 'very difficult to prove that an electoral result was fraudulent, that is to say, produced by the government and not by the vote of the electors'.<sup>17</sup> Cosío did come across a piece of documentary evidence of fraud in the archives of Rosendo Márquez: it opens with a letter signed by President Porfirio Díaz to the governor of Puebla attaching the list of candidates and closes with the official approval of their election. However, according to the Mexican historian, such a conclusive piece of evidence is exceptional. Cosío might have exaggerated the point in his efforts to challenge Emilio Rabasa's simplistic assertion that the Mexican people had never in fact voted and that the elections in this country were always fabricated by the government. However, he was right to warn us as to the possibly misleading nature of the sources – as other historians have done in relation to France, Great Britain and Italy. A historian of electoral corruption in Latin America ought, therefore, to approach the subject with some degree of caution. The subject also merits new perspectives. By offering a critique of the assumptions that have hitherto served to undermine the historical meaning of the suffrage, this article aims to encourage (or to legitimise) the study of electoral history in Latin America – a challenge that has indeed already been taken up, particularly in recent years, by a growing number of scholars. As such, before engaging directly with the subject, it is worth examining the various developments of the historiography.

<sup>16</sup> S. Kent, *Electoral Procedure under Louis Philippe* (New Haven, 1937), p. 190. Historians of electoral practices in England have also acknowledged that this is a slippery subject, often difficult to grasp. See Charles Seymour's classic *Electoral Reform in England and Wales. The Development and Operation of the Parliamentary Franchise, 1832–1885* (first ed., 1915; Hamden, CT, 1970), p. 401; and H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management. Politics in the Times of Disraeli and Gladstone* (Sussex, 1978), p. 262. These observations are similarly made by students of corruption in general. See Jean Claude Waquet, 'Some Considerations on Corruption, Politics and Society in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century Italy', in Walter Little and Eduardo Posada-Carbó (eds.), *Political Corruption in Europe and Latin America* (London and Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 21–40, and G. R. Searle, *Corruption in British Politics, 1895–1930* (Oxford, 1987), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La constitución de 1857 y sus críticos* (Mexico, 1957), p. 127.

*Towards a new electoral history?*

Whoever approaches the history of Latin American elections today does not enter virgin territory, although only during the last decade or so has interest in the subject started to take firm root. However, it has been possible, at least since the publication in the 1940s of Natalie Lee Benson's essay on the Mexican elections of 1812, to identify a number of valuable works that have given elections a central place in the history of the region.<sup>18</sup> Among the several contributions that preceded the current trends, I should like to concentrate on some of the pioneering works that paved the way for fresh interpretations: namely those by David Bushnell, Malcolm Deas, Jorge Basadre and J. Samuel Valenzuela.<sup>19</sup>

David Bushnell's various essays on the history of the suffrage stand out not only for his early interest in the topic and his revealing insights, but also for the broad scope of his research. Although Bushnell's central concern was the study of Colombia, in two of his articles (published in 1968 and 1971 respectively) he expanded his geographical frontiers to include Argentine and Venezuela, where he examined the legal evolution of suffrage from independence to the mid-nineteenth-century.<sup>20</sup> This selection was probably not arbitrary. Together with Mexico, these countries had in common their acceptance of universal male suffrage during the 1850s (long before most western democracies): 1853 in Argentina and Colombia, 1857 in Mexico and Venezuela. In Bushnell's view, the study of the constitutional and legal aspects of suffrage was important in that it shed light on the values and attitudes that prevailed among certain social groups, even if the practice of the institution was perverted by fraud or coercion. Moreover, fraud and coercion were not always the dominant features of nineteenth-century elections, as Bushnell suggested when he later examined the Colombian presidential election of 1856. Here he shifted his focus from legal institutions to levels of political participation. In 1853 – the first elections in Colombia held under universal male suffrage – some 300,000 people went to the polls; three years later, 210,000 voted in the 1856 presidential election – or more than 40 per cent of the electorate. These were large numbers, particularly if the

<sup>18</sup> Natalie Lee Benson, 'The Contested Mexican Election of 1812', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 26 (August 1946), pp. 336–50.

<sup>19</sup> I selected the work of these authors for the dates of their publications (from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s) for the centrality they gave to elections in examining the politics of different countries, and for their views either on the role of electoral institutions or on the ways electoral practices should be studied.

<sup>20</sup> D. Bushnell, 'El sufragio en la Argentina y Colombia hasta 1853', *Revista del Instituto de Historia del Derecho*, 19 (Buenos Aires, 1968), and 'La evolución del derecho del sufragio en Venezuela', *Boletín Histórico*, 29 (Caracas, May 1972), pp. 189–206.

poor communication conditions are taken into account. They were certainly large when compared to the number of votes cast in countries such as Chile and Venezuela: 30,000 and 60,000 respectively, during the elections of 1846.<sup>21</sup> Indeed by the mid-nineteenth-century, it seems that Colombian elections attracted more voters to the polls than most countries in South America. Bushnell underlined the need to pay more systematic attention to electoral statistics, a task to which he devoted further research.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he emphasised the competitive nature of elections in Colombia and suggested that these contests, through the formation of electoral clubs and the organisation of regular canvassing and rallies, forced the emerging parties to expand their respective popular bases.

The significance of these political practices was also highlighted by Malcolm Deas in his 1973 essay on caciquismo in Colombia. ‘This republic’, he somewhat boldly observed, ‘has been the scene of more elections, under more systems – central and federal, direct and indirect – than any other Latin American or European country.’<sup>23</sup> Thus the history of Colombia ‘as a field for the study of caciquismo could not be bettered’. Simple theories of caciquismo or clientelism, however, did not, in his view, offer a sufficient explanation of electoral behaviour. The *gamonales* and caciques that emerged from Deas’s studies do not always fit the stereotypes. Even if they did, very few of them could embark on a successful political career without getting involved in the ‘arduous task’

<sup>21</sup> The figures for other Andean countries – Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru – are even smaller. See my essay, ‘El estado republicano y el proceso de incorporación: las elecciones en el mundo andino, 1830–1880’, in Juan Maiguashca (ed.), *Historia Andina*, vol. V (Quito, Universidad Andina, forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> David Bushnell, ‘Elecciones presidenciales colombianas, 1825–1856’, in Miguel Urrutia and Mario Arrubla (eds.), *Compendio de estadísticas históricas de Colombia* (Bogotá, 1970), pp. 219–314; ‘Las elecciones presidenciales, 1863–1883’, *Revista de la Universidad Nacional de Medellín*, 18 (Medellín, November 1984), pp. 44–51. See also his more recent brief article, ‘Las elecciones en Colombia siglo XIX’, *Credencial Historia* (Bogotá, February 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Deas, ‘Algunas notas sobre el caciquismo en Colombia’, *Revista de Occidente*, 127 (October 1973). This essay has been reprinted in Deas, *Del poder y la gramática. Y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (Bogotá, 1993). I have used here the original version. In various later essays, Deas repeatedly insisted on the importance of the subject and has elaborated further on various aspects of Colombian electoral history. See in particular ‘La presencia de la política nacional en la vida provinciana, pueblerina y rural de Colombia en el primer siglo de la república’, in M. Palacios (ed.), *La unidad nacional en América Latina. Del regionalismo a la nacionalidad* (Mexico, 1983); his essays on Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, published in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vols III and IV (Cambridge, 1985 and 1986); ‘La política’, in Beatriz Castro (ed.), *Historia de la vida cotidiana en Colombia* (Bogotá, 1995), and ‘The Role of Church, Army and Police in Colombian Elections, c.1850–1930’, in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 163–80.

of seeking the vote: ‘Mosquera and his agents had to work the ‘barrios’ of the artisans with beer, music, fireworks, “chicha” and barbecues, cock-fighting and newspapers’. Both the government and the opposition resorted to ‘electoral tricks’. Beyond the emphasis on the alleged electoral anomalies, Deas suggested that more attention be paid to the social context within which politics developed. Furthermore, neither the government nor the caciques exercised unlimited power over the electoral process. A successful campaign required much knowledge of local conditions, even of the climate of opinion. Caciquismo did not exclude political awareness; it could coexist alongside partisan consciousness. In 1930 Conservatives knew pretty well that in Anapoima it was ‘easier to grow plantains, cacao and mangoes ... than to get five truly conservative votes’.<sup>24</sup> Without denying the existence of electoral manipulation – not always necessarily a corrupt practice – Deas described a complex political world that could not be understood by means of simple explanations of fraud, clientelism, or governmental control.

In his work on the Peruvian elections, published in 1980, Jorge Basadre adopted a different approach to those pursued by Bushnell and Deas, although he did focus on some common concerns. In common with Bushnell, Basadre thought that electoral institutions ought to be given serious consideration. Basadre’s study covered a much longer period and he was therefore only able briefly to examine the different electoral laws in Peru, and suggest some of the difficulties surrounding their implementation. He was careful to indicate the introductory nature of his work by adding a sub-heading to the title of his book: ‘Apuntes para un esquema histórico’.<sup>25</sup> His *apuntes* devoted particular attention to the role that congressmen played in electoral politics, and included some interesting suggestions as to how literature might serve as a source for the study of electoral customs. Basadre did not venture any great interpretations, nor was this a major revisionist work – except perhaps in the importance he gave to the historical role of Peruvian congresses. The picture he drew reiterated, from different angles, the continuation of corrupt practices in spite of institutional changes.

In contrast, the work of J. Samuel Valenzuela effectively combined an interest in revising the significance of electoral institutions with the need to appreciate how the social practices of suffrage developed. Published in 1985, his book, *Democratización vía reforma. La expansión del sufragio en Chile*, offered a most valuable sociological reinterpretation of Chilean

<sup>24</sup> See Deas, ‘Algunas notas sobre el caciquismo’, pp. 119, 123, 128–31 and 133.

<sup>25</sup> Jorge Basadre, *Elecciones y centralismo en el Perú: Apuntes para un esquema histórico* (Lima, 1980).

electoral history during the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Valenzuela's aim was to review the circumstances that led to the adoption of the electoral reform of 1874. In stating that it was presumed by law ('presunción de derecho') that all literate adult males had the required income to vote, the 1874 reform expanded the franchise in large numbers while encouraging important changes in the social composition of the electorate. In practice, according to Valenzuela, this measure meant the adoption of near universal male suffrage. His analysis was not restricted to the various aspects of the reform – its immediate origins, the social sectors which supported it, its contents and its impact on the political landscape; he also offered a wide-ranging discussion of how from 1833 – since the so-called 'venia del ejecutivo' started to dominate the electoral process – the Chilean political system evolved to achieve a high level of political competition, to the point when it finally freed itself from presidential interventionism in the elections following the 1891 revolution. Throughout the nineteenth-century, electoral politics involved all social sectors. The relationship between elections and society was such that parties, organised to win votes, developed lasting ties and loyalties with popular sectors. Elections were participatory events, that included both voters and non-voters.<sup>27</sup> In sum, the political system in nineteenth-century Chile was far from being closed. Valenzuela argued that any attempt to appreciate the dynamics of electoral politics had to go beyond traditional interpretations.

The authors reviewed above were not alone in their attempts to revise the history of Latin American elections. Important contributions were also published during the 1970s and early 1980s. Some scholars, such as Laurens B. Perry, continued to insist on the fraudulent nature of the suffrage. As Perry put it, Mexicans simply did not believe in their elections.<sup>28</sup> But others – such as Natalio Botana, Charles Bergquist,

<sup>26</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma. La expansión del sufragio en Chile* (Buenos Aires, 1985). In recent essays, he has reformulated his central arguments, enriched by additional research and perspectives. See his 'Building Aspects of Democracy Before Democracy: Electoral Practices in Nineteenth-century Chile' in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 223–58; and 'La ley electoral de 1980 y la democratización del régimen político chileno', *Estudios Públicos*, 71 (Santiago: Winter, 1998), pp. 265–96.

<sup>27</sup> Valenzuela also developed these points in his 'Orígenes y transformaciones del sistema de partidos en Chile', *Estudios Políticos*, 58 (Santiago: Autumn, 1995), pp. 5–77.

<sup>28</sup> Perry, *Juárez y Díaz*, p. 29. See in particular chapter 3, 'La selección de dirigentes', pp. 58–83. Similarly, Argentine elections 'had little meaning in terms of voting behaviour: local justices and military commanders... manipulated electors at their will...'. See F. J. McLyn, 'The Argentine Presidential Election of 1868', *JLAS*, 11:2 (1979), pp. 303–23. A valuable essay on the history of the institution of suffrage in Colombia, though again insisting on the anomalies of electoral practices, also published in the 1970s, is Fernán González, 'Legislación y comportamiento electorales: evolución

Eleonora Gabaldón, René Millar and Laurence Whitehead – offered fresh readings of the electoral struggles in Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile and Bolivia.<sup>29</sup> From different angles, these authors raised questions about the marginal role commonly given to elections in the history of Latin America. Their own interests of course varied, as did the emphasis of their individual contributions. Some focused on the institutional aspects of suffrage; others on how elections might have been conditioned by class conflict; on the role played by ideological struggles; on the levels and effect of electioneering; or on processes of popular mobilisation. None of these scholars denied that the systems were subject to manipulation, but they did suggest that there was more to the electoral history of the region than manipulation alone.

The current trends in the historiography of Latin American elections, trends that emerged with some vigour in the last decade, have to some extent continued to develop along the lines of inquiry laid down by earlier research, although some authors still appear to be unaware of past findings. Additionally, historians' interest in Latin American elections have found inspiration in some of the themes identified by a renewed trend in political history in general. Studies on the development of citizenship, on the diverse forms of political representation, on the politics of subaltern sectors, or on electoral history elsewhere in the world have encouraged the reexamination of the study of electoral practices in the region.<sup>30</sup> Overall the picture is one of advance in a revisionist spirit. In

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histórica', *Controversia* (1978), reprinted in *Para leer la política* (Bogotá, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 95–164.

<sup>29</sup> See Charles Bergquist, 'The Political Economy of the Colombian Presidential Election of 1987', *HAHR*, 56:1 (February 1976), pp. 1–30; Natalio R. Botana, *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880–1916* (Buenos Aires, 1977); René Millar, *Las elecciones presidenciales de 1920: Tendencias y prácticas políticas en el Chile parlamentario* (Santiago, 1981); Laurence Whitehead, 'Miners as Voters: The Electoral Process in Bolivia's Mining Camps', *JLAS*, 13:2 (1981), pp. 313–46; and Eleonora Gabaldón, *Las elecciones presidenciales de 1835* (Caracas, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> An interest in the question of citizenship, particularly based on a revision of the linear approach as defined by T. H. Marshall, has inspired some of the recent work on Latin American elections. See, for example, José Murilo de Carvalho, *Desenvolvimento de la ciudadanía en Brasil* (Mexico, 1995); Antonio Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1995), 'Introducción', p. 13; Hilda Sabato, *La política en las calles*; and the essays by various authors in Sabato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*. Sabato has also found inspiration in the renewed interest in civil society and in the notion of the public sphere. On Marshall, see T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London and Chicago, 1992). The influence of subaltern studies is explicitly acknowledged in the work of Astrid Cubano-Iguina, 'Political Culture and Male Mass-Party Formation in Late-Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico', *HAHR*, 78:4 (1998), pp. 631–62, although she also acknowledged other influences, such as the notions of political culture and the public sphere. Other works

contrast to the relative isolation that characterised so much of the historiography in previous decades, there has been a visible effort among scholars to communicate and even to integrate the results of their work.<sup>31</sup> There has also been an attempt to study the subject within a comparative framework, examining the Latin American experiences alongside those of European countries, as was first suggested by the various essays on caciquismo published in *Revista de Occidente* in 1973, and, more recently, by a 1988 edition of *Quaderni Storici* devoted to 'Notabili, Elettori, Elezioni'.<sup>32</sup> However, the dominant tendency is still to approach the subject from a national perspective. Whatever the approach adopted, the recent historiography has touched on the most diverse aspects of the suffrage. Three major areas of research can be singled out: the problems posed by the definitions of citizenship and representation in the emergent nations after independence; the history of electoral institutions; and finally voting practices. A brief look at these three areas will serve to illustrate these developments further.

The independence of Spanish America, has been persuasively argued by François-Xavier Guerra, Marie-Danielle Demélas-Bohy and Jaime

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have also found inspiration in a new wave of studies on electoral history elsewhere; see in particular, Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties. The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (London, 1989); Pierre Rosanvayon, *Le sacre du citoyen. Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Gallimard, 1992); Malcolm Crook, *Elections in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996); Larry E. Jones and James Retallack (eds.), *Elections, Mass Politics and Social Changes in Modern Germany. New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1992); Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser's Voters. Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 1997); Margaret Lavinia Anderson, 'Voter, Junker, Landrat, Priest: The Old Authorities and the New Franchise in Imperial Germany', *American Historical Review*, 98:5 (December 1993), pp. 1448–74; and Javier Tussell (ed.), *El sufragio universal* (Madrid, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Annino, the coordinator of a research group that held meetings in the universities of Turin and Austin, and at the Instituto Ravignani in Buenos Aires, is the editor of *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1995). Carlos Malamud, convenor of various meetings in Spain and in the LASA conferences, is, together with Marisa Ramos and Marta Irurozqui, the co-editor of *Elecciones y partidos políticos en América Latina y la Península Ibérica, 1830–1930* (Madrid, 1995); Hilda Sabato, co-organiser with Gonzalo Sánchez of a meeting in Bogotá, is the editor of *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones. Perspectivas históricas de América Latina* (Mexico, 1999). The book I edited, *Elections Before Democracy*, was the result of a conference that took place at the Institute of Latin American Studies in London in 1993. There have been successive panels on Latin American electoral history at the last four congresses of the Latin American Studies Association.

<sup>32</sup> In addition to Deas's essay on Colombia referred to above, the *Revista de Occidente* also included contributions by José Varela Ortega and Joaquín Romero Maura on Spain and by Adrian Lyttelton on Italy. Coordinated by Antonio Annino and Raffaele Romanelli, the volume of *Quaderno Storici*, 69 (December 1988) included essays on Italy, Mexico, Peru, Great Britain and Ireland. I thank Guy Thomson for providing me with a copy of this journal.

Rodríguez, was closely linked to the issue of representation.<sup>33</sup> As a result of the power vacuum left by the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, the Hispanic world experienced an unprecedented period of intense electioneering. Between 1809 and 1814, most provinces lived through cycles of political agitation motivated by successive elections, including those for the juntas, the Spanish Cortes, for municipal offices and bodies and provincial *diputaciones*. The conflicts unleashed and tensions created by these elections meant, in effect, that they *were* the revolutions of independence, as Guerra and Demélas-Bohy argued. A reevaluation of these early electoral processes has also been reflected in a number of studies aimed at reinterpreting the impact of the 1812 Constitution of Cadiz in Latin America.<sup>34</sup> The elections of the independence period were far from being exclusive. On the contrary, they involved diverse social sectors, given the existence of a wide suffrage and the level of mobilisation they encouraged in some provinces. The picture naturally varied from place to place, and the sudden introduction of modern forms of representation in Spanish America faced great obstacles from its inception. Any examination of the first items of electoral legislation reveals the conflicts present in the very act of defining the emerging nations.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the modern political discourse of representation, Guerra suggests, was bound to meet with contradictory responses in societies where traditions of the *ancien régime* persisted.<sup>36</sup> There were all sorts of attempts to adapt the new language to local circumstances; according to

<sup>33</sup> See Guerra and Demélas-Bohy, 'Un processus révolutionnaire méconnu: l'adoption des formes représentatives modernes en Espagne et en Amérique, 1808–1810', *Caravelle*, 60 (Toulouse, 1993), pp. 5–57; and 'The Hispanic Revolutions: the Adoption of Modern Forms of Representation in Spain and America, 1808–10', in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 33–60; Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias* (Madrid, 1992); and Jaime Rodríguez, *La independencia de la América española* (Mexico, 1996), especially chapter III.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the chapters by Chiaramonte, Annino and Demélas-Bohy in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*; chapters by Guerra, Annino and Chiaramonte in Sábato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*; Nettie Lee Benson, *The Provincial Deputation in Mexico* (Austin, 1992), especially chapters 1–2; Virginia Guedea, 'Las primeras elecciones populares en la ciudad de Mexico, 1812–1813', *Estudios Mexicanos*, 7:1 (1991); Víctor Peralta Ruíz, 'Elecciones, constitucionalismo y revolución en el Cusco, 1809–1815', *Revista de Indias*, LVI: 206 (1996), pp. 99–131. On the renewed interest in the constitutional process of Cadiz, see, for example, Marie Laure Rieu-Millan, *Los diputados americanos en las Cortes de Cádiz* (Madrid, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Juan Carlos Chiaramonte in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*, and Véronique Hébrard, 'Ciudadanía y participación política: Venezuela, 1810–1830', in A. McFarlane and E. Posada-Carbó (eds.), *Independence and Revolution in Spanish America: Perspectives and Problems* (London, 1999), pp. 122–53.

<sup>36</sup> François-Xavier Guerra, 'The Spanish American Tradition of Representation, and its European Roots', *JLAS*, 26:1 (February 1994), pp. 1–36; and his 'Les avatars de la représentation au XIXe siècle' in G. Couffignal (ed.), *Réinventer la démocratie: le défi latinoaméricain* (Paris, 1992), pp. 49–84.

Annino, the indigenous communities in Mexico tried to accommodate the liberal discourse to their own interests, while the first elections served to strengthen the notion of local sovereignty.<sup>37</sup>

Neither the original definitions of voters nor the first electoral systems remained unchanged for long. Electoral legislation was subject to numerous reforms, often in tandem with the frequent changes of political regimes. In contrast to the English experience, the expansion of suffrage in Latin America did not develop in a linear, gradual way, except perhaps in Chile. From a relatively wide franchise during the first decades of the nineteenth-century, some countries later opted for a more restricted suffrage. Countries that by the mid-nineteenth century had accepted universal male suffrage, such as Colombia, reintroduced income restrictions to the vote. In Peru, literacy qualifications were brought back in 1896, reversing the generous suffrage that had been in place since 1860. Similarly, the Brazilian electoral reform of 1881 drastically reduced the size of the electorate.<sup>38</sup> The question of what sort of interests lay behind these redefinitions of the electorate has been the subject of inquiry by some historians, such as Gabriella Chiaramoni on Peru or Juan Maiguashca on Ecuador.<sup>39</sup> The expansion of suffrage to women has not attracted much attention, but there have been some valuable contributions, such as the essays by Erika Maza Valenzuela.<sup>40</sup>

The definition of who the electors were was just one of the various aspects dealt with by successive electoral reforms. Equally important were the instrumental measures that accompanied the exercise of the vote – the way electoral authorities were selected, or the methods of translating votes into seats, or the choreography of the act of voting itself. Recent essays by J. Samuel Valenzuela on the Chilean electoral reform of 1890,

<sup>37</sup> Annino, 'The Ballot, Land and Sovereignty: Cadiz and the Origins of Mexican Local Government, 1812–1820' in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 61–86; and Benson, *The Provincial Deputation in Mexico*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> On Peru, see Gabriella Chiaramonti, 'Andes o nación: la reforma electoral de 1896 en Peru', in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*, pp. 315–46; on Brazil, see Richard Graham, 'Ciudadanía y jerarquía en el Brasil esclavista', Sábato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*, p. 365. For a brief survey on the evolution of suffrage in Brazil, see Leslie Bethell, 'On Democracy in Brazil. Past and Present' (ILAS: Occasional Papers, No.7, London, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Chiaramonti, 'Andes o nación', pp. 315–46; Juan Maiguashca, 'The Electoral Reforms of 1861 in Ecuador and the Rise of a New Political Order', in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 87–116.

<sup>40</sup> Erika Maza Valenzuela, 'Catolicismo, anticlericalismo y extensión del sufragio a la mujer en Chile', *Estudios Públicos*, 58 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 137–95; 'Liberals, Radicals, and Women's Citizenship in Chile, 1872–1930' (Kellogg Institute Working Paper 245, November 1997); and 'Las mujeres chilenas y la ciudadanía electoral: de la exclusión al voto municipal, 1884–1934', paper presented at the XX LASA Congress, Guadalajara, 1997.

by Carlos Malamud on the 1902 electoral reform in Argentina and by Iván Molina and Fabrice Lehoucq on Costa Rica illustrate this point. The institutional arrangements that surrounded the vote cannot be dissociated from the practice of suffrage.

It has been voting practice, however, that has received the attention of most of the recent historiography. Above all, this has implied a shift of focus towards analysis of the electorate, its social composition and political role. Detailed studies of electoral registers, such as those carried out by Hilda Sabato, Paula Alonso, and Herbert Klein, have served to indicate that a wide range of social sectors from all strata participated in elections, and that these were not the patrimony of the privileged few.<sup>41</sup> This renewed interest in the electorate has also motivated a revision of the concept of electoral participation, and more generally of political participation. As the work of Frank O’Gorman on Hanoverian England suggests, electoral participation was never restricted to the mere act of depositing the vote. The elections described by O’Gorman were communitarian occasions that often took on a festive character, whose rites and public ceremonies brought together electors and non electors, men, women and even children.<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, the study of electoral campaigns and of election days acquire a central place. Indeed the recent historiography devotes increasing attention to all the paraphernalia surrounding the suffrage, to the process that preceded the elections and to all those collective efforts that made the vote possible – including the establishment of electoral clubs, the various forms of political communication, the launching of newspapers, the organisation of electoral rallies and, naturally, the role played by political parties.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Paula Alonso, ‘Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898’, *JLAS*, 25 (1993); H. Sabato, ‘Elecciones y prácticas electorales, 1860–1880. Sufragio universal sin ciudadanía política?’ and H. Klein, ‘Participación política en Brasil en el siglo XIX: los votantes de San Pablo’, in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*. See also Sabato, ‘Citizenship, Political Participation and the Formation of the Public Sphere in Buenos Aires, 1850–1880’, *Past and Present*, 136 (1992); and Sabato and E. Palti, ‘Quién votaba en Buenos Aires? Práctica y teoría del sufragio, 1850–1880’, *Desarrollo Económico*, 30:119 (October-December, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> See also Frank O’Gorman, ‘Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: the Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780–1860’, *Past and Present*, 135 (May 1992).

<sup>43</sup> See, in particular, Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-century Brazil*, especially the chapter ‘The Theater of Elections’; Malamud, *Partidos políticos y elecciones en la Argentina*; Sabato, *La política en la calle*; Alonso, ‘Voting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, before 1912’, in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 181–200; Carmen McEvoy, ‘Estampillas y votos: el rol del correo político en una campaña electoral decimonónica’, *Histórica*, XVIII: 1 (Lima, July 1994), pp. 95–134; Pilar González, ‘Los clubes electorales durante la secesión del estado de Buenos Aires, 1852–1861’, in Sabato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*, pp. 142–61; Víctor Peralta, ‘Entre la exclusión y la abstención. Partidos políticos y elecciones en el Perú, 1890–1920’ (unpublished essay, 1997). On the role of newspapers in elections, see the following

Until recently, Latin American electors have generally been treated as herds without any will of their own, easily manipulated by unscrupulous politicians. What distinguishes some of the current historiography is the questioning of such traditional assumptions. The growing interest in the electorate, therefore, has gone hand in hand with a concern for the study of its values and aspirations, with the aim of exploring the extent to which people were able to take advantage of the power conferred by the vote.<sup>44</sup> Such a revisionist approaches invite further research on a set of questions similar to those raised by O’Gorman: What was the size of the electorate and what was its rate of growth over the years? How effective was the control exercised over the electorate? How did the growth of the electorate affect the mechanisms and extent of such control? What was the electorate’s political consciousness? To what extent did the electorate identify with the parties or with actors such as the Church? How was the electorate organised and mobilised? Finally, did electoral campaigns have any influence on the final results of elections?

Not all recent historiography follows such lines. One of the most ambitious works published during the last decade – *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* by Richard Graham – at times reinforces the traditional stereotypes of Latin American politics.<sup>45</sup> Graham does take the

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essays by Eduardo Zimmermann, Will Fowler and Eduardo Posada-Carbó respectively: ‘Newspapers and elections in Argentina, 1890–1903’, ‘The Mexican press and the collapse of representative government during the 1828 presidential campaign’ and ‘The role of newspapers and leaflets in Colombian electioneering, 1830–1930’ (papers presented at the LASA Congress, Washington, 1995), and the chapter by Ema Ciboti in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*. Other recent work of interest on various aspects of electoral history in the region include, Germán Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile y su evolución electoral (desde 1810 a 1992)* (Santiago, 1992); Patricia Pinzón, *El ejército y las elecciones. Ensayo histórico* (Bogotá, 1994); Marta Irurozqui, ‘La amenaza chola. La participación popular en las elecciones bolivianas, 1900–1930’, *Revista Andina*, 13: 2 (December 1995); Irurozqui and Víctor Peralta, ‘Las elecciones bajo el caudillismo militar en Bolivia, 1830–1878’, *Ibero Americana. Nordic Journal of Latin American Studies*, XXVI: 1–2 (1996), pp. 33–62; and Fernando Devoto and Marcela Ferrari (eds.), *La construcción de las democracias rioplatenses: proyectos institucionales y prácticas políticas, 1900–1930* (Mar del Plata, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Most of the recent works reevaluate the role of the electorate in one way or another. In addition to the titles referred to above, see Richard Warren, ‘Elections and Popular Participation in Mexico, 1808–1836’, and V. Peloso, ‘Liberals, Electoral Reform and the Popular Vote’, in Peloso (ed.), *Liberals, Politics and Power*; Marta Irurozqui, ‘Ebrios, vagos y analfabetos. El sufragio restringido en Bolivia, 1826–1952’, *Revista de Indias*, LVI: 208 (September–December, 1996), pp. 697–742. See also the comments by Annino, who warns of the risks of an exclusively electoral history ‘from below’, in Annino (ed.), *Historia de las elecciones*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> (Stanford, 1990). The work of Murilo de Carvalho on Brazilian citizenship, innovative from other angles, also reiterates traditional views on the electorate. See his *Desenvolvimento de la ciudadanía en Brasil*, pp. 21–63. For a recent sociological

study of elections seriously; in his analysis of Brazilian politics, elections take the central stage, while he makes perceptive observations on the rituals of the act of voting. However, he limits the meaning of elections to a mere legitimising function, emphasising their role as a mechanism of social control over a hierarchical order which was determined almost exclusively by rural landlords. Although he acknowledges the difficulties in manipulating the vote in the cities,<sup>46</sup> or among *agregados* in the countryside – on whose loyalties the patrons could not count – Graham does not explore patterns of voting among this electorate, less amenable to control, nor does he examine changes in voting behaviour over time. In his ‘theatre of elections’ there is no space for ideas – whatever public opinion there was in nineteenth-century Brazil is deemed irrelevant. In the final analysis, it would seem that all political developments obeyed the uncontested will of the rural patron, who ‘was leader because he won elections and he won because he was leader’.<sup>47</sup> Equally, elections were all characterised by fraud and violence.<sup>48</sup>

*Electoral corruption: the universal and the specific*

I have so far sketched some of the major historiographical trends regarding elections in Latin America, underlining those contributions that attempt to reevaluate the meaning of the vote, particularly those that reconsider the role of the electorate. Against the hitherto prevailing image of a passive electorate, exclusively manipulated by almighty elites, can sometimes be seen a voter with values of his own, whose will at electoral times should merit more attention. I have also signalled those renewed efforts to study the institutional history of the suffrage in the region. Without such an analytical base, it is impossible properly to appreciate the

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interpretation of the history of citizenship in Mexico, where the electorate does not receive much attention, see Fernando Escalante, *Ciudadanos imaginarios* (Mexico, 1993). Michael J. Gonzalez offers new research on interesting aspects of Peruvian elections at the beginning of the nineteenth-century but he is not concerned with the electorate or the campaigns as such, but with the study of the way planters exercised electoral influence. See his ‘Planters and Politics in Peru, 1895–1919’, *JLAS*, 23 (1991), pp. 515–41.

<sup>46</sup> See also his comparative observations on the development of civil societies in major cities in his comments on Hilda Sabato’s book, in ‘Notas y debates’, *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana Dr Emilio Ravignani*, 18 (second semester 1998), pp. 118–19. On the centrality of urban politics, see François-Xavier Guerra, ‘Lugares, formas y ritmos de la política moderna’ (Conferencia José Gil Fortoul, Caracas, October 1988), p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122–45.

patterns of electoral behaviour. Above all, I have concentrated on those historiographical trends that try to escape from the ‘black legend’ which has cast its shadow over the study of Latin American elections.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that electoral processes were often accompanied by practices that were perceived as corrupt. What were these practices, and how generalised were they? How did they evolve? To what extent did their recurrence distort the meaning of the vote? In spite of the significant historiographical advances described above, these questions still remain largely unexplored. Electoral corruption therefore continues to be the subject to easy judgements and misinterpretation.

‘It is said ... among us’, the Chilean José Maza observed in 1913, ‘... that regarding electoral matters our levels of corruption and bad habits have no parallels elsewhere in the world.’ He went on to complain, ‘This is false and unjust’, without denying that some of the electoral vices in Chile had become even worse at the time he was writing. Maza found some comfort in his neighbours: ‘we have never suffered the shameful experience of seeing our students selling themselves in public, as has happened in Argentina’.<sup>50</sup> His reasoning, though, aimed at emphasising the ‘universalidad de las incorrecciones electorales’.<sup>51</sup> It is necessary to stress the point: the ‘corruption’ of electoral practices was a universal phenomenon – wherever electoral democracy took root, the process went hand in hand with notable distortions.

The earlier developments of modern Western democracies are indeed relevant to any comparative analysis of the subject. In Great Britain, as noted by G. F. S. Elliot in 1853, constant attempts at meddling in elections, often through corrupt practices, had existed ever since ‘the House of Common began to have any considerable weight’.<sup>52</sup> Years later, in 1867, a former British Minister to Brazil and Argentina observed about his own country that ‘this evil of electoral corruption has taken hold of the nation like a nightmare’, while pointing out that the history of legislation against the problem had only left a ‘beggarly account of empty boxes’.<sup>53</sup> The campaigns against electoral corruption finally proved to be effective after the reform acts of 1867 and 1883, particularly the latter, although corrupt practices would survive in some areas until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Neither did the United States escape

<sup>49</sup> Annino, *Historia de las elecciones*, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> José Maza, *Sistemas de sufragio i cuestión electoral* (Santiago, 1913), pp. 23–4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Elliot, *Thoughts on Bribery and Corruption at Elections*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> Christie, *The Ballot and Corruption and Expenditure at Elections*, pp. 119 and 136.

<sup>54</sup> Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales*, and O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections*. As Michael Pinto-Duschinsky has observed, ‘corrupt practices remained common in at least half of the borough constituencies in England

the ‘evil of electoral corruption’, though in 1891 James Bryce acknowledged that ‘not even the poorest ward in New York City sinks below the level (of corruption) of such constituencies as Yarmouth’ in England. Bryce noted some advances in the legislation, encouraged by the zeal of a wave of reformers. Nevertheless, he pointed out that while in some states the conduct of elections was believed to be ‘pure’, in others, ‘frauds, such as ballot stuffing and false counting’ were ‘said to be common’.<sup>55</sup> Intimidation, bribery, impersonation and multiple voting still existed, in some cities more than others, in addition to other forms of influence exercised by the political bosses and their machines. During the primaries the rolls of party members were sometimes ‘largely bogus’. Fraud was ‘likely to be used on both sides; and fraud often provokes violence’. The composition of delegates attending a convention to select the candidates was ‘prearranged’ by the professionals. It should not be surprising, Bryce concluded, that this was thought ‘by many Americans, [to be] a travesty of popular choice’.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond the Anglo-Saxon world the examples and denunciations of electoral corruption are abundant, especially in the Mediterranean. In France, electoral corruption was a persistent problem between 1815 and 1914, although the methods used to distort the suffrage appear to have changed over the years.<sup>57</sup> Spanish elections during the Restoration (1875–1923) have been described as being merely acts dictated by the

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after the Second Reform Act of 1867. The general election of 1880 was markedly corrupt...’. See his *British Political Finance, 1830–1980* (Washington and London, 1981), p. 15. On Ireland, see K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 74–83.

<sup>55</sup> James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London and New York, 1895), pp. 146–148.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104–106. The secondary literature on political machines and elections in the United States is predictably vast. Recent works of a revisionist nature suggest that the level of electoral fraud was not as extensive as has been assumed. See Loomis Mayfield, ‘Voting Fraud in Early Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIV:1 (1993), pp. 59–84; and Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, 1991), pp. 147–8. An example of a revisionist view of machine politics is Robert F. Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902–1918* (New York and London, 1986). For a more recent discussion, see Peter McCaffery, ‘Style, Structure and Institutionalization of Machine Politics: Philadelphia, 1867–1933’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXII:3 (1992). A recent book that offers juicy anecdotes of electoral fraud and violence is Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861–1893* (Durham, NC, and London, 1998). A good introduction to various aspects of US political history, including elections, can be found in the various essays of Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy. American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York and Oxford, 1986).

<sup>57</sup> M. Kreuzer, ‘Democratization and Changing Methods of Electoral Corruption in France from 1815 to 1914’, in Little and Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Political Corruption in Europe and Latin America*, pp. 97–114; and Kent, *Electoral Procedure under Louis Philippe*.

government, the results of ‘massive fraud’.<sup>58</sup> In Italy, the prefect of Palermo acknowledged the presence of widespread corrupt practices when he observed in 1924 that ‘only a small part of the population would be persuaded to vote without – ay! – the traditional incentive of the bank note’.<sup>59</sup>

This evidence from the USA and Europe serves to confirm José Maza’s observation regarding the universal nature of the phenomenon. Throughout the nineteenth-century and during the first decades of the twentieth-century electoral corruption was not a unique to Latin America. This should be the obligatory starting point for analysis. Nonetheless, corrupt electoral practices varied from country to country; they changed in intensity over time, and different states took different steps to tackle the problem with varying results. A further look at the various expressions of electoral corruption may allow us to identify some of the local particularities of this universal phenomenon.

To start with, it is important to identify the crudest mechanisms of electoral corruption – such as the falsification of the polls, the intimidation of voters and the bribery of electors – from electoral influence based on relationships of deference, patronage and clientelism.<sup>60</sup> These phenomena should be treated as distinct categories, requiring different types of analysis. Contemporaries who campaigned against electoral corruption, such as W. D. Christie in Great Britain, recognised that there was ‘a palpable difference between bribery of voters and distribution of favours’.<sup>61</sup> It is even easier to distinguish between an exchange of favours and the coercion of voters or the stuffing of the ballot box with false votes. These distinctions are crucial to any appreciation of the changing nature of electoral behaviour. According to O’Gorman, deference must not be

<sup>58</sup> José Varela Ortega, ‘Orígenes y desarrollo de la democracia: algunas reflexiones comparativas’, in Varela Ortega, Carlos Dardé and Teresa Carnero, *Política en la Restauración, 1875–1923* (Madrid, 1997), p. 26. See also José Varela Ortega, *Los amigos políticos. Partidos, elecciones y caciquismo en la Restauración, 1875–1900* (Madrid, 1977); and Carlos Dardé, ‘Fraud and Passivity of the Electorate in Spain, 1875–1923’, in Posada-Carbó (ed.), *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 201–22.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in A. Lyttelton, ‘El patronazgo en la Italia de Giolitti’, *Revista de Occidente* (October 1973), p. 112.

<sup>60</sup> The literature on patronage and clientelism is vast. See, for example, Alex Weingrod, ‘Patrons, Patronage and Political Parties’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10 (1968); Sheron Kettering, ‘The Historical Development of Political Clientelism’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XVIII:3 (Winter 1988). Especially useful for the study of elections and patronage is O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*. On patronage in Latin American elections, Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-century Brazil*. For a recent essay on patronage and elections in Argentina, see Joel Horowitz, ‘Bosses and Clients: Municipal Employment in the Buenos Aires of the Radicals, 1916–1930’, *JLAS*, 31:3 (October 1999), pp. 617–44.

<sup>61</sup> Christie, *The Ballot and Corruption and Expenditures at Elections*, p. 121.

identified with dependence. In his view, the deferential relationship between patrons and voters in Hanoverian England ‘was one of interdependence and mutual gain, not one of servility and humiliation’. There was more than ‘an automatic and instinctive obedience’ in the behaviour of voters influenced by their patrons. Furthermore, neither deferential nor clientelistic relationships necessarily imply the distortion of the will of voters; thus they should not in themselves be equated with corrupt electoral practices.<sup>62</sup>

The falsification of votes, the use of outright violence against the electors, or any other irregular electoral tactics generally classified under the heading of ‘electoral fraud’, were a different matter. Here again it is crucial to distinguish between the various levels of government intervention and the different levels of fraud. The traditional assumption has been that whoever was in power was able to manipulate the electoral results at will. Accordingly, the Argentine historian Natalio Botana has referred to the dominant role of ‘gobiernos electores’ as institutions that reversed the democratic order: governments did not originate in the popular will; on the contrary, they created it by fabricating the elections.<sup>63</sup> Emilio Castelar had expressed it graphically in 1886: in Spain, the nineteenth-century champion of Spanish republicanism denounces, ‘las elecciones no se hacían, se escribían’.<sup>64</sup> The concept of *gobiernos electores* has taken some root. François-Xavier Guerra suggests that during the latter third of the nineteenth-century, Latin American political life was characterised precisely by, among other features, ‘manipulated or government-controlled elections’, leading to the establishment of regimes that might be called ‘democratic fictions’.<sup>65</sup> José Varela Ortega has also elaborated this notion in his studies of Spain, but has extended it in his comparative references to Mexico and Argentina.<sup>66</sup>

In most countries, electoral processes have been affected by the intervention of governments. Eighteenth-century England is often cited

<sup>62</sup> O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*, pp. 225–44. On the difference between patronage and corruption in Spanish elections, see Carmen Frías, *Liberalismo y republicanismo en el alto Aragón. Procesos electorales y comportamientos políticos, 1875–1998* (Huesca, 1992), and Tusell, ‘El sufragio universal en España, 1891–1936’, in Tusell (ed.), *El sufragio universal*, p. 29. Julio Heise also suggests that the electoral influences of Chilean rural caciques does not classify as ‘corrupt’ because ‘la clientela votaba espontáneamente por su patrón’; *El período parlamentario, 1861–1925* (Santiago, 1982), vol. 2, p. 265. That the electoral influence of wealthy mineowners was different from fraud in Bolivia in 1914 is illustrated in Whitehead, ‘Miners as Voters’, p. 321.

<sup>63</sup> Botana, *El orden conservador*, p. 185 and his ‘Comentarios finales’, in Annino, *Historia de las elecciones*, p. 477.

<sup>64</sup> ‘There were no elections; these were written’. Quoted in Varela Ortega, ‘Orígenes y desarrollo de la democracia’, p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> Guerra, ‘The Spanish American Tradition of Representation’, pp. 32–3.

<sup>66</sup> Varela Ortega, ‘Orígenes y desarrollo de la democracia’.

as the classic case of elections being made by governments. John Robinson, Senior Secretary at the Treasury Board in the 1770s and 1780s is the recognised ‘master at manipulating elections’.<sup>67</sup> Part of his job was ‘to manage the constituencies so that a favourable majority would be returned in the case of elections’.<sup>68</sup> He possessed detailed knowledge of the dominant interests throughout the country, which he used to manipulate the electoral process. According to Laprade, in his official handling of elections Robinson took no account of public opinion. Laprade doubted therefore that in general elections, such as those of 1784, ‘the popular wish ... could have influenced the result(s) ... to any considerable degree’.<sup>69</sup> It could be argued that Robinson’s machinations were legitimate in as much as that was the normal course of affairs. However, even if government manipulation of elections is considered improper, this did not constitute absolute control. As the revisionist historiography of eighteenth-century England has amply demonstrated, the world of electoral politics cannot be confined to government interference. Electoral control, which in any case was conditioned above all by local circumstances, varied according to the type of constituency. Additionally, some form of legitimate electoral competition was being developed in a significant proportion of them. Surely, then, the notion of government-controlled elections will often elsewhere require much qualification. How much control there was, what sorts of mechanisms of control existed, and the circumstances under which governments interfered in the electoral process must make a substantial difference to our definition of electoral corruption and therefore to the meaning of electoral politics.

At one end of the spectrum, it is possible to identify regimes where the degree of government interference made elections quite uncompetitive, almost meaningless, beyond playing a ritual legitimising role. The regimes of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico and Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina could be included among such extreme examples of *gobiernos electores*. Rosas produced the single list of candidates and ordered its distribution through the justices of the peace, who were instructed to pass it on to the appropriate authorities in the countryside.<sup>70</sup> There was no electoral campaign; instead, as under the *porfiriato* in Mexico, there were

<sup>67</sup> W. T. Laprade, ‘Public Opinion and the General Election of 1784’, *English Historical Review*, XXXI:122 (April 1916), p. 228.

<sup>68</sup> See Laprade’s introduction to the volume *Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson, 1774–1784* (London, 1922), p. vi.

<sup>69</sup> Laprade, ‘Public Opinion and the General Election of 1874’, pp. 230 and 236.

<sup>70</sup> See Marcela Ternavasio, ‘Hacia un régimen de unanimidad: política y elecciones en Buenos Aires, 1828–1850’, in Sábato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de naciones*, pp. 119–141.

‘uncontested official candidates’; ‘... sometimes the lucky winner finds out about his election in the press’.<sup>71</sup> As suggested by Ternavasio, Rosas extended to the city a practice that was already widespread in the countryside, and Díaz inherited a legacy of corrupt electoral practices. However, in both cases, any earlier signs of electoral competition were replaced by political unanimity. Elections were almost exclusively determined from above, reduced to mere rituals. The electoral processes of these regimes should be clearly set aside from other processes where governments interfered but without exercising such total control.

The *gobiernos electores* that Botana and Spanish historiography have in mind were those that ruled Argentina during the three decades preceding the electoral reforms of 1912, and those of Spain during the Restoration. It is true that Spanish elections were characterised by high levels of governmental manipulation, as described in the works of Varela Ortega and Dardé, among others. The *encasillado* – as the process of negotiations between the government and the different political forces to select the candidates came to be known – aimed at replacing electoral competition.<sup>72</sup> In extreme cases, the absence of an electorate was total and the electoral agents of the government in the provinces fabricated the elections. Sometimes, however, they did care for appearances. ‘How clumsy these people are! We want more opposition, more opposition!’ was Castelar’s sarcastic caricature of a member of the government’s criticism of those who arranged the electoral results in 1872. Subsequently, the votes of the opposition were inflated, ‘como se ponen sombras a los cuadros, para que realzaran la luminosa libertad electoral’.<sup>73</sup> Here electoral fraud involved more labour, and even an artistic touch. The government was not always so generous with the opposition; nor were its actions subtle. The votes that were inflated were often those from the distant provinces – favourable to the government, with the support of the local caciques – blown up to outnumber any advance of the opposition in the big cities. It may be also true, as Gabriele Ranzato has observed, that while the Italian electoral system was generally characterised by the exchange of favours, what dominated in Spain was blatant fraud.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless electors in some Spanish provinces expected to be rewarded for their vote. ‘Si quiere el

<sup>71</sup> See François-Xavier Guerra, *México. Del antiguo régimen a la revolución* (Mexico, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 39 and 112.

<sup>72</sup> For the workings of the *encasillado*, see Varela Ortega, *Los amigos políticos*, pp. 426–8. See also Aurora Garrido, *Cantabria 1902–1923: Elecciones y partidos políticos* (Santander, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> Emilio Castelar, ‘Discurso sobre las elecciones dirigidas por el Ministerio Sagasta’, in Castelar, *Discursos políticos de Emilio Castelar dentro y fuera del Parlamento, 1871–1873* (Madrid, 1973), p. 351.

<sup>74</sup> Gabriele Ranzato, ‘La forja de la soberanía nacional: las elecciones en los sistemas italiano y español’, in Tussell (ed.), *El sufragio universal*, pp. 115–38.

gustico de los votos que los pague’, an Aragonese woman warned her husband before he committed his vote in a late nineteenth-century election. She requested that the cacique fulfil the duties that traditional patronage demanded: ‘acuérdate de todo lo que has de pedir; primero un piacico del campo de la fuente pa’ hacernos pajar...; segundo, que nos deje cortar maderos... y dimpués, que nos dé las tejas que tienen bajo de la sermentera...’.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, in her study of electoral processes in Aragón, Carmen Frías has argued that between the 1870s and 1890s, the electors were capable of extracting favours from their patrons, and that the electoral system in this region was characterised by patronage and not just barefaced fraud.<sup>76</sup> The Aragonese experience, as described by Frías, may have been unique in Spain, though this is surely unlikely. It does point to the need to revise the stereotype of a passive Spanish electorate whose will was either non-existent or entirely conditioned by electoral fraud. Other historians, for example Alicia Yanini, have suggested that Spanish electoral behaviour underwent changes after the adoption of universal male suffrage in 1890, particularly in the big cities.<sup>77</sup> Certainly in Madrid, Bilbao, Valencia or Santander a significant element of electoral competition developed. This was absent in the regimes of Rosas and Díaz.

Electoral competition was also notable in the Argentine elections after the fall of Rosas. Until 1880, the predominant feature of the system in post-Rosas Argentina seemed to have been violence and intimidation rather than electoral fraud.<sup>78</sup> The presidential campaign of 1880 developed under a tense, ‘electrifying atmosphere’, where the various electoral clubs were organised around gun clubs, and finally evolved into an open civil conflict.<sup>79</sup> It is possible that such violent experiences might have later motivated the arrangement of electoral pacts among political leaders to avoid competition, as was agreed between the *Roquista* and *Mitrista* forces in 1898.<sup>80</sup> Electoral competition, however, intensified after the 1890s, particularly in Buenos Aires. There is no doubt that fraud played a major role, but it was not just a simple product of government manufacture.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Frías, *Liberalismo y republicanismo en el alto Aragón*, p. 259.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, specially the chapter entitled ‘Corrupción o padronazgo?’, pp. 243–64.

<sup>77</sup> Alicia Yanini, ‘La manipulación electoral en España: sufragio universal y participación ciudadana, 1891–1923’, in Tussell (ed.), *El sufragio universal*, pp. 99–114. For an alternative view, see Carlos Dardé, ‘El sufragio universal en España: causas y efectos’, *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Historia Contemporánea*, 7 (1989–90), pp. 85–100.

<sup>78</sup> See Sábato, *La política en las calles*, pp. 84, 86 and 90.

<sup>79</sup> This campaign, and the violence that went with it, is examined in detailed in Lía E. M. Sanucci, *La renovación presidencial de 1880* (Buenos Aires, 1959). On violent electoral practices, see also Sábato and Palti, ‘¿Quién votaba en Buenos Aires?’.

<sup>80</sup> Cullen, ‘Electoral Practices in Argentina’, p. 110. On the frequent lack of necessity of an electoral campaign in Argentina, see also Malamud, *Partidos políticos y elecciones*, p. 193.

Electoral fraud involved a long procedure, open to subtle and not so subtle machinations, which started with the formation of the electoral register and followed a set of identifiable steps, including ‘tricks’ to register the largest number of voters, to influence the composition of electoral boards and the selection of juries at the polling station, to mobilise the largest number of voters on the polling days, to invalidate – when convenient – certain electoral tables, and of course to stuff the ballot box.<sup>81</sup> Both the government and the opposition, as Malamud and Sábato have shown, resorted to all those electoral ‘tricks’.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, by the turn of the century, electoral results had ceased to be guaranteed in advance. In 1904, Roca acknowledged that elections had become ‘unpredictable’.<sup>83</sup> The government had to face an active opposition. In 1911, Lisandro de la Torre continued to complain about his confrontations with ‘agents of the governments’ who interfered with the electoral process; justices of the peace who took away the *libretas cívicas* from the electors; and chiefs of police who intimidated the voters.<sup>84</sup> What characterised the Argentine scene at the eve of the 1912 electoral reforms were the profound socio-economic changes that the country had undergone during the previous decades, changes which gradually undermined the capacity of governments to manipulate the electoral process.

The Chilean experience offers yet another set of *gobierno elector* which, although it bore some resemblance to the cases just described in Spain and Argentina, differed substantially from them. Here ‘la venia del ejecutivo’ (literally the permission of the executive) was the expression used to refer to the dominant power of presidents over the elections during the regime that grew out of the 1833 constitution. Governmental interference was a central feature of the system. As has been observed for eighteenth-century England, not all government intervention was in itself corrupt. Moreover, the elections in Chile were not just ‘written’, as Castelar had denounced those of Spain. The levels of intimidation and coercion so notable in Argentina seem to have had few parallels in Chile. Electoral fraud of course took place. The irregularities that stood out were probably those procedural ‘tricks’ used to control access to the polls, as in late nineteenth-century Argentina.<sup>85</sup> Yet from the early post independence period, the Chilean system developed higher levels of electoral competition than in both Spain and Argentina. The power of the president

<sup>81</sup> See Botana, *El orden conservador*, pp. 177–8.

<sup>82</sup> Malamud, *Partidos políticos y elecciones*, p. 200; and Sábato, *La política en las calles*, p. 91.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Cullen, ‘Electoral Practices in Argentina’, pp. 243 and 249.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Malamud, *Partidos políticos y elecciones*, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> For further emphasis on this point, see Valenzuela, ‘Building Aspects of Democracy Before Democracy’, p. 248.

was never unlimited, and from the mid-nineteenth-century onwards was further constrained. Valenzuela has underlined precisely the need to appreciate more fully the limitations of those who exercised electoral influence. The Ministers of the Interior did take the trouble to consult the opinion of the municipalities when selecting the candidates. Official lists were thus often heterogeneous and the victory of the government at elections was not always predetermined. Occasionally, as happened in 1849, the opposition made significant gains. All these complexities became even more characteristic of the system after the reforms of 1874, and the presidents lost most of their power to interfere in the electoral process after the revolution of 1891. Fraud did not disappear; rather its locus now shifted to the municipality, where it was engaged in by all parties involved in electoral contests. Fraud had ceased to be the major cause of concern, which was now the purchase of votes. In any case, by 1920 the level of electoral irregularities did not define the nature of a system whose long electoral traditions appeared then to be firmly rooted.

There is also a long history of denunciation of electoral fraud in another Latin American experience worth examining: Colombia. At first sight, it may be tempting to jump to the conclusion that Colombia replicated the Spanish model of elections during the Restoration, that elections there were also 'written' by the governments. In 1869, the president of the state of Magdalena complained that 'in most towns there are no elections but 'rejestros' [the official return of the votes], and the ['rejestros' from the] most miserable and distant villages make the votes from the cities meaningless'.<sup>86</sup> However, looking at the overall picture from a long term perspective, such problems were more local than national, neither necessarily controlled by the capital, nor exclusively orchestrated by the authorities. The Chilean 'venia del ejecutivo' met with serious resistance in Colombia. Since as early as 1836, when public support from President Santander to the candidacy of General Obando had the effect of reversing the fortunes of his campaign, being perceived as an official candidate was often more a burden than an asset. As the *Diario de Cundinamarca* warned in 1875, candidates imposed by the government did not generally prevail in Colombia:

... In a country like ours; that is to say, in a country where the number of citizens who intervene in public affairs is so significant, candidates cannot be imposed. And they cannot be imposed because there is no power to do so; and neither the parties, nor the factions, nor the ... individuals would allow it now, as they have never allowed in the past.

Elections in Colombia are a real struggle: and a terrible struggle in various

<sup>86</sup> H. Vengochea, *Mensaje que el Presidente del Estado S. del Magdalena dirige a la Asamblea Legislativa* (Santa Marta, 1869), p. 17.

forms: the press, agitation, intrigues, letters, bribery, arms, incentives, revenge, politics, anger and treachery ...<sup>87</sup>

It is possible to trace the highly competitive atmosphere of Colombian elections after 1836. In such a contested field, as a leaflet of 1836 observed, each party used ‘every possible trick to gain victory; the opposition and the government, all resorted to condemned weapons: they all seduced, flattered, attracted, intimidated, and put into practice whatever means they had to hand, following their enthusiasm or their evil nature’.<sup>88</sup> One of those weapons was fraud. The denunciation of fraud, however, was also a tool commonly employed in fighting an election. Uncontested electoral results were rare. ‘Once the polls were closed (and the votes were counted), as has always happened’, observed the president of Bolívar in 1871, ‘each defeated faction has attributed its failure to fraud committed by its opponent’.<sup>89</sup>

It is doubtful that fraud was always the major determinant of electoral results. No one has yet studied in detail the various types of fraud that were denounced in Colombia, as Iván Molina and Fabrice Lehoucq have done for Costa Rica, or René Millar for Chile. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the nature of electoral fraud in Colombia embraced a combination of ‘artimañas’ (tricks), used by all parties throughout the electoral process, such as those described above for Argentina. Next to electoral fraud and the denunciation of fraud, parties also displayed, as already suggested, a range of legitimate tactics to win over the favour of the electorate. Under these circumstances, fraud and its denunciation were elements among the many factors conditioning electoral competition. That electoral competition was usually intense was reflected in the general uncertainty which accompanied the polls: until the votes were finally counted, ‘all the parties considered themselves to be the winners’. From early on after independence, Colombians developed a litigious electoral culture. ‘Electoral laws’ according to the Minister of the Interior in 1839, ‘were subject to the scrutiny of thousands of individuals, who study and examine them with a persistence that increases every year’.<sup>90</sup> The electoral process was always questioned. With a frequency not appreciated by modern scholarship, the power of electoral authorities

<sup>87</sup> ‘Candidaturas oficiales’, *Diario de Cundinamarca*, 1 February 1875. On the conflicts unleashed by the official backing of a presidential candidate in 1875, see Posada-Carbó, ‘Elections and Civil Wars in Nineteenth-Century Colombia: the 1875 Presidential Campaign’, *JLAS* (October 1994).

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in J. J. Guerra, *Viceversas liberales* (Bogotá, 1923), p. 591.

<sup>89</sup> R. Santodomingo Vila, *Informe del Presidente Constitucional del Estado de Bolívar a la Asamblea Legislativa* (Cartagena, 1871), p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> *Exposición del Secretario de estado, en el despacho del Interior I de Relaciones Exteriores del Gobierno de la Nueva Granada al Congreso constitucional* (Bogotá, 1839), p. 3.

– the control of electoral juries over the drawing up of the rolls, the overseeing of the act of voting, and the counting of the votes – was not only independent from the government but also entered into conflict with the executive. Local officials often complained of the many abuses beyond their control committed by the electoral authorities.<sup>91</sup>

This cursory survey is not intended to be conclusive. Nor does it pretend to minimise the problem of electoral fraud in Colombia. Any political history of the republic would have to make an obligatory reference to the infamous 1904 Registro de Padilla – a classic example of a local election result ‘written’ by a cacique, which determined the result of a national presidential election. Indeed the history of electoral fraud may be a fertile field for the picaresque genre, in Colombia and elsewhere. But a history that restricts its attention to juicy anecdotes of fraud without exploring the wider context in which it occurred, will fall short of explaining the nature of electoral practices and their most singular characteristics. Among the latter in Colombia, I have tried to underline the significance of electoral competition and the limited control that governments had over the process. These two factors ought to be given serious consideration when judging both the extent of fraud and the role it played in the political system.

Thus, between the case of Rosas’ Argentina, where elections were strictly fabricated under dictatorial control, and other cases where electoral fraud could be defined as an intricate game of tricks open to all contestants, it is possible to identify different levels of corrupt practice which merit further individual attention. No one disputes that governments interfered in elections. However, as all the experiences reviewed above suggest – be they eighteenth-century England or nineteenth-century Spain, Mexico, Chile, Argentina or Colombia – a simple notion of *gobiernos electores* is not much help. It tells us little about the nature and degree of governmental intervention, the development of electoral behaviour, the extent of electoral corruption, or the final meaning of the practices of suffrage. Not only do we need to define and distinguish between the various national histories, but we must also consider the relative significance of the different practices, and the regional variations that developed within each country over the years.

This analysis has so far been centred on dispelling the dominant notion that elections were controlled, and therefore corrupted, by governments.

<sup>91</sup> For more on these points, see my essay: ‘Limits of Power: Elections under the Conservative Hegemony in Colombia’, *H.A.H.R.*, 77:2 (May 1997), pp. 262–72; and ‘Fraudes al sufragio: introducción a la historia de las reformas electorales en Colombia, 1830–1930’, in Carlos Malamud (ed.), *Reformas electorales en España y América Latina, 1880–1930* (Mexico, forthcoming).

By the mid-nineteenth-century in England the major concern over electoral corruption was not governmental manipulation but the bribing of voters by individual candidates. Similarly in Chile, at the turn of the century, some politicians perceived that governmental intervention had been replaced by ‘cohecho’, the purchase of votes, and that money had become ‘an essential factor in the pseudo-manifestation of the popular will’.<sup>92</sup> Let me then conclude this section with a brief look at another expression of electoral corruption: the venality of voters as manifested in England and Chile.

Purchasing votes was of course endemic in ancient Rome, particularly during the late republic.<sup>93</sup> The abundance of allegations of bribery, however, does not appear to be matched by sufficient and detailed information about its recurrence. Andrew Lintott has thought it appropriate to draw comparisons, and interpret the phenomenon through the analysis of the problem in Britain, where a long history of electoral bribery offers an excellent base for comparative analysis. In some English boroughs, ‘gold had been freely distributed from time immemorial’ for the purpose of buying votes.<sup>94</sup> According to Elliot, ‘it was not until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ... that votes were first bought at elections’.<sup>95</sup> The practice continued throughout the nineteenth-century. It was most prominent and long lasting in the rotten boroughs, Yarmouth being a classical reference in any study on the history of electoral bribery. Yet in towns such as Ipswich, Worcester, Gloucester, or Chester, corruption was still widespread in 1880, ‘and the political leaders of both sides were deeply involved’.<sup>96</sup> In Chile, evidence exists of vote-buying as early as the elections of 1829, as recorded in José Zapiola’s memoirs. In 1851, a US officer vividly described how votes were purchased and at what prices during the election of that year.<sup>97</sup> After 1891, and during a period when

<sup>92</sup> Rivas Vicuña, *Historia política y parlamentaria de Chile*, vol. 1, p. 170.

<sup>93</sup> For a description of the electoral process, see Lily Ross Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1984, first published in 1949), chapter III, ‘Delivering the vote’, pp. 50–75. For more recent interpretation on electoral bribery, see Fergus Millar, *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (Ann Arbor, 1998), pp. 68–69; and, in particular, Andrew Lintott, ‘Electoral Bribery in the Roman Republic’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXX (1990), pp. 1–16.

<sup>94</sup> Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p. 266. See also, Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales*; O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Election*; and Pinto-Duschinsky, *British Political Finance*, pp. 15–30.

<sup>95</sup> Elliot, *Thoughts on Bribery and Corruption at Elections*, p. 12.

<sup>96</sup> Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p. 267.

<sup>97</sup> José Zapiola, *Recuerdos de treinta años* (Buenos Aires and Santiago, 1974), p. 258; and Liut. J. M. Gills, *The US Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere during the years 1849–52* (Washington, 1854), pp. 307–8. I thank Alan Angell for calling my attention to the existence of this interesting document.

a parliamentary regime prevailed in Chile, *cobecho* seems to have become generalised. Julio Heise referred to the practice as a ‘system used by absolutely all parties’. He also noted that the Chileans had followed the French and Italian models of using a so-called ‘sobre brujo’ to guarantee that the voters would fulfil their part of the bargain. They also resorted to the simpler formula of cutting banknotes in half: the voter would only receive the second half after depositing the ballot in the urn.<sup>98</sup> The cost of the presidential campaigns of 1915 and 1920 – in which most of the money was allegedly spent on bribing voters – seems to have been exceptionally high.<sup>99</sup>

The bribing of the electorate, in England and Chile and wherever the practice took root, should be distinguished from the other expressions of electoral corruption examined in this article. Paying for the vote was commonly demanded by the electors rather than imposed by the candidates or parties. As Lewis Namier observed, ‘political bullying starts usually from above, the demands for benefits from below’.<sup>100</sup> Voters often resented the lack of lavish expenditure at election time. As a Chilean labourer complained to Rivas Vicuña, ‘the *futres* (the patrons) agreed among themselves, and they scarcely gave us an *empanada* (a pasty) and one peso, while they pocketed the money that the government sent for the elections’.<sup>101</sup> In some cases, all parties in competition were involved in purchasing votes. Under these circumstances, it is relevant to ask to what extent electoral bribery distorted the political wishes of voters. The experience of Yarmouth illustrates this point. Here was a town ‘quite unmistakably and thoroughly corrupt’, in the words of John A. Philip.<sup>102</sup> In the late 1830s and early 1840s, ‘virtually every man asked for and expected the money’. Furthermore, since all parties paid similar amounts of money, electors preserved their freedom of choice. Thus Philips concludes, Yarmouth’s all too evident corruption reveals its ‘relative insignificance’, since ‘wholesale bribery is ineffective bribery ...’, more than that, it is ‘almost entirely meaningless’.<sup>103</sup> Similarly in Chile, as Valenzuela has suggested, the fact that some electors sold their votes should not imply that they were not voting for the party of their choice. Here again most parties were involved in *cobecho*. There was no

<sup>98</sup> See Heise, *El período parlamentario*, vol. II, p. 228.

<sup>99</sup> See Rivas Vicuña’s memoirs, *Historia política y parlamentaria de Chile*, p. 579. See also the analysis by Millar, *La elección presidencial de 1920*, pp. 147–8, 163, 168.

<sup>100</sup> L. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London, 1965, first ed., 1929), p. 104.

<sup>101</sup> Rivas Vicuña, *Historia política y parlamentaria*, vol. 1, p. 178.

<sup>102</sup> John A. Philip, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs. English Electoral Behaviour, 1818–1841* (Oxford, 1992), p. 203.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203–9.

contradiction in the voters' minds to taking the money and still voting as they pleased.<sup>104</sup> Electoral bribery had, therefore, two sides. Lintott has rightly observed how it could have a corrupting influence on the electoral system, derived from mutual perceptions of illegitimacy in the minds of both candidates and voters. But, in certain conditions, electoral bribery also had a 'liberating' effect. It made elections 'less predictable'. Above all, it helped to break traditional ties of deference and dependence.<sup>105</sup> As an Argentine political leader expressed it in 1906: 'no hay voto más libre que el que se vende'.<sup>106</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In 1911, the Interior Minister of Argentina, I. Gómez, described the history of suffrage in his country as a process evolving from successive corrupt practices: '... we have had bloody elections, during a time when the people still had an interest in going to the polls ...; and then fraudulent manoeuvres at the polls followed; afterwards these were replaced by venality'.<sup>107</sup> Violence, fraud and bribery: all these expressions of electoral corruption were also present in other countries where electoral democracy developed – both in Europe and Latin America. However, the process was far from following the linear route described by Minister Gómez. Violence, fraud and bribery often co-existed, although their occurrence may have been more intense in some constituencies than in others. In any case, the universality of the phenomenon is not in doubt, as the evidence presented in this article clearly shows. Hence the significance of exploring further and systematically the impact of corrupt electoral practices on the meaning of the vote, and the role they had in the development of democracy itself.<sup>108</sup>

Electoral corruption was never a unique Latin American phenomenon. The phenomenon developed in the region at different rates and under different circumstances. Significant national variations mean that any

<sup>104</sup> See Valenzuela, 'La ley electoral de 1890', pp. 287–89. Although from a different perspective than Valenzuela's, Heise has also suggested that the practice of *cobeco* did not contradict the will of the electorate. See his *El período parlamentario*, vol. 2, pp. 229–30.

<sup>105</sup> On these points, see Lintott, 'Electoral Bribery in the Roman Republic', pp. 1, 4, 13–4.

<sup>106</sup> 'There is no freer vote than the one that is sold' (Pellegrini), quoted in Botana, *El orden conservador*, p. 182. <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175–6.

<sup>108</sup> For an interesting and perceptive discussion of some aspects of electoral corruption and the origins of democracy, see Varela Ortega, 'Orígenes y desarrollo de las democracias'. Varela Ortega suggests approaching the subject from two angles: the distribution of power and the economy of politics. The question is, in his view, why and when some countries managed to develop 'a market of the public sphere'.

attempt at generalising soon runs into difficulties. Common to the whole region, perhaps, was the abrupt adoption of the suffrage, under a relatively wide franchise, during the first decades of the nineteenth-century. Most countries subsequently experienced a rapid expansion of the electorate. For the newly organised independent states, the sudden emergence of an electorate of substantial size posed serious challenges, the dimensions of which have not been properly assessed by modern scholarship.<sup>109</sup> The control of this electorate was not a simple operation. Neither was it a settled process that remained unchanged throughout the century. What was evident in some cases was the lack of control over the electorate, and whatever control there was, this was not always unconditional. Moreover, it does not seem that governmental control was the generalised and defining feature of Latin American elections. These were often better defined by their level of conflict than by the attempts at controlling them. This was the case of Mexico before Díaz consolidated his power.<sup>110</sup> Any effective, lasting control would have required state resources that were lacking. In nineteenth-century Peru, according to Gabriella Chiaramonti, the state for the most part did not have the capacity to register its population, or to exercise control over its territory. Similarly, Alberto Navas Blanco has observed how there was no national structure that could facilitate the manipulation of the electoral processes during the first half of the nineteenth-century in Venezuela.<sup>111</sup> The elections of 1834–35 and 1846, in particular, were examples of a ‘precarious equilibrium, where there was no firm control over the electorate by any of the parties in dispute’. A study of the ‘corruption of suffrage’ in the region would ignore at its peril the existence of much electoral conflict, which often developed into genuine electoral competition, conditioning changes in the nature of corrupt practices themselves, or diminishing their significance or even making them irrelevant.

This article also suggests that there is a need to distinguish between the different practices that are often lumped together under the general

<sup>109</sup> Some of the observations made by J. H. Plumb regarding the problems that a growing electorate posed to the political stability of England may be also relevant for Latin America. See his *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (Penguin, 1967). See also my ‘Introduction’, in *Elections Before Democracy*.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Silvia M. Arrom, ‘Popular Politics in Mexico City: the Parian Riot, 1828’, in Arrom and Servando Ortoll, *Riots in the Cities. Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765–1910* (Wilmington, 1996), pp. 71–98; Michael P. Costeloe, ‘General versus Politicians: Santa Anna and the 1842 Congressional Elections in Mexico’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 8:2 (1989), 257–74, and Perry, *Juárez y Díaz*.

<sup>111</sup> See Chiaramonti, ‘Andes o nación’, p. 329; and A. Navas Blanco, *Las elecciones presidenciales en Venezuela del siglo XIX, 1830–1854* (Caracas, 1993), pp. 189–90.

heading of ‘electoral corruption’. Attitudes of deference, traditional patronage and clientelism should not in themselves be treated as corrupt. Moreover, for analytical purposes they pose different questions than those raised by attempts to influence the electorate through physical intimidation or the distortion of electoral results through the falsification of the register, or the stuffing of the ballot box. Again not all government influence over the electoral process was corrupt by definition, although the legislation of some countries made it clear – from very early on – that those in positions of authority were forbidden even to suggest for whom the electors should vote.<sup>112</sup> The different levels of government intervention must of course be taken into consideration when judging the extent to which the wishes of electors were distorted. Electoral fraud merits special attention. As this article has shown, this was not exclusively carried out by governments. What was generally labelled as ‘electoral fraud’ included a wide range of practices, from the crude fabrication of the results to a whole set of tricks aimed at outmanoeuvring the opposing party. Further studies, such as those of Iván Molina and Fabrice Lehoucq – which attempt to quantify, if possible, the nature and rhythm of fraud – will certainly help us appreciate both the magnitude of electoral corruption and the changing patterns of electoral behaviour. If electoral fraud was a widespread practice used by all parties, the question is not so much whether or not fraud should be considered ‘corrupt’, which of course it was, but whether – as in the case of wholesale bribery – it was effective or relevant. In other words, fraud was not always the determinant of electoral results. Indeed fraud interacted with the development of electoral competition.

In the face of widespread ‘electoral corruption’ in Latin America, some historians have suggested that these practices should therefore not be treated as ‘corrupt’. Such an assumption, it is said, would be to apply a Western European yardstick to a different reality, or to impose retrospectively a definition peculiar to twentieth-century political science.<sup>113</sup> However, contemporaries themselves used the term. That these practices were widespread does not mean that they were not considered at the time to be a deviation from an ideal type of behaviour, or that they should not be treated as such by historians.<sup>114</sup> Legislators often explicitly

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, art 113 of the Colombian electoral law of 1856, in *Ley, de 18 de junio de 1856 sobre elecciones* (Bogotá, 1856), p. 14.

<sup>113</sup> See comments by Antonio Annino and Raffaele Romaneli, in ‘Premessa’, *Quaderni Storici*, 69 (December 1988), pp. 675–6 and 999; Sábato (ed.), *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones*, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> The argument that electoral irregularities should not be treated as corrupt because they were ‘normal behaviour’ runs the risk of treating such conditions as ‘stable, unalterable features of a “political culture”’. The perceptive observations by Carl J.

defined what was regarded as unacceptable electoral conduct; the law included precise sanctions – as shown, for example, by the Colombian electoral codes of 1856 and 1888 – for those who committed fraud.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, to treat all electoral irregularities as ‘normal’ would not be enlightening. It would not help us to understand why at any one time there were significant differences in the patterns of electoral behaviour, not only from country to country but also from province to province, and even from village to village. Neither would it help us to understand how it was possible for electoral customs to change over the years. Again, not all electoral corruption can be reduced to problems of ‘discourse’. Denunciation of fraud were of course used as a political weapon, which suggests caution in the assessment of fraud, which in some cases might have been more apparent than real. But this is precisely one of the challenges a new electoral history of Latin America has to meet: to determine the level and significance of electoral corruption. How much corruption there was in an election probably made a vital difference – whether or not, for example, the results were finally accepted by the parties or challenged by armed rebellion. Above all, it is important to assess the different forms and levels of electoral corruption and the extent to which they affected democratic development in the various countries of Latin America.

‘An Election’ is the general title that William Hogarth gave to his famous series of paintings. Hogarth depicted in them various aspects of the 1784 general election in Oxfordshire.<sup>116</sup> Four images set the scene. The first shows the electors drinking, eating and being entertained at the expense of the candidates. The second, ‘canvassing for votes’, is a picture of electoral bribery: a voter sees no problem in taking money from two different electoral agents. In the third, there is visible confusion around the polling station; some people try to vote against a background of apparent chaos, possibly of open fighting among opponents, preventing each other from casting their vote. ‘Chairing the member’ is the last in the series, one of celebration in an atmosphere of jubilation coloured by

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Friederich on the general problem of corruption could be applied to electoral corruption. See *The Pathology of Politics. Violence, Betrayal, Corruption, Secrecy and Propaganda* (New York and London, 1972), pp. 127–32, 255, note 25.

<sup>115</sup> In addition to *Lei, de 18 de junio de 1856*, see Centro Liberal (ed.), *Disposiciones vigentes sobre elecciones* (Bogotá, 1891), pp. 27–34, the section on ‘penas’ of the 1888 law include almost 40 articles. This evidence contradicts Annino’s assertion that in spite of the rhetoric of fraud there was no legislation against fraud in the region. See his introduction to *Historia de las elecciones*, p. 15. On the legislation on fraud in Costa Rica, see the work of Molina and Lehoucq.

<sup>116</sup> These paintings are at Sir John Soane’s Museum in London. I have also based my observations on Christina Scull, *The Soane Hogarths* (London, 1991), pp. 32–45.

violence. ‘An Election’ has been called Hogarth’s ‘most bitter comment on human folly’,<sup>117</sup> a depiction of political behaviour that, in the artist’s eyes, could only be viewed as despicable.

There were few alternatives. In their modern form, democracies could hardly have all opted for the ancient principle of selection by lot – closer to the ideal of equality.<sup>118</sup> Instead, modern democracies were identified with elections as the central institution of representative government. There were many obstacles in the way of elections becoming commonly accepted as the basis of legitimate authority, including the establishment of neutral institutions that could guarantee the fairness of a process that by its nature encouraged struggle and competition. There is something anachronistic, and even naïve, about those who persist in looking at elections in the past merely as faithful or unfaithful expressions of the popular will. In their origins and development, elections could not have escaped from their natural and social ills, as portrayed in Hogarth’s paintings. Elections were largely defined by those features singled out by the *Diario de Cundinamarca*: ‘intrigue’, ‘infighting’, ‘unrest’, ‘bribery’, ‘treachery’.<sup>119</sup> By the mid-nineteenth-century, such a discouraging picture was for some a reason to stay away from the polls. Others, such as the Colombian Liberal leader Manuel Murillo Toro,<sup>121</sup> saw them as a painful but inevitable learning process which societies had to undergo.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>118</sup> See on this point Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>119</sup> For full reference, see note above.

<sup>120</sup> G. Murillo Toro, ‘El sufragio universal’, in G. España (ed.), *Los radicales del siglo XIX. Escritos políticos* (Bogotá, 1984), pp. 131–40.