

**BUILDING ASPECTS OF DEMOCRACY BEFORE DEMOCRACY:
ELECTORAL PRACTICES IN NINETEENTH CENTURY CHILE**

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a detailed analysis of electoral practices in nineteenth-century Chile. It argues that such elections have been largely misunderstood in Chilean historiography, given the fact that the political system has been viewed simply as a tool in the hands of the rich. Indeed, the existence of income requirements in order to register to vote has even led analysts to assume that only wealthy males actually voted. By contrast, this paper shows that a majority of the voting public in the electoral processes that occurred every three years was drawn from the middle-lower to lower strata of society. The politicization of artisans and other working-class groups therefore began early in the nation's history. Moreover, the involvement of people in the electoral politics of the time greatly exceeded the numbers of men who actually voted. As such, the elections permitted the formation of a considerable degree of loyalty within the population at large for the emerging parties, which helps explain their strength in the Chilean case. The nineteenth century's electoral practices also created a competitive and highly militant electoral culture that affected the conduct of elections well into the twentieth century, i.e., even after crucial transformations in the early 1890s permitted them to become a vehicle for the realization of Chilean democracy.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un análisis detallado de las prácticas electorales en Chile durante el siglo diecinueve. En él se sostiene que tales elecciones han sido largamente malinterpretadas en la historiografía chilena, dado que el sistema político ha sido visto simplemente como una herramienta en manos de los ricos. En efecto, la existencia de requisitos de ingreso para registrarse para votar ha llevado a los analistas aún a suponer que sólo las personas ricas del sexo masculino realmente votaban. En contraste, este artículo muestra que la mayoría del público votante en los procesos electorales que ocurrían cada tres años provenía de estratos medio-bajos a bajos de la sociedad. En consecuencia, la politización de los artesanos y otros grupos de la clase trabajadora comenzó temprano en la historia nacional. Más aún, la participación de la gente en la política electoral de la época excedía grandemente el número de hombres que de hecho votaban. Las elecciones, como tales, permitieron la formación de un considerable grado de lealtad en la población en general hacia los partidos emergentes; lo cual ayuda a explicar la fuerza de éstos últimos en el caso chileno. Las prácticas electorales del siglo diecinueve también crearon una cultura electoral competitiva y altamente militante que afectó la conducta de las elecciones bien entrado el siglo veinte; esto es, aún después de las cruciales transformaciones de los primeros 1890s esta cultura permitió que las elecciones devinieran en vehículo de realización de la democracia chilena.

At least once every three years, beginning in 1823 and unfailingly except for the 1891 presidential contest, Chilean voters were summoned to the polls for presidential, congressional, and/or municipal elections throughout the nineteenth century. Congressional and municipal elections were held every three years and presidential ones every five. With so many elections there should be a rich historiographic tradition devoted to them, especially since they left a considerable statistical and documentary trail. However, they have only recently become the object of study.¹ Instead of detailed empirical work on the subject, historians since the 1940s have simply enveloped the nineteenth century's electoral processes in a set of enduring but fundamentally misleading and even inaccurate notions that have been taken as fact, thereby stifling further research. Consequently, the early evolution of Chilean political participation and democratization has been very poorly understood.

The misleading notions can be stated succinctly in three points. First, the Constitution of 1833—the first to have more than an ephemeral application—solidified the political domination of the most traditional landed upper class of colonial origin; hence, it established income and property requirements that restricted voting rights, with some exceptions, to relatively wealthy men. Second, the expansion of suffrage to all literate males in 1874 was the product of the rise of financial, commercial, industrial, and mining interests that forged an alliance with urban professional and other middle-class groups in an attempt to wrest political power away from the landowners. The electoral reform was championed primarily by the Radical Party, the political expression of the new classes formed by the nation's economic development. And third, despite opposition efforts, nineteenth-century elections were nonetheless quite meaningless and unimportant: until 1894 the government-supported candidates always won, and given the small numbers of voters the whole electoral process had virtually no impact on the political inclinations of the broad masses. The nation had an 'oligarchic', 'aristocratic', or 'patrician' political and electoral system.²

¹ Germán Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile y su evolución electoral (desde 1810 a 1992)* (Santiago, 1992), is the first book offering a comprehensive view of Chilean elections since the beginning. J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma: La expansión del sufragio en Chile* (Buenos Aires, 1985), is the first work that analyses nineteenth-century electoral politics and their contribution to Chilean democratization.

² For a sample of the many sources reflecting these points see Ricardo Donoso, *Desarrollo político y social de Chile desde la Constitución de 1833* (Santiago, 1942), 69; Julio César Jobet, *Ensayo crítico del desarrollo económico-social de Chile* (Santiago, 1955), 40; Hernán Ramírez Necochea, *Historia del movimiento obrero en Chile. Antecedentes, siglo XIX* (Santiago, 1956), 76–77; Julio Heise González, *150 años de evolución institucional* (Santiago, 1960), 64; Nibert Lechner, *La democracia en Chile* (Buenos Aires, 1970), 35; Luis Vitale, *Interpretación marxista de la historia de Chile. Ascenso y declinación de la burguesía minera: De Pérez a Balmaceda*

While it is true that the Constitution of 1833 required prospective voters to have certain property, income, or professional qualifications, this did not mean in practice—contrary to the first notion—that only rich property owners were able to vote. In fact, as this paper will show, a majority of the electorate during the heyday of the ‘Conservative Republic’ (1830–71) that was supposedly dominated by landed families of colonial origin was composed of men of middle-lower- to lower-class background, including public employees. The law specifying the *censitaire* provisions established income levels that could be met by artisans, most if not all adult male salaried workers and miners, and petty merchants. Moreover, all veterans of the wars of independence were exempted from having to show proof of income as well as from the literacy requirement.

As indicated by the second notion, the Radical Party was indeed in favor of most provisions of the 1874 electoral reform. But this is only a half-truth, because the Conservative Party, the one that authors have consistently identified with the wealthy land-holding families of aristocratic lineage, was also in favor of the reform. Both parties disagreed sharply over every issue connected somehow to church/state relations, but they forged a short-lived coalition of mutual convenience in congress after 1872 to force the approval of an electoral reform in order to curtail the power of the government, then in the hands of the Liberals, to determine the outcome of elections. And contrary to what might be expected after reading the above-quoted literature, the key phrase that expanded the numbers of voters was proposed by Zorobabel Rodríguez, a deputy of the Conservative—not the Radical—Party.¹ It stipulated that “it is presumed by right that whoever can read and write has the income that the law requires.”¹

(1861–91) (Frankfurt, 1975), 86–87; François-Xavier Guerra, “Les avatars de la représentation au XIX^e siècle” in Georges Couffignal, *Réinventer la démocratie: Le défi latino-américain* (Paris, 1992), 52–53. Urzúa Valenzuela, 72, 87, 185, 233, firmly reasserts the first two premises, although he also provides evidence that contradicts the first one (see 62, for example).

There are many differences among these authors on matters of interpretation that go beyond the above noted consensus. One of the main disagreements lies in the assessment of the significance of the 1874 reforms for the land-holding groups. The extreme positions are given by Ricardo Donoso, who asserts that the reforms “finally broke the political power of the land holding oligarchy,” and by Norbert Lechner and Luis Vitale, who think that at best the reforms initiated a new phase of domination by a transformed and broader based oligarchy; *ibid.*

A revisionist view is contained in J.S. Valenzuela.

¹ See *Boletín de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, Ordinary Session of 16 June 1872, 24, for Rodríguez’ first suggestion of the key phrase.

Although the role of the Conservatives in this crucial aspect of the electoral reform has been documented for the first time in J.S. Valenzuela, some prior sources have mentioned in passing that the Conservatives played a part in pressing for the approval of unspecified elements in the electoral law of 1874. For example, among the historians mentioned in footnote 2, Ricardo Donoso, in his *Las ideas políticas en Chile* (Santiago, 1967), 303, notes the fact that “Radicals and Conservatives” defended certain aspects of the legislation against the opinion of the government.

Turning to the third notion, it is true that the government's official lists of candidates usually won the elections, often by resorting to unfair procedures. However, opposition leaders did run for the presidency, even if unsuccessfully, and opposition candidacies did emerge in many districts or communes in congressional and municipal elections, winning in at least several places in most instances. Thus, as Urzúa Valenzuela notes forcefully, oppositions were an ever present ingredient in Chile's nineteenth-century politics.² And although the numbers of voters was indeed relatively small (a nineteenth-century maximum of 7% of the total population, about 30% of adult males—or close to 150,000 individuals—was registered to vote in 1878),³ political divisions and loyalties did extend to a much broader audience in the national society. Elections were not only a concern of those who voted; people who were not registered voters, including many women, participated all the same in the process by attempting to secure its fairness, by protecting the urns, by celebrating the candidates' victories or lamenting their loss, by propagandizing in their favor, or by writing in the partisan press for or against specific candidates. As many of the most disputed issues of the day were of concern to the Church—be they control over education, the rights of religious dissidents, or the scope of government versus ecclesiastical

However, of the two parties, the Conservatives were the most strongly in favor of reforming the whole electoral system. While the Radicals supported Rodríguez's phrase that expanded the size of the electorate, they broke with the Conservatives when it came to changing the vote-counting procedures. The government Liberals were adamantly opposed to the Conservatives' attempt to institute the cumulative vote in all elections. Hence, they offered the Radicals a position in the cabinet if they did not support the Conservatives on this issue. The Radicals accepted the deal, and the cumulative voting system was adopted only for Deputy elections. A majority list system was retained for senators and for the presidential electoral college, while an incomplete list system reserving one-third of the seats on municipal councils for the runner-up list was adopted for local government elections. See J.S. Valenzuela, 104–5. The new government coalition between Radicals and Liberals was viewed as a sensational development at the time. For details see Francisco Encina, *Historia de Chile* (Santiago, 1950), vol. XV, 384–87.

¹ The phrase was contained at the end of Article 16 of the 1874 electoral law. The constitution required revisions of the electoral law every ten years in order to set the income and property qualification levels. Article 16 was the key article that fulfilled this requirement. Chile, *Boletín de leyes y decretos del gobierno*, vol. XLII, no. 11 (November 1874), 327.

² Urzúa Valenzuela, 123.

³ See J.S. Valenzuela, 150, for figures regarding the size of the electorate from 1846 to 1912. The adult male literacy rate in the late 1870s was about 35%.

The numbers of voters declined from these levels in the early 1880s because the Conservative party called on its voters to abstain from voting in the presidential elections and in most districts as a form of protest. The numbers of registrants and of voters declined further in 1885 and did not recover significantly in 1888, probably because there was little interest in participating in elections in which the only opposition force was the Conservatives. Liberals, Nationals, and Radicals were all part of the governing alliance during the decade. The 1880s are not, therefore, the best decade to assess the extent of voter participation in the late nineteenth century. However, this is what Guerra, 52, does. He is also incorrect in asserting that only 5% of the "adult male population" voted in 1885, because that is the percentage of registered voters over the *total* population that year.

authority—the pulpit was a powerful source to crystallize political identities, and it generated an anticlerical reaction. The Liberal, Conservative, and Radical Parties emerged from these conflicts. Even if government interference in the elections before the 1890s made them less than democratic, the subsequent development of Chilean democracy cannot be understood without analyzing such prior elections in detail. Twentieth-century Chilean electoral and party politics evolved from mid-nineteenth-century origins.

This paper contributes to the analysis of Chilean elections in the nineteenth century by examining the mechanics of voter registration, the voting practices on the day of the elections, the changing occupational composition of the electorate, the creation of candidate lists, electoral campaign strategies, and the participation of nonvoters in the electoral contests. The paper refers primarily to the six decades that are framed between two civil wars, those of 1829–30 and of 1891, which altered the shape of the nation's politics. The first one led to the triumph of the centralist forces that dictated the Constitution of 1833, and the second one set virtually all the nation's parties against the President, José Manuel Balmaceda, who was defeated as his term of office ended. At that point the winning coalition ended official government sponsorship of candidates as well as overt government interference in elections.

Unlike nineteenth century elections in Argentina, where the polls were open to all males with Argentinian citizenship, the compilation of a registry of voters was a key step in Chilean electoral procedures from the very beginning. It is the obvious starting point to analyse them.

Electoral Registrations

The Procedures, and Who Controlled Them

After independence, with the exception of a short period in which a system of permanent electoral registries was in force, citizens had to register to vote—or reconfirm their registry—before each electoral year. The registries were opened, with slight variations, in all townships (*comunas*) for four hours a day during the first fifteen days of November; congressional and municipal elections were held in March, and those for presidential electors were held in June. The process of re-registering continuously before each electoral year meant that the rolls were largely free of the names of those who had deceased. In 1888 the voter registry was made valid

for ten years. There was no legal obligation to register to vote.¹ The short period in which the registries were opened diminished the chances that all those who were eligible to vote would make an effort to register, and it enhanced the proportion of registered voters who were part, somehow, of an organized effort to mobilize voters.

Voter registrations were conducted by a 'Qualifying Junta' (*Junta Calificadora*). Upon registration or re-registration, voters were given a small certificate, called 'qualification' (*calificación*), printed by the national government and bearing its seal. On it registry officials wrote the voter's name, the date of registration, the book in which the voter's name and occupation was inscribed, and the number assigned to it in the book. The *calificación* was signed by all seven officials on the junta, but it did not contain the voter's own signature.² Each citizen had to present the *calificación* at the polls on day of the election in order to vote; therefore, it had to be kept in a safe place for months before using it. If it were lost, the municipalities were authorized to grant a substitute form on the basis of the voter registry.

The voter registration lists were checked by a 'Revisory Junta' (*Junta Revisora*). In addition to purging the rolls of irregularities such as duplicate registries, the latter was also empowered to review and resolve any citizen complaints regarding inclusions or exclusions. Its decisions in such cases could be appealed to the courts.³

The members of both juntas were appointed by municipal authorities. Despite the fact that all parties were entitled to send observers to oversee the voter registration process,⁴ opponents of the national governments argued that the juntas did not have the necessary impartiality to exercise their functions and that the process itself as a result contained many irregularities. Indeed, municipal councilors were generally beholden to the national government because they were usually elected after being included in official lists of candidates prepared by the minister of the interior. The municipal councils were also presided by the provincial, departmental, or communal representatives of the national executive, namely, either the

¹ The legal obligation to vote in Chile was instituted by a 1962 law. It is only then that the numbers of voters increased sharply; the small size of the voting public was first and foremost due to the apathy of potential voters. There is no space to develop this theme further here.

² For a facsimile of these certificates, see J.S. Valenzuela, 148–49.

³ Judicial records show that such appeals were by no means infrequent. For illustrations of such cases when citizens complained of their exclusion from the registry despite their knowing how to read and write after 1874, see *Gaceta de los Tribunales*, vol. XXXV, no. 1739 (13 May 1876), case nos. 708 and 709; and vol. XXXVII, no. 1860 (14 December 1878), case no. 4692. The judges ruled in their favor.

⁴ A reference to such observers appears in the anticlerical newspaper *El Ferrocarril*, 2 November 1875, 2. The article stresses that they must know people in the district in order to avoid being fooled by the practice of registering the same individuals under different names.

intendants (*intendentes*), governors (*gobernadores*), or subdelegates (*subdelegados*), depending on the size and importance of the commune. The representatives of the executive as well as the councilors could also become candidates in the forthcoming elections, and therefore at least some of those who participated in choosing junta members (or in naming themselves to the juntas, as nothing prevented such self-appointments) could even have a personal, and not only political, stake in registering their partisans quickly while questioning the qualifications of those they knew would be opposing them—assuming the latter bothered to make the effort to register during the short period when this could be done.

Moreover, the composition of the juntas was of such significance that national government authorities (and their provincial representatives) took a direct role in selecting the individuals the municipal councils were to place on them. This is illustrated by the following circular sent in 1839 by an *intendente* to all his subordinate *subdelegados*:

Mister Subdelegate of...

It is extremely necessary to me to have a list of the individuals that you think you can count on to compose the qualifying tables. The appointments must be made by the Municipalities, but as we do not know the local people I would like to ask you to point them out to me.

Six or seven names will be enough, placing those *you can most count on* at the beginning of the list.¹

The *intendente* in this case presumably went on to impose the names he accepted on the municipal councils.

After denouncing the lack of fairness in the juntas' voter registration procedures for over two decades, opposition leaders tried in the 1860s to devise a different mechanism to appoint their members. These efforts were finally reflected in an electoral law enacted in 1869. It explicitly excluded the local representatives of executive authority from participating in the *Juntas Calificadoras*, and it changed the character of the *Juntas Revisoras* by drawing its six members by lot from lists of the forty largest taxpayers (*listas de mayores contribuyentes*) of each commune. This latter procedure was introduced by the progovernment congressional majority to counter an indication formulated in 1867 by José Victorino Lastarria, a progressive Liberal intellectual and deputy who was generally a government opponent, which called for the juntas to be drawn by lot from the lists of all voters in the prior election. Subsequently, opposition advocates of electoral reform embraced the idea of drawing junta members from lists of the forty

¹ *El diablo denunciante de los abusos de las calificaciones*, Santiago, no. 1, 5 December 1839, p. 1. *El diablo* was an opposition periodical that printed the circular to denounce this practice.

largest taxpayers as the only system that would be acceptable to the government but would still help ensure the juntas' independence from it. Consequently, this mechanism was instituted in the 1874 electoral law—which was approved when a split in the governing coalition produced an opposition majority in both houses of congress—to compose the *Juntas Calificadoras* as well.¹ Once it was in place, however, government opponents still found reasons to complain that the juntas were biased. They noted that in some communes the lists of the forty largest taxpayers from which the names of junta members were drawn had politically significant omissions. The authorities supplied the lists, and they could indeed be doctored.

Obviously, the political inclinations of those who obtained the qualification certificate to vote in the first 15 days of November prior to each electoral year were of crucial significance for the electoral outcome, and therefore fairness of the juntas that were in charge of the registry was of the essence. In most localities there was a strong if not certain indication of the subsequent electoral results by the time voter registrations were completed. A key aspect to any winning campaign was to make sure that it was well prepared to register its voters and to denounce fraudulent registries by its opponents. Hence, the electoral campaigns had to begin before the voter registration process took place, especially for opposition candidates who had to make a special effort to mobilize potential voters against the authorities.

Who Registered to Vote

The registries were open to all 'citizens' (*ciudadanos*) who met, according to the 1833 Constitution, certain requirements. They had to be 21 years and over if married, 25 and over if single—or simply over 21 after 1884; they had to know how to read and write; and they had to have either some real estate, invested capital, or an income from whatever source, the minimum levels for which were to be set every ten years in an electoral law. These property or income requirements were met simply by being literate after the enactment of the 1874 decennial electoral law, and—having been rendered moot by the literacy provision—all mention of them was deleted in the subsequent decennial law of 1884. The word 'citizens' in practice was supposed to mean 'male citizens.' This notion was made explicit in the 1884 electoral law in

¹ This discussion of the use of municipal taxpayer lists to appoint junta members is based on an anonymous article entitled "Origen de las funciones electorales de los mayores contribuyentes," *Revista Chilena*, vol. XII (1878), 311–15. Abdón Cifuentes, *Memorias* (Santiago, 1936), 105, notes that Manuel José Irarrázabal, the Conservative Party leader and senator, suggested the extension of the largest taxpayer mechanism to the *Juntas Calificadoras*. Though usually reliable, Cifuentes' memoirs, written when he was very elderly, may be incorrect on this point.

order to exclude women, who had registered to vote in 1876 by arguing that the term *ciudadano* was used in the constitution and in the laws in a generic sense and not in the masculine singular form.¹

As noted above, the income requirements in the constitution did not mean that the electorate was composed of wealthy voters even before 1874. A key element in the electoral strategy of all the governments during the period discussed here, especially before the 1870s, consisted of generating majorities for official lists of candidates by relying to a significant extent on the votes of two categories of individuals: public employees (including several hundred army officers and policemen) and national guard troops. In an 1869 House of Deputies speech Lastarria dissected the composition of the 1862 electorate, noting all the voters who were in his opinion subject to the direct influence of the government. His comments are revealing:

According to the electoral census of 1862, the following were inscribed in the electoral registries: 1) 5,534 farmers (*agricultores*) of whom four fifths are citizens who given their social and moral condition are at the mercy of the influences of government agents and do not know the importance of the suffrage... 2) 3,734 artisans who are, like the farmers, enrolled in the national guard, and are therefore under the direction—and even under the pressure—of the agents of the executive. It is also certain that a majority of these citizens have false ideas regarding the dignity and importance of suffrage... 3) 1,859 public employees, and 1,110 private employees who work mainly for municipalities, since the latter often extend qualification certificates to their dependents and servants as private employees. To these employed citizens it is necessary to add 337 army and 55 navy officers.

All of this combines to give the enormous sum of 12,620 voting citizens who formed the basis of the electoral power of the government...²

The last figure represented 56.7% of the total number who were registered to vote for the elections of 1864.³ Most of these individuals lived near or in the nation's cities and towns. Artisans, employees of various kinds, and military officers were mostly urban dwellers, but even the farmers Lastarria mentions had to be in the peripheries of urban areas if they were part of the National Guards. As a result the latter's lives were closely connected to urban society. Consequently, the electorate was disproportionately urban at a time when the population was overwhelmingly rural.

¹ This matter is discussed in Erika Maza Valenzuela, "Catolicismo, anticlericalismo, y la extensión del sufragio a la mujer en Chile," *Estudios Públicos*, 58 (fall 1995).

² *Boletín de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, ordinary session of 7 October 1869, 462. The speech was part of the minority report of the committee that reviewed the 1869 legislation on electoral registries.

³ J.S. Valenzuela, 150. Did Lastarria mean to say 1863 instead of 1862? Or did he refer to a census drawn in 1862 on the basis of the registry made in 1860?

The national guard troops were clearly the largest component of the government's supposedly captive electorate. Reviving a colonial institution that had fallen into disuse with the discommodulations created by the wars of independence, national guard units were formed in all significant towns of the republic after 1830. Able bodied men in occupations that were not exempted from service had to enroll in its units, which trained on weekends but could be mobilized on command. The guards were usually led by socially and politically prominent individuals who were appointed at will by the ministers of the interior, given their loyalty to the government. This paramilitary force was the principal means for the state to quell serious disturbances of public order, at least until the beginning of the War of the Pacific in 1879 after which the institution declined. The police depended on municipal governments and were undermanned and ineffective (although their numbers and strength increased beginning in the 1870s), and the bulk of the army was stationed permanently in the South to protect against incursions by the Araucanians. Once in full force by the 1840s, there were over 60,000 men in the national guards.¹

The practice of having national guard troops vote in the elections was so prevalent in the early 1850s that James M. Gilliss, an American naval officer and astronomer living in Chile at the time, noted that "all who are enrolled as members of the national guard are entitled to the right of suffrage."² This was, strictly speaking, not true, at least insofar as Gilliss presented this practice as an entitlement by right. Gilliss also notes that "so far as the property and intellectual [literacy] qualifications [to vote] are concerned, the law is dead letter, or at least is openly violated at every election";³ and while he is correct in observing that men who had little or no property and/or who were illiterate did vote, he is mistaken in implying that such practices, exceptions aside, were illegal. Governments could justify the registration of national guard troops on a legal basis. Illiterates were entitled to vote by a transitory article in the 1833 Constitution as long as they had fought for independence—but who among those who were old enough in the national guard would admit to not having done so?⁴ And despite the *censitaire* form of suffrage enshrined in the

¹ The figure is given by Pedro Félix Vicuña, *Cartas sobre la situación de la República y la crisis electoral* (Valparaíso, 1870), 21.

² Lieut. James M. Gilliss, A. M., *The US Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere during the Years 1849-'50-'51-'52. Chile. Its Geography, Climate, Earthquakes, Government, Social Condition, Mineral and Agricultural Resources, Commerce, etc., etc.* (Washington, 1855), vol. I, 129.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The transitory article stipulated that such illiterates could vote until 1840. In 1842, after a heated congressional debate, the government enacted a law interpreting the transitory constitutional provision as referring only to *new* registrants after 1840.

constitution that has led analysts to believe that only those who were well off could vote, what really mattered were the minimal property, invested capital, and income levels that were set in the decennial laws to specify the constitutional requirements to vote. The first such law enacted in 1834 set low income levels, namely, 200 pesos in Santiago and 150 in the provinces, and—as demanded by the constitution’s article 8—correspondingly low property and capital levels, simply because the authorities needed to have a legal justification to enfranchise the national guard troops. These income levels were never raised before being swept aside by the literacy provision in 1874.

Testimonies of the time contain abundant confirmation that national guard troops were drawn from the lower classes. As Lastarria observed in the above quoted passage, the national guards were composed mainly of artisans and of small property holders in the immediate vicinity of the cities and towns (and who therefore participated, despite their agricultural occupation, in urban social and political life). An Argentine general wrote in his diary, while an exile in Chile in the 1840s, that the national guardsmen were “jacks of all trade (*menestrales*), artisans, petty clerks (*mozos de tienda y almacén*), and the proletarian class.”¹ The historian Diego Barros Arana, who was partly a chronicler of the nineteenth-century events he witnessed in his youth, wrote more simply that the guard troops were “drawn from the working classes.”² And regarding their income levels, Gilliss observed in the early 1850s that “freeholders and artisans...possess the requisite income [to vote].”³ Congressional debates contain confirmations of Gilliss’s observation. Thus, while defending in 1874 the presumption that literacy could be taken by right as proof of the requisite income to vote, Senator Manuel José Irarrázabal, the leading figure of the Conservative Party, reminded his colleagues that “some senators who are now present” had already asserted during the

previous [or 1864] debate on the decennial law that sets the income citizens must have in order to vote that even the peons [*peones gañanes*], even the last

¹ General Tomás de Iriarte, *Panoramas chilenos del siglo XX* (Santiago, 1965), p. 89. The portions referring to Chile in this diary were retrieved from the original manuscript by Gabriel Balbontín Fuenzalida, who authored its prologue and notes.

² Diego Barros Arana, *Un decenio en la historia de Chile, 1841–1851* (Santiago, 1906), vol. II, 458.

³ Gilliss, 129. On 258 Gilliss notes that *barreteros*, the miners who broke into the ore and hence had higher skills, earned 25 pesos per month, while the *apires*, those who hauled the ore, made 12 pesos per month. The latter (assuming they were of age) would apparently not have the requisite 150 pesos in the provinces to vote, except that miners also received, in addition, food for themselves and their families. Hence, if the value of this food supplement were added to their income, even the *apires* surpassed the required income.

of Chileans, could have an income of two hundred pesos, and that is why this figure was set for Santiago and that of one hundred and fifty for the provinces.¹

A large number of voter registrants obtained their certificates of qualification without having to present any proof-of-income documents. Public employees, including municipal ones, appeared on state payroll lists. Artisans and petty merchants were listed on the municipal treasury books as having paid the requisite local tax (*patente*) for opening their shops. The owners of small plots of land around the towns were included in the national treasury lists as having paid the tithe (the Church's income was drawn from agricultural production), and after 1853 they appeared on the lists of rural property holders that were drawn up to assess the so-called agricultural contribution (*contribución agrícola*) that replaced the tithe. All of these lists were in the hands of the authorities, and anyone on them was presumed to have the requisite income.² These were generally the categories of voters who cast ballots in favor of the governments' official lists of candidates. In fact, as many of these individuals were also in the national guards, the commanders usually supervised the process of what turned out to be their virtually automatic registration. The payroll and tax payer lists could conceivably be adulterated, temporarily omitting certain names from them for political purposes; hence, opposition voters who may have appeared on them could be screened out from the effortless process of registration. And a reading and writing test beyond the simple ability of signing one's name (which was taken to be a sufficient demonstration of literacy) as well as proof-of-income documents could be demanded of any prospective voter, even of those appearing on the voter-qualifying lists.

Consequently, the *censitaire* requirements were simply a tool in the hands of the voter registry authorities who generally acted, as noted above, as electoral agents for the governments. They could simplify the procedures for those they considered secure voters for the official lists of candidates, and they could apply the full extent of the law to those who were not. The literacy test could be done on the spot and was relatively incontrovertible, but the lack of income

¹ *Boletín de sesiones del Senado*, extraordinary session of 28 September 1874, 54. Despite Irrarrázabal's implication that these income levels were 'set' in 1864, they were simply restated from the earlier decennial electoral laws. As noted above, they were never raised after 1834. By the 1870s, given the expansion of the Chilean economy during those decades, it is very likely that income levels had risen. Inflation only became a persistent feature of the Chilean economy after the mid-1870s.

² All those with "public employment" could register automatically, as the president of a Qualifying Junta is alleged to have said in 1839. In *El diablo denunciante de los abusos de las calificaciones*, Santiago, no. 3 (9 December 1839), p. 1. For a typical electoral law stipulating that individuals appearing on these lists were presumed to have the requisite income, see *Boletín de las leyes y decretos del gobierno*, Santiago, vol. XXIX, no. 9 (September 1861), articles 31–37 on pp. 213–15.

documentation, or of what was deemed to be proper proof of income, could be used easily as an excuse to refuse a prospective voter his registration. The Qualifying Juntas could rapidly accept, for instance, the salary certificates given by private employers to known supporters of their preferred candidates while refusing to accept the validity of the same certificates given to voters favoring, or suspected of favoring, other candidates.¹ This could easily discourage all but the most politicized of voters from making the effort to come back with new documents or from appealing a negative decision to the Revisory Juntas and, eventually, the courts. As a result, opponents of the government rightly viewed the voter registration requirements, especially the income requirement, as a major obstacle, although the problem was not, as could be assumed at first glance, the income levels that were set but rather the practice of forcing voters to show what was deemed to be its proper documentation. This was a difficulty, in particular, that stood in the way of the qualification as voters of those among the large nonfreeholding rural population who could at least sign their names. Even though agricultural laborers apparently had the requisite income, as noted by Irarrázabal in the above quoted passage, they were mostly paid in kind by the large landowners through access to land and pastures. Living generally in a nonmonetized economy, they had the greatest difficulty in producing proof-of-income papers. This was the case even for those laborers who marketed part of their production from the plots of land assigned to them.

The difficulty of enfranchising the dependent rural population placed the Conservative Party in a particularly disadvantageous position. The party had strong support among the landowning families of the Central Valley, the most populated area of the country before the rapid growth of the cities towards the end of the nineteenth century. As long as the Conservatives were part of the governing coalitions they obviously had no need to be particularly concerned with the biases in the voter registration system. However, when the party finally broke its coalition with the government Liberals in 1872, its legislators—who had been elected to the congress on the official candidate lists of the Liberal-Conservative coalition that had governed since 1863—faced the almost certain prospect of defeat in the next elections. Consequently, they joined forces with the minority opposition of Radicals and ‘loose’ Liberals in order to reform the electoral law in a manner that would buttress its fairness.

The Conservatives, Radicals and ‘loose’ Liberals disagreed sharply over substantive issues, but they shared momentarily a strong common interest in minimizing the capacity of the

¹ Gilliss, 305, mentions a practice he attributes to landowners of issuing bogus salary certificates to their dependents to ‘qualify’ them to vote. He notes that the resulting contracts were later annulled.

executive to place its partisans in elected positions. With the stipulation added to the 1874 decennial electoral law that literacy was to be taken as proof of the constitutionally requisite income, the new temporary congressional majority sought to facilitate opposition voter registrations by eliminating the necessity of consulting payroll or treasury lists or of having to present proof-of-income certificates and receipts. The opposition legislators could not opt to eliminate the income and literacy requirements altogether, because they would have had to reform the constitution, and this they could not do: the Constitution of 1833 could only be changed after a legislature voted in favor of the amendments debated and approved by a previous one. Since the opposition in favor of electoral reform could not count on its own reelection given the electoral practices it was trying to change, whatever constitutional amendments it approved were bound to face defeat in the hands of the new progovernment majority that would in all likelihood control the next legislature.

The enactment of the 1874 decennial electoral law eliminating the need for literate citizens to show proof of income when registering to vote led to a threefold expansion—from 49,047 in 1872 to 148,737 in 1878—of the numbers of registered voters. As could be expected, the registered voters who listed agriculture as their occupation increased most sharply. This can be appreciated in Table 1, which shows the 1872 and 1878 occupational distribution of registered voters both nationally and in Rancagua, a Central Valley district where the Conservative Party was strong.

The registrants listing agriculture as their occupation were the only group to increase significantly not only in absolute terms (from 16,698 to 70,966 nationally between 1872 and 1878) but also as a proportion of the total electorate. Individuals in this category became close to half the electorate after the change in the voting law. In Rancagua this category increased to about two-thirds of the district's electorate, a fact that reveals the voter mobilization efforts of the district's generally Conservative landowners. This effort had already begun by 1872, because only nine years earlier, in 1863, despite the district's overwhelmingly rural and agricultural profile, only 19.2% of its electorate was listed as engaged in agriculture.¹ It should be noted that the 'proprietors and capitalists' group is the only one to have shrunk in absolute terms both nationally (from 6,258 to 4,422) and in Rancagua (from 142 to 11). There must have been a greater tendency in 1878 to list these individuals' occupations either as professionals or as agriculturists.

¹ J.S. Valenzuela, 119.

TABLE 1

The National and Rancagua District Electorate by Occupational Groups in 1872 and 1878, in Percentages

| Occupational Groups | National Electorate | | Rancagua Electorate | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| | 1872 | 1878 | 1872 | 1878 |
| Proprietors & capitalists | 12.8 | 3.0 | 9.6 | 0.1 |
| Professionals, merchants, and other middle strata | 17.2 | 13.5 | 11.3 | 8.1 |
| Employees, public and private | 11.4 | 7.8 | 7.5 | 2.0 |
| Agriculturists | 34.0 | 47.7 | 52.7 | 67.6 |
| Artisans and other specialized trades | 20.4 | 21.7 | 18.0 | 20.4 |
| Miners | 3.9 | 4.6 | 0.9 | 1.5 |
| Workers and fishermen | 0.3 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 0.3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| TOTAL NUMBER | 49,047 | 148,737 | 1,480 | 7,722 |

Source: Chile, *Anuario Estadístico*, (Santiago, 1873) vol. 13, 520–21; (Santiago, 1879) vol. 20, 310–11. A fuller set of figures and a detailed listing of all occupations under these categories appear in J.S. Valenzuela, 118–19. Minor errors in the percentages presented there have been corrected for this table.

The Selection of Candidates for Office

Presidential Candidacies

During the period discussed here, the outgoing president selected the candidate who would then be presented to the nation as the government's choice to succeed him. Invariably one or more opposition candidates emerged, and yet they never obtained more than a handful of electoral college votes. Citizens voted for slates of electors pledged to the presidential candidates in each province, and with the winner-take-all system in place and the ability of the government to generate majorities for its official lists of candidates, few electors supporting the opposition candidates actually won.

This did not mean that the presidents could choose just anybody to succeed them. They had to select individuals who they knew would be generally acceptable to the parties that

supported their governments or, as occurred on one occasion, to their more powerful opponents. This happened with the election of José Joaquín Pérez as successor to Manuel Montt in 1861. As he neared the end in 1859 of his second term in office, Manuel Montt faced an insurrection which was based in part on the supposition that he was preparing to name his friend and collaborator, Antonio Varas, to succeed him. Montt defeated the insurrection, known as the 1859 Civil War, but decided that he could not press ahead with naming Varas in the face of resistance from Liberals, Conservatives, and Radicals, the three parties that had crystallized during his presidency. Hence, he turned to Pérez, a mild man of advanced age who, once in office, made a governing coalition with the Liberals and Conservatives leaving the *Montt-Varista* party, the Nationals, in the opposition with the Radicals.

After the parties acquired a clearer configuration during the Montt presidency they became a more important factor in ratifying presidential succession choices. Their ability to intervene in the process was to a large extent a function of the electoral college system used for the election of the president. Thus, each candidate had to generate a list of names supporting him all over the country and these individuals, though nominally pledged to support the candidate, could in fact decide to vote as they wished once the electoral college met—although in practice few of them reneged on their pledges. This meant that the sitting president and his chosen successor needed to rely on a nationwide network of political leaders to constitute the electoral college candidacies and that they could not run the risk of ignoring their sentiments and demands. The institutional design for the selection of presidents therefore made it impossible for the incumbent—unlike the twentieth-century Mexican practice—to authoritatively name a personal choice as his successor. This institutional definition made the next step almost obligatory, namely, the organization of a party (or a party coalition) convention to proclaim the candidate. Some of the delegates to such conventions could then also become candidates for the electoral college. The first year an official presidential candidate was nominated in a convention with delegates from all over the country was in 1876, with the Liberal Aníbal Pinto as the standard bearer. Subsequently such nominating conventions became the norm rather than the exception, and after 1891 presidents were no longer directly involved in the choice of candidates to succeed them.

Opposition presidential candidates also had to rely on party networks to press their candidacies. Again, this was especially true after the 1850s as the parties crystallized into more coherent organizations; opposition figures would either emerge from the parties or, as was more often the case, they would seek the support of the parties that were left out of the incumbent president's coalition, whatever their own party position. Thus, in 1871 opposition (or so-called

independent) parties proclaimed the candidacy of José Tomás Urmeneta, a wealthy mine owner identified mainly with the National Party, in a meeting attended by close to seventy prominent political leaders.¹ In 1876, the same year Pinto was proclaimed in a national convention to head the Liberal-Radical ticket, a separate convention attended primarily by Conservatives proclaimed the candidacy of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, who was also a Liberal.

The Choices of Congressional and Municipal Candidates

The ministers of the interior, with the collaboration of the intendants (especially when deciding on municipal candidates), drew up the official lists of candidates for office throughout the country. Given this function, the individuals who occupied that ministry towards the end of a presidential term were assumed to be in a strong position to prepare their own campaign for the presidency.

Despite the authorities' capacity to mobilize a significant portion of the electorate, fraudulently or not, for the official lists of candidates, the minister of the interior could not compose the official lists following his own whim. There were certain personalities, like José Victorino Lastarria or Manuel José Irarrázabal, whom everyone respected given the force of their intellects and/or the wealth and prominence of their families, and even if they spoke their own minds and were often opposed to the government, it was not possible to ignore them when constituting the official lists for the lower house or the senate. Moreover, there had to be significant signs that the candidates on the official lists would be favorably received by a majority of the most influential local figures in their respective districts ('local' even if the most prominent of them also lived, especially during the winter months, in Santiago). Any attempt to place candidates who were rejected by the local notables on the official lists ran the risk of leading them to set up opposition lists that had significant chances of winning. National opposition leaders would be more than happy to assist in this endeavor. They drafted opposition lists only for the districts where they had a possibility of winning. Hence, the electoral contest between the government and its opponents was only judged on the basis of those districts where the opposition presented challenges, and any minister of the interior whose official lists were defeated in a sizable number of those districts by a coordinated opposition effort (rather than various independent local opposition candidacies) was considered to have 'lost' the election. President Bulnes, for example, fired his minister of the interior, Manuel Camilo Vial, when his

¹ See Martín Palma, *Los candidatos* (Santiago, 1871), 98–99, for a listing of their names.

opponents won in four of the five districts in which they ran coordinated candidates for the house of deputies in the 1849 elections.¹

Moreover, even if the minister of the interior decided to pull all the levers of electoral fraud at his command to impose his official list, such a victory was not worth the price of ill feeling it generated among the influential local leaders. Given the paucity of fiscal resources to meet the country's many needs before the great nitrate boom that began in the 1880s, the government had to appeal constantly to the generosity of wealthy individuals, including women, in order to carry out improvement projects.² The line between public and private initiative was very nebulous, and the opposition of local notables could lead to a paralysis of construction and repairs for infrastructure, schools, churches, and hospitals in the district as the local notables gave a cold shoulder to the representatives of the national government. Consequently, the ministers of the interior usually engaged in a process of consultation or negotiation with influential local notables to establish the official lists of candidates for their districts. These lists (and therefore the congressmen and municipal councilors who were elected) were as a result much more heterogeneous than would appear to be the case. They often included individuals who tended to favor opposition views in the congress and in the municipal councils. For the same reason, the dividing line between majority and minority benches in the congress was not as sharply drawn as could be expected.

In his memoirs the Conservative congressman Abdón Cifuentes gives an example of negotiations between government authorities and local notables to compose the official list in which the latter took the initiative in presenting the names of the candidates. The case occurred in Rancagua, the already mentioned province with an important number of Conservative landowners, towards the end of the 1860s. At that time Liberals and Conservatives were part of the governing coalition of President Pérez. According to Cifuentes, Rancagua's "great electors," led by Juan de Dios Correa, met to draw up the list of candidates for the congress, and subsequently took it to the government "to obtain its customary ratification" (*la usada venia*).³ The minister of the interior objected to Cifuentes' inclusion on the list but finally accepted it grudgingly when confronted by the insistence of the Rancagua Conservatives. However, he then ordered the local representative of the government to do everything possible to prevent Cifuentes'

¹ For a description of these elections, see Barros Arana, vol. II, 277–85.

² For an example of an intendant's efforts to solicit the assistance of wealthy individuals to build railways and roads, see *Memoria que el Intendente de Coquimbo presenta al señor ministro del interior dando cuenta de todos los ramos de la administración de la provincia de su mando* (La Serena, 1855), 31–35.

³ Cifuentes, vol. I, 149.

victory. This did not work out as the minister had planned because the individual who received his order not only did not accept it but also decided to denounce it publicly, and when confronted with irate protests of the Rancagua Conservatives President Pérez personally intervened in Cifuentes' favor. In this case the official list was basically composed by the 'great electors' of the district since a majority of them belonged to the Conservative Party and it felt entitled to select the candidates in the districts where it had a strong presence given its governing alliance with the Liberals. Moreover, Rancagua's leading figures were individuals who, given their wealth and social rank, were part of the highest circles of Chilean society.

The ministers of the interior had greater room for maneuver when dealing with local notables of a lower social standing and living in poorer districts. In these cases the minister could offer some desired position in the local state administration—if not a place on the official list itself, especially for the municipal councils or as presidential or senatorial elector—to an important individual in exchange for his and his family's support for the official lists. Information regarding who should be named to what position was normally provided by the electoral agents of the minister, who were either the government's local representatives or the minister's political and personal friends. For instance, in the following letter an intendant asked Minister of the Interior Antonio Varas to name a certain person to a position in the provincial treasury of Valdivia since that would, he said,

bring us infinite advantages, giving us all the influence of this family, which is the most important in the province. In this municipality alone it has a brother and a son in law; the latter's name is Juan Angel Acharán, a person of great value, who belongs to the opposition, but his father in law solemnly engages himself to make him work in our favor.

However, the letter also asked the minister to make the appointment on an interim basis "so that we may," it concluded "use this circumstance as a rein in order to guide him in a way that will suit our purposes."¹

Using these tactics, the ministers of the interior could even create official lists of candidates in congressional races by naming individuals who had never lived in the region they would represent. This was, again, more common in provinces and districts of little economic importance, whose local notables did not move in the highest circles of the national society.

¹ Miguel Varas Velásquez, *Correspondencia de don Antonio Varas sobre la candidatura presidencial de don Manuel Montt* (Santiago, 1921), 244–45. In this case the correspondence refers to the presidential campaign of Manuel Montt. The *intendente* later informed Varas that the victory was assured, which meant that he probably thought that the appointment had had the desired effect.

Still, opposition candidacies by either independent local figures or by coordinated national oppositions were a regular feature in elections throughout the nineteenth century. Table 2 presents a comprehensive view of the districts in which there was at least some electoral competition in lower house elections, the number of opposition deputies who were elected, and the number of districts where the difference in vote totals between winning and losing candidates was less than 15%.

TABLE 2

Numbers of Districts with Electoral Competition for Lower House Seats and Numbers of Opponents Elected to the Chamber, 1831–88

| Year of election | No. of districts electing at least one deputy* | No. of districts with electoral competition** | No. of seats won by opponents | No. of districts with close elections** |
|------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|---|
| 1831 | 32 | 22 (69%) | 4 | 4 |
| 1834 | 37 | 18 (49%) | 0 | 2 |
| 1837 | 36 | 16 (44%) | 0 | 2 |
| 1840 | 38 | 31 (82%) | 9 | 5 |
| 1843 | 38 | 19 (50%) | ? | 1 |
| 1846 | 38 | ? | ? | ? |
| 1849 | 38 | 9 (24%) | 4 | 0 |
| 1852 | 39 | 4 (10%) | ? | 2 |
| 1855 | 40 | 3 (7%) | 0 | ? |
| 1858 | 43 | 11 (26%) | 15 | 5 |
| 1861 | 42 | 5 (12%) | ? | 1 |
| 1864 | 43 | 29 (67%) | 14 | 11 |
| 1867 | 51 | 14 (27%) | 6 | 3 |
| 1870 | 49 | 13 (27%) | 40 | 3 |
| 1873 | 51 | 35 (69%) | ? | 6 |
| 1876 | 55 | 24 (44%) | 37/28*** | 12 |
| 1879 | 54 | 7 (13%) | ? | 1 |
| 1882 | 55 | 14 (25%) | ? | 1 |
| 1885 | 63 | 44 (70%) | 4 | 2 |
| 1888 | 69 | ? | 14 | ? |

Source: Calculated from figures and reports of electoral outcomes in Urzúa Valenzuela, Chapters 3 and 4.

* The figures do not always correspond to the total number of districts because there is no information regarding who, if anybody, was elected in a small number of cases. Some districts chose only one deputy, while most elected two, and a few elected between three and ten (the latter being the case in Santiago).

** Districts with electoral competition are those in which there are more candidates than positions to be filled, even if losing candidates obtain only 1 vote. Close elections are those in which the difference between the winning candidate with the fewest votes and the losing candidate with

the most votes is less than 15% of the total vote. In some districts this result occurred between candidacies competing for the alternate deputy position.

*** 28 'independents' were also elected that year.

Table 2 shows that opposition candidacies appeared in half or more than half of all districts in six of the twenty elections, while there were such candidacies in a quarter to a half of all districts in eight elections. This is a considerable number, given the circumstances. Looking at this dimension from the bottom end, there were only four elections in which there were opposition candidacies in less than 20% of the districts. This latter result is not easy to interpret, because the lack of electoral competition could be the product of either severe intimidation of opponents by the government (as in 1852 and 1855), of the opening of official candidacy lists to a broad spectrum of candidates (as in 1861), or of the political truce generated by the beginning of the War of the Pacific against Peru and Bolivia (which occurred in 1879). It is noteworthy that competition was quite high in the earlier years, despite the recency of the 1829–30 civil war. The elections of 1870 appear as the ones with the most victories by opposition candidates (40 of 99 seats), but this result may be more apparent than real because many Liberals were elected as 'opponents' despite having the sympathies of Liberals in the government at a time of tension in the ruling Liberal-Conservative Fusion. The elections of 1876 stand out, therefore, as the ones in which the largest number of opponents were elected, especially since 28 'independents' also won.¹ The 1876 elections also have the greatest number of districts with close results, and they were the first to be held after 1874 reform that expanded the suffrage.² It seems to have been the most democratic congressional election of the nineteenth century.

The Organization of Electoral Campaigns

In addition to making provisions to register its voters and ensuring that they actually voted, electoral campaigns also had to present the candidates in public rallies and engage in public discussions of the issues at hand. Already in the 1840s there was a significant arena of public political debate apart from the chambers of Congress, and during electoral campaigns the partisans of one or another presidential candidacy or congressional or municipal list attempted to articulate all the reasons for which voters should support it. The almost nightly custom of evening

¹ Urzúa Valenzuela, 239. 108 deputies were elected that year, which left the government with a minority of 43 deputies pledged to it.

² 80,346 votes were cast that year, up from 25,981 in the previous lower house election. J.S. Valenzuela, 150.

meetings in private homes (*tertulias*), generally overseen by women and including music and conversation, turned to political discussions, especially during electoral campaigns.¹ The major newspapers took positions, and a number of ephemeral ones, often with runs of less than a dozen or so numbers, would emerge to try to argue the case for or against particular candidates. During the 1846 presidential campaign, for instance, Manuel Bulnes, who was up for reelection, was favored in Santiago and Valparaíso by *El Araucano*, *El Mercurio*, *El Progreso*, *El Orden*, *El Artesano del orden*, *El Rayo*, *El Industrial*, *El Cívico de Valparaíso*, and *El Mensajero*, while his opponent was championed by *El Artesano opositor*, *El Guardia nacional*, *El Voto libre*, *El Artesano de Valparaíso*, *El Diario de Santiago*, *El Duende*, and *El Pueblo*.²

As these titles indicate, some of the periodicals were specifically directed at an artisanal readership.³ This is not surprising. Given the government's early use of the national guards as voters to ensure its electoral victories, the artisanal, working- and lower-middle-class sectors that formed the majority of the civic troops were an important center of attention during electoral campaigns. Opponents of the government tried to recruit artisans to their cause by sounding populist themes and stressing the need for social equality.⁴ This also explains one of the noteworthy characteristics of mid-nineteenth century Chile, namely, the development of political and cultural circles formed by opposition groups to try to capture the support of urban popular sectors. The first such clubs appear to have been formed in 1845, including one called the Democratic Society (*Sociedad Demócrata*) and another one called the Caupolicán Society

¹ See Gilliss, 144–45 for a description of the *tertulias* as social institutions, including the role of women in them, and 305 for a reference to their political function during electoral campaigns.

² This listing is drawn from *El Cívico de Valparaíso: Periódico popular dedicado a los artesanos*, Valparaíso, no. 2 (15 March 1846), p. 1. The first three newspapers were major ones with daily editions and a national circulation.

³ Some, such as *El Cívico de Valparaíso* which was created to support Bulnes' presidential campaign, even circulated free of charge.

⁴ *El Cívico de Valparaíso*, no. 4 (25 March 1846), p. 1, goes to great lengths in denouncing these opposition appeals and in condemning a demonstration by artisans in Santiago on 8 March 1846 which led to acts of violence. *El Pueblo*, the periodical published in Santiago, was apparently one of the most radical. It presented 'subversive ideas,' according to Amunátegui and Amunátegui, and seems to have had ties to the organizers of the 8 March 1846 demonstration; Miguel Luis Amunátegui and Gregorio Víctor Amunátegui, *D. José Joaquín Vallejo* (Santiago, 1866), 126.

Writing from his exile in Peru, where he was sent for attempting to organize opposition to the government in the elections of 1846, Pedro Félix Vicuña, a Liberal leader from Valparaíso, explains that the opposition deliberately tried to capture the support of the militias because they were the most important source of votes for government candidates. Vicuña notes that his party was quite successful in this attempt and that in the elections the government had to resort to buying votes and to high handed repression in order to win. See Pedro Félix Vicuña, *Vindicación de los principios e ideas que han servido en Chile de apoyo a la oposición en las elecciones populares de 1846* (Lima, 1846), 40–41, 52.

(*Sociedad Caupolicán*).¹ The purpose, Amunátegui Solar notes, was to ‘incorporate distinguished members of the working classes into their ranks, not only to obtain their votes in the elections, but also to take advantage of their influence over the soldiers of the National Guard who gave the government great strength in the elections.’² The most noteworthy of these clubs became the Equality Society (*Sociedad de la Igualdad*), which was created in April 1850. Although the majority of the opposition political leaders of the time, who were then in the so-called Reform Club (*Club de la Reforma*), kept a certain distance from the Society after it acquired what was for them an excessively radical direction under the inspiration of Santiago Arcos and Francisco Bilbao, they protested energetically against Manuel Montt’s government when it forced the Society’s dissolution. The governments of the time countered these opposition organizing efforts by sponsoring the formation of artisanal clubs as well. Such was, for instance, the purpose of a Society of Valparaíso Artisans (*Sociedad de Artesanos de Valparaíso*), created in March 1846 as part of the Bulnes presidential campaign.³ As a result of these practices, the politicization of organized popular sectors has deep roots in Chilean republican history.

The increase in the size of the electorate in the mid-1870s was associated with a further development of public campaign styles. As noted earlier, both candidates in the presidential elections of 1876, Aníbal Pinto and Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, were nominated in political conventions with representatives who came from all sections of the country. The main cities and towns of the central region were already connected by railways, and both candidates took to the trains in order to visit their organized supporters in electoral rallies. The Vicuña Mackenna campaign, opposed by the outgoing Liberal president and supported by the Conservatives, was

¹ *El Guardia Nacional*, Santiago, no. 1 (6 February 1846), p. 1, mentions the formation in late 1845 of the *Sociedad Demócrata* for young people, together with “two or three societies of artisans.” Domingo Amunátegui Solar, *Historia social de Chile* (Santiago, 1932), 93, mentions the *Sociedad Caupolicán*. According to Amunátegui and Amunátegui, *El Pueblo* was also linked to “various clubs of people of the last class that the opposition had organized,” 126.

² Amunátegui Solar, 93. *El Guardia nacional*, idem, also says that the “societies of artisans...had the purpose of preparing public sentiments (*espíritu público*) for the elections.” It should be added that governments and their opponents also saw the guards as a military force that could be a strategic asset if political disputes led to armed conflict.

³ See *El Cívico de Valparaíso*, Valparaíso, no. 3 (22 March 1846), p. 1. The club appears to have been called first the Society of Order Composed by the Artisans of Valparaíso (*Sociedad del Orden Compuesta de los Artesanos de Valparaíso*). Vicuña, *Vindicación de los principios e ideas*, states parenthetically that the Society of Order only pretended to support the government and that in fact it “hoped for its ruin,” 46. However, he offers no further explanation.

The Conservatives, with their Josephine Worker Societies (*Sociedades Josefinas de Obreros*) and Catholic Worker Circles (*Círculos Católicos de Obreros*), tried also years later to establish political support among workers by creating cultural and social circles. Cifuentes, *Memorias*, mentions these groups repeatedly, vol. 2, 149–54; 189–92; 239; 244; 249–51.

especially noteworthy for its large gatherings and populist tone. Francisco Encina indicates that Vicuña's campaign stop in the central city of Talca was organized by

conservatives and other local notables (*potentados departamentales*) who had also become leaders in the war against the oligarchy... [They] prepared a grandiose reception. Between eight and ten thousand citizens received the candidate at the station and promenaded him triumphantly through the city... Workers organized a separate rally... The 400 place banquet in his honor that evening was attended by the majority of the high aristocrats of the area.¹

Both Pinto and Vicuña Mackenna also campaigned in favor of the congressional and municipal candidates who belonged to the parties supporting their presidential bids.² These national campaign tours became an obligatory feature of presidential campaigns from then on.

During the course of the campaign, the ministers of the interior received regular reports from their electoral agents in order to assess local opinion and take any corrective measures, if need be, to ensure victory. As one of Minister Varas's correspondents confidently indicated, "if there should arise an opposition we have a thousand means to make it fail."³ On occasion, however, a pessimistic report presaged the victory of an opposition list:

It is necessary for me to speak to you in all frankness [began a letter addressed to Varas]...I assured you that you would have many difficulties to overcome in order to win [in this district], and anything that may be said to the contrary will only come from impassioned men, without any prestige...⁴

In this case the chances of the official candidates must have been really minimal, because the local electoral agents did have a broad arsenal of tactics at their disposal.

The Mechanics of Voting

Voting was held over a two-day period during six hours each day. The polls were set up in public places, generally in town squares. The officials in charge of the proceedings were designated by lot from names proposed by the municipal councilors, and as a result they normally favored the political views of the majority in the councils—which is to say that they were usually

¹ Encina, vol. XV, 505.

² Nonetheless, after the congressional elections had taken place, disagreements developed between Vicuña, who was a Liberal, and the Conservatives, and as a result Vicuña finally withdrew his candidacy before the presidential electors were chosen.

³ Varas, 264.

⁴ Varas, 195.

partisans of the national government. However, representatives of the opposition candidates were normally allowed to observe the casting of the votes as well as the counting of the votes after the polls closed. The votes were counted at the end of each day of voting. Therefore, the candidates could assess their chances of winning the election on the basis of the partial result generated by the first day.

Unlike electoral practices in Argentina, where voters were asked to openly voice their electoral preferences before voting booth officials, in Chile voting laws from the very beginning established a 'secret vote.'¹ The normative expectation was always that each citizen had to be able to cast a vote without revealing its content to others. Violations of this normative standard were frequent, and yet they were seen as improper and reprehensible, as attested by countless debates in Congress and articles in the press throughout the nineteenth century.

Voters were supposed to present their qualifying certificates at the voting table, where their numbers and other information would be checked against the records in the voter registry.² They were then allowed to deposit their votes, duly marked and folded to hide their contents, in the ballot box. Describing an election he observed in Copiapó during the early 1840s, the Polish scientist Ignacio Domeyko noted that voters gave their ballots to the president of the vote reception table, who would then place it in the box "rolled up, just as he received it—and in full view of the public."³ This practice was probably unusual. Each candidate list or independent candidacy had its own ballot, which had to be printed or written-in on a piece of white paper of a specified size. Voters had to come to the table with their ballots ready to be deposited in the box, i. e., marked, folded, and sealed. (It was only with electoral reforms in 1890 that voters were obliged to mark their ballots in a separate area at the polling place before returning to the table to deposit them in the ballot box; this and other measures in the law led Cifuentes to assert that it "introduced the novelty of the secret vote, to ensure the independence or liberty of the voter."⁴)

¹ For an analysis of the first electoral laws enacted in Chile, see Juan B. Hernández E., "Las primeras leyes electorales chilenas," *Revista de Historia y Geografía*, vol. XI, no. 38 (second trimester 1921).

² The qualifying certificates were abolished by electoral reforms in 1888; Urzúa Valenzuela, 234.

³ Ignacio Domeyko, *Mis viajes* (Santiago, 1978), vol. 1, 412. Domeyko spent most of his adult life associated with the University of Chile.

⁴ Cifuentes, vol. II, 288. He adds that "the parties" (not government agents) had invented many tricks to figure out how people voted, despite the changes. And yet, the notion that voting preferences were supposed to be secret was, as noted above, much older than he indicates. The 1890 electoral law also ended the obligation to re-register prior to each election and introduced a permanent electoral registry. In 1912 the registry was completely renewed. Subsequently, electoral registries were valid for ten years until 1958, when they were made permanent once again.

After voting, each citizen's qualification certificate would be signed on the reverse side by the members of the vote reception board, with a notation indicating that the voter had already cast a ballot (*votó*) in that particular election. This presumably prevented voters from casting ballots more than once.

If these voting procedures had been implemented in good faith, the electoral system could have reflected approximately the distribution of political opinion among politically active citizens. However, the documentary evidence contains so many references to abuses of the system by the authorities that such good faith must have been sorely lacking. The result was that many elections contained a significant degree of fraud in favor of the official lists of candidates, and this simply magnified the distortions already contained in the voter registration process.

After the registration of the individuals enrolled in the national guards, most commanders routinely, as Barros Arana indicates, "collected the certificates of qualification to prevent, so they said, their getting lost."¹ Many certificates would then end up on the minister of the interior's desk, and he would distribute them to whom he saw fit.² The Conservative politician Abdón Cifuentes notes that he even saw "on the president's table two tall packages of certificates of qualification obtained by policemen" who had dressed in civilian country clothes (as *paisanos*) for that purpose.³ The qualifications were then given back to the civic guardsmen (or to policemen and petty state employees), who would be organized by their commanders to vote. The ballots they received were not only appropriately marked to indicate a preference for the government candidate or candidates but they also had some other external unofficial marking or even a number. In this manner the electoral agents of the government on the vote reception tables could verify that the guardsmen had voted as they were told.⁴ Owners of mines, industries, and land were also known to collect the qualification certificates of their employees.⁵

¹ Barros Arana, vol. 1, 99. This practice was so widespread that the progovernment periodical *El Artesano*, Santiago, no. 1 (7 June 1841), p. 3, defended it by saying that national guard officers were not "robbing us of our property," as claimed by an opposition sheet, but simply acting as "our depositories" before returning the certificates the night before the elections.

² When Antonio Varas took over the ministry after President Bulnes dismissed Manuel Camilo Vial from the office, he had to figure out who had received the qualifications from Vial and how to recover them. One of his correspondents advised him that "in this district, with very few exceptions, the only persons who are qualified to vote belong to the civic militia, and to the rural cavalry squadrons. It is known that Vial left the qualifications of these troops with Rafael Cruz." Varas, 82, letter dated 18 June 1850.

³ Cifuentes, vol. 1, 68–69. The use of the police for this purpose increased in the 1870s as the national guard voters declined as a proportion of the total number of voters.

⁴ On the markings and even the numbering of ballots, see Amunátegui and Amunátegui, 147.

⁵ See Domeyko, 410–11.

Obviously, the national guard commanders and other officials or political leaders only gave back the qualifications to the troops or other dependents when they were, as indicated by an American observer, Lieutenant MacRae, “quite sure they will be used only in favor of their own candidates.”¹ Such dependents who tried to vote for the opposition risked brutal treatment on the part of the commanders or the authorities, including lashes and imprisonment.² But such events were exceptional. The small size of Chilean communes meant that most voters’ political preferences were generally known. Family connections, bonds of friendship, economic dependency on influential individuals with well-known political views, participation in political rallies, clubs, and even a close tie to the Church were all cues that could be taken as signals of political allegiance and voting preference. And even if no effort had been made to mark the folded exterior of the ballots in any particular way, the small variations in the shades of white paper used to print the ballots, in the color of the ink that was used, or in the size of the ballots made it relatively easy to identify whether a voter was casting the appropriate vote. Pedro Félix Vicuña even notes that in the 1846 election in Valparaíso “all employees [public?] voted the first day with marked ballots made with colored paper.”³ In sum, given these and many other practices, some crude, some ingenious, the secret vote was not fully guaranteed and the electoral agents could ensure in most instances that their dependents and clientele voted as was expected of them.

But the system for such agents was not fully foolproof. The iconoclastic writer, mine owner, and occasional politician José Joaquín Vallejo wrote a remarkable account of the tactics his campaign used in order to win a seat in the house of deputies in 1849 as an opposition candidate and of the reception his victory received in the populace.⁴ Vallejo at that point was identified mainly with the Liberal Party, which still retained the early so-called *pipiolo* identity it acquired from the conflicts of the period immediately following independence and of the 1829–30 civil war.

1 Gilliss, 305. MacRae was a member of Gilliss’s scientific team.

2 Gilliss relates that a porter working for his astronomical observatory declined to turn over his qualification to a former employer, having, since ceasing to work for him, “imbibed in other notions.” After an altercation between the two, “José was furnished with lodgings at the expense of the municipality,” 307. For testimonies of beatings of troops who did not follow voting directives, see J.S. Valenzuela, 65–66.

3 Vicuña, *Vindicación de los principios e ideas*, 51. Did he mean a shade of white, or clearly on paper of a different color?

4 The account was published days after the election in *El Copiapino*, Copiapó, no. 14 (13 March 1849), and is reprinted in Amunátegui and Amunátegui, 145–56.

The governor of Vallenar, one of the two departments in the district where Vallejo was a candidate, organized his electoral forces in the usual way, collecting a sizeable number of qualifications. He then prepared the ballots with a characteristic mark and number and distributed the qualifications to his friends and family, as well as to Indians from a highland community. He told the latter that their lands would be expropriated if they did not follow his indications. This procedure meant that the governor did not trust the local national guard troops, and in fact they did not follow his orders when he called on them to help control a crowd that was trying to prevent the Indians from approaching the voting tables. Such insubordination was doubly understandable since the governor was, in essence, pressing nonregistered voters to cast ballots by using qualifications that at least in some cases must have belonged originally to the guardsmen themselves. Moreover, the opposition produced ballots that imitated the markings and numbers used by the governor and managed—given the confusion that occurred as scuffles broke out—to substitute its own ballots for those that the governor had put in a stack to distribute to his electoral contingent. As a result, some of the governor's surrogate voters in fact cast ballots for the opposition list without knowing it.

At the end of the first day the ballots were counted, and the governor was ahead in Vallenar only by a margin of 15 votes. This was not nearly enough to counteract the margin of victory the opposition was expected to receive, and did, in the other department, Freirina, whose governor had not been able to make the necessary arrangements to prevent the opposition majority from being reflected in the ballot box. Vallejo's forces in both departments protected the ballot boxes all night long between the first and the second day of voting. When the polls opened the next day, the same individuals organized to vote by the Vallenar governor showed up at the Vallenar voting tables once again, all in disguise, presenting other qualification certificates. Liberal protests went unheeded by the vote reception officials, who pretended that all was normal. Many Vallejo voters in the department were unable to go to the polls because the governor had kept their qualifications and the municipal authorities refused to give them the legally prescribed surrogate certificates alleging that they had no access to the voter registry books. Nonetheless, Liberal voters in Freirina once again gave Vallejo a greater margin of victory than the governor was able to secure in Vallenar, leading to celebrations and dancing that lasted well into the night after the ballots were counted. The following afternoon the general election results had to be proclaimed, after recounting all the ballots from the two departments, in Vallenar. The residents of Freirina—including many women and children—attached a pennant to their ballot box with the words 'Union and Liberty' and marched it in a procession, some on horse back, some on foot, to Vallenar. They stopped at a country house where they were given refreshments, and toasts were

raised to the victory expressing the hope that the rest of the Republic will also 'wake up.' Entering Vallenar, the procession was reorganized with 300 men on horseback. They carried the national flag in front, followed by the electoral commissioner with the ballot box. The box was flanked in turn by the new deputy to its right and someone carrying Freirina's pennant to its left. The calvacade made its way into the city through

streets full of jubilant and excited people; girls agitated their handkerchiefs and threw flowers as the ballot box made its way in front of their doors. The hurrahs, the rockets, and other exclamations and general happiness gave the festivities an ambiance that was reminiscent of the one produced thirty years earlier with the victory of the heroes in the War of Independence.

"Thank God!" said a sixty-year-old Liberal (*pipiolo*) woman, "that we have once again witnessed events of our Motherland (*Patria*)."

After depositing the box in the municipal hall, a banquet attended by citizens of all classes was held... The dancing lasted until three in the morning.¹

As this illustration shows, where there was electoral competition the government's agents could not automatically control even the voters in the national guards who were generally most susceptible to their influence. For this reason, in the larger cities there was already in the 1840s a market, in the literal sense of the term, for votes.² Some individuals sold their qualifications, their votes, or for a price made themselves available to vote by pretending they were the person whose name appeared on a qualification certificate that an electoral agent gave them. Judging from a list of 'new commandments' (*mandamientos nuevos*) printed by *El Artesano*, a Santiago newspaper that supported the government and was directed at an artisanal readership, vote buying was probably a tactic to which oppositions resorted preferentially. Indeed, the very first 'commandment' stated peremptorily "you will not give your vote for money" (*no darás tu sufragio por dinero*).³ However, where the market existed and when the votes of the national guards were not secure or not sufficient, the government also resorted to vote buying.⁴

The prices in this market for votes would increase or decrease depending on which candidate was estimated to be ahead at the time—or after the ballots were counted at the end of the first day—and by what margin. An account of the 1851 presidential elections in Santiago prepared by Lieutenant MacRae notes that under favorable circumstances voters could be paid

1 Amunátegui and Amunátegui, 155–56.

2 Domeyko also mentions that some voters sold their qualification certificates in Copiapó, often more than once; 411–12.

3 *El Artesano*, Santiago, no. 2 (20 June 1841), p. 3.

4 This is noted, as indicated previously, by Vicuña, *Vindicación de los principios e ideas*, 52.

up to “half a doubloon” (\$8.62) for depositing a ballot or for selling their qualification.¹ Electoral agents gave these voters a receipt which they could then exchange, after voting in the expected manner, for a counter-receipt that had to be presented to the campaign ‘bank’ for payment.² Hence, the campaign organization included a considerable number of operatives to identify voters and others who were willing to engage in these transactions; to agree on a price; to make sure that the voter could reach the voting table through the tight throng of people the contending campaign organization would also place in front of it to prevent such access; to observe the voting at the table in order to verify that individuals whose votes had been bought actually kept their bargain; to complain to voting table officials when fraud was committed by the other side; and to deliver the necessary monetary pay-offs after those who had struck a deal had voted as expected. Moreover, the campaigns had to have agents who circulated from one table to the next throughout the city’s subdivisions in order to keep tabs on which tables needed reinforcement, i.e., where more money needed to be spent. This information was vital to the central campaign headquarters not only in order to mobilize voters to the deficitary tables but also to calculate the market price for the votes. Each one of these operators had a special name, as can be seen in MacRae’s account:

Head-quarters were established in the house of one of the leading men near the center of the city, and there a bank was formed by subscription of all the wealthy men belonging to the ministerial party. Branch banks, drawing supplies from the central coffer, were instituted near each poll; about which last, three distinct classes of men were employed. The most numerous were the *apretadores* (pressers), whose business it was to jostle or intimidate from the polls as many opposition voters as possible, and facilitate the entrance or exit of their friends. A few intelligent men were stationed inside of the *apretadores*, to answer objections, challenge votes, and exchange checks with those whose votes had been purchased by their friends—a precaution necessary to prevent fraud by the vendor. Outside and circulating among the crowd was the third portion—the purchasers. These, on concluding a bargain, gave the vendor a check, with which and his vote he repaired to the polls, deposited his ballot, and received the counter-check from one of the ‘intelligent’ gentlemen standing near. This counter-check was an order on the local branch bank for the market value of the vote, regulated by the central institution, through intercourse constantly kept up by men on horseback, whom they called *vapores* (steamboats). Thus, when a steamer arrived from San Lázaro with intelligence that the opposition was very strong, and a majority of the voters were of that party, reinforcements of men and money were despatched there, the former having orders to hustle their opponents away from the ballot-box, and raise the price for votes one, two, or four dollars, as might be necessary. When another came from La Catedral with

¹ Gilliss, 307. These being 1850s dollars, the \$8.62 must have represented a tidy sum. The reference buttresses the notion that where there was electoral competition—and such was always the case in Santiago—it was of great intensity.

² Gilliss, 306.

news that their friends carried everything before them, the *apretadores* were withdrawn, and a diminution ordered for the sum to be paid for votes. Although there was no actual great necessity for economizing, yet, under this system, no more money was expended than was essential to secure their objects, and uniformity of action was preserved in all the parishes. Their bank seemed inexhaustible.¹

These illustrations from the provincial north and from Santiago show that even though the procedures were basically fraudulent, the fraud did not consist of stuffing the ballot boxes with a large number of ballots. Voters had to go through the process of registering, and each had to show a qualification (whether true or someone else's) in order to deposit a ballot. The numbers of votes were always fewer than the numbers of registered voters. The irregularities in the procedures centered on mechanisms to control voter access to the ballot box.

Concluding Remarks

Is it appropriate to dismiss the electoral practices of the Chilean nineteenth century as a mere manifestation of an 'oligarchic,' 'aristocratic,' or 'patrician' system of little relevance to the masses and to the future development of the nation's democracy? This paper has presented evidence that such characterizations are in need of deep revision.

It is certainly not true that Chile's *suffrage censitaire* meant that only the rich voted. Given the peculiar electoral practices that have been described here, the participation of especially the urban popular sectors was of great significance. Moreover, as elections were observed and celebrated (no doubt on some occasions more than others) by a much larger number of men, women, and even children than the small numbers of actual male voters would seem to indicate, it cannot be said that elections had little impact on the national society. The nineteenth century's electoral practices and political divisions forged enduring partisan loyalties in the electorate. Thus, until the 1920s, the main parties that emerged from the mid-nineteenth century, namely, the Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Parties, obtained an average of about 75% of the national vote in congressional elections, and until the late 1940s they received an average of about 56% in the same elections.² The parties that emerged in connection with the labor movement, beginning in 1887 with the Democratic Party, a splinter from the Radical trunk,

¹ Idem.

² These averages include the votes for all splinter groups from the Liberal, Radical, and Conservative parties that did not eventually become different parties altogether. The averages are calculated from data in Urzúa Valenzuela.

had difficulty reaching their full electoral potential because the political attachments of many popular sector voters had already been cast by the previous decades. These results were obtained after the 1888 to 1891 electoral law and post-civil war political changes had significantly altered electoral practices: the voting was moved into public buildings instead of being held outdoors; voters were instructed to move to a separate area with a table or desk to choose and mark ballots; the voter registry did not have to be renewed prior to each electoral year; the qualification certificates that could be used to supplant voters were abolished; the ministry of the interior no longer composed official lists of candidates; and the government no longer intervened directly in determining the outcome of elections. Hence, the parties no longer had to contend with blatant interference by the executive in mobilizing voters.

The often noted strength and endurance of the Chilean parties go back to nineteenth-century origins not only because of the loyalties they were able to generate in the populace. Equally important is the fact that they forged strong organizations binding together sizable numbers of the more militant and politically engaged individuals who exist in any national society. Not only did the parties have to find the necessary individuals to fill all the positions that were available from local to national government, including membership in the electoral juntas, they also had to rely on the efforts of a considerable number of individuals to make sure that their voters actually voted and to control and observe the various phases of the electoral system from registration to vote counting. The above noted descriptions of the actual voting show that the process demanded a very exacting and coordinated effort. Paradoxically, it is very likely that the organizational demands of parties would have been much simpler had there been more massive numbers of voters without a voter registry system and much easier access to the voting tables.

The numbers of actual voters for decades after 1891 continued to be relatively small, mostly because a large number of potential voters did not bother to register and/or to vote. Perhaps this was because elections were seen not only as a means to choose political leaders and exercise a right of citizenship but also as an act of partisanship and militancy—or an opportunity to earn some money by selling one's vote—which many people preferred to shun. If so, this was also a nineteenth-century legacy, given the large numbers of voters who participated in them as part of well-organized groups. The literacy requirement to vote was kept as well; the parties of the center and the left, in particular, did not favor abolishing it because they relied to a significant extent on the printed word to propagate their views. Moreover, illiteracy was higher in rural areas, where the parties of the right had a stronger presence.

The nineteenth century's electoral practices, despite their unfairness and irregularities, also had state institution-building effects. The voter registries had to be set up, qualification

certificates had to be printed, records had to be kept of who was and was not a voter, and even tax payer lists for each municipal ward had to be updated for the registration process. The whole system was also based on the law. Hence, voters who felt they were unfairly treated in the registration process appealed to the courts, which had to hear their cases quickly to settle the matter before the actual election. Moreover, opposition commentators in the newspapers could point to the deviations between the laws and the rights of citizens and the actual practices, and opposition legislators could argue the case in the chambers for legal changes to eradicate fraudulent practices.

By the final decade of the nineteenth century no one openly disputed that electoral practices had to be purified. There had to be a correct registry of voters, there had to be paper ballots, and the vote had to be secret. While complaints of electoral irregularities continued over the next decades—generally centering on vote buying—the electoral results did begin to reflect the relative strength of the Chilean electorate's various political tendencies. In this sense Chile had the essential legal-institutional and party-organizational elements of a democracy in place by the early twentieth century. But this was only the case because many of these aspects of Chilean democracy were wrought from nineteenth-century origins as legislators and party leaders sought to free the electoral system from control by the executive in what was, as a result, an authoritarian or predemocratic polity.