

ARGENTINE POLITICAL VIOLENCE DURING STATE FORMATION (1862-1880) AN INTERPRETATIVE ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Argentine historiography has considered the many uprisings that took place in Argentina during the second half of the nineteenth century to be disruptive actions that hampered the institutionalization of the political system outlined in the Constitution. Historians understood these forms of political mobilization as a part of minor power struggles between elites who, through their behavior, perpetuated political instability and delayed state consolidation. Recent empirical, local studies offer a different view of political violence in Argentina during state formation. This article reviews those studies and proposes a new global interpretation of the concept and practice of violence for the period between national unification (1862) and the consolidation of the state (1880).

KEYWORDS

Political History – 19th Century – State formation – violence – Historiography of Argentina.

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VIOLENCIA POLÍTICA DURANTE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL ESTADO EN ARGENTINA (1862-1880) UN ENSAYO INTERPRETATIVO

RESUMEN

Tradicionalmente, la historiografía argentina ha considerado los muchos levantamientos que tuvieron lugar en Argentina durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX como acciones disruptivas que obstaculizaron la institucionalización del sistema político descrito en la Constitución. Los historiadores entendieron estas formas de movilización política como parte de luchas de poder menores entre las élites que, a través de su comportamiento, perpetuaron la inestabilidad política y retrasaron la consolidación del estado. Estudios empíricos locales recientes ofrecen una visión diferente de la violencia política en Argentina durante la formación del estado. Este artículo revisa esos estudios y propone una nueva interpretación global del concepto y la práctica de la violencia para el período comprendido entre la unificación nacional (1862) y la consolidación del estado (1880).

PALABRAS CLAVE

Historia política – siglo XIX – formación del Estado – violencia
– Historiografía de Argentina.

Violence was an important part of the nation building process in Spanish America during the 19th century. From the wars of independence to the confrontations that erupted within and between the new nations, armed conflicts were frequent and played a key role in the new polities. The recurrence of violence and the fact that it could be (and was) used to settle many disputes at local, regional, national and international levels, made it a political tool as well as a permanent source of fear among political elites. Traditionally, Argentine historiography has considered uprisings to be disruptive actions that hampered the institutionalization of the political system outlined in the Constitution. This violence has usually been understood as the result of caudillo politics and a lack of political order following independence, as well as a reflection of regional disputes and power struggles between elites who perpetuated political instability and delayed state consolidation.³ Recent studies connected to the new Latin American political historiography⁴ have contested such views. They claim that popular violence was not a political anomaly, but an element that was constitutive of the republican regimes and that, at the same time, was vital in shaping them.⁵ This literature has produced excellent empirical analysis, but it has not yet provided an overarching analysis from a national perspective, or one that explains the role played by the different institutional and political actors involved. This article will examine the concept of violence during state formation and offer a general overview of its practice during the period. To do so, it will map recent literature on

3 HALPERÍN DONGHI, Tulio. *Proyecto y construcción de una nación: Argentina, 1846-1880*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1980; OSZLAK, Oscar. *La formación del Estado argentino. Orden, progreso y organización nacional*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1997 [1982]

4 On the renovation in political history in Latin America: PALACIOS, Guillermo (coord.). *Ensayos sobre la Nueva Historia Política de América Latina, Siglo XIX*. México: COLMEX, 2007.

5 A different assessment of this process in: MÍGUEZ, Eduardo. *Violencia y orden político en la Argentina en la formación del "régimen oligárquico"*. In ISLAS, Ariadna; REALI, M. Laura (eds.). *Guerras civiles. Un enfoque para entender la política en Iberoamérica (1830-1935)*. Madrid/Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2018, pp. 127-142, among others.

the topic not chronologically, but around a few issues that have been the focus of historiographical renovation.

The first section traces how the new literature explains the different positions regarding political violence held by the main national parties of the time. The second section builds on empirical studies, including my own, to show how rebellions were usually organized and carried out, who their participants were, their motivations, and how they justified their actions. The third section addresses the connection between political violence and the organization of the national army, which was used both to carry out the insurrections and to repress them. In the final section I assess how the doctrinal debates regarding the legitimacy of armed politics produced changes in legislation. The conclusion offers an overall balance of recent literature and argues that these studies have developed strong foundations for a new global interpretation of political violence during state formation: that the decline in the number of armed confrontations at the end of the century was not the mere result of state consolidation and political modernization. On the contrary, they suggest that it was the outcome of the triumph of the National Autonomist Party (PAN)'s political project, which prioritized public demobilization and reinforcement of national authorities. An indication that the Argentine state could have developed far different traits than it ultimately did.

Rebellions and Party Politics during State Formation

Revolts were a frequent form of political violence in nineteenth-century Argentina. Most political groups used armed rebellion to protest the authorities and to seize power. The denomination of armed movements as “illegal conspiracies” or “legitimate revolution” was a matter of dispute within Argentine liberal elites, who argued over the limits of popular politics in a republican system.⁶ All the re-

⁶ Unlike other Latin-American countries, Argentina did not have a conservative party that could challenge the liberal consensus on limited government, civil equality, freedom of thought and of the press, etc., laid out in the National Constitution of 1853.

bellions claimed to defend the Constitution against the authorities that violated its principles in the way they obtained power (through fraudulent elections) or the way they exercised such power (in a despotic manner). Therefore, the insurgents usually proposed to replace the authorities and *restore* constitutional rule, but they never put forward a new charter. Hilda Sabato has argued that the Constitution itself contributed to a sense of ambiguity about whether these kinds of political actions were legitimate. On the one hand, Article 21 stated that every citizen had the duty to bear arms in defense of the fatherland and the Constitution; on the other hand, Article 22 established that the people should only deliberate or govern through their constitutional representatives and authorities.⁷

In the same vein, new studies argue that the frequency of revolt was related not to the permanence of old political habitus, but to the new challenges of managing the access to power in republican politics. The electoral system played an important role in these challenges. It was based on the idea that the government should not pursue the interests of different sectors but should create a single national will. Majority-rule precluded the representation of minorities and turned elections into a battle between parties. As the ruling party often possessed greater resources to win, opponents were further marginalized. Many members of the political elite saw this exclusion as the primary source of violence, suggesting it made opposition candidates view armed insurrection as the most effective path to power. There were 117 uprisings between June 1862 and June 1868 alone, and in these conflicts, 4,728 people died.⁸ What were the origins of such political disputes? Did the various political parties view rebellions differently from one another?

7 SABATO, Hilda. Resistir la imposición: revolución, ciudadanía y República en la Argentina de 1880. *Revista de Indias*, 69: 246, 2009, pp. 169-170.

8 BOTANA, Natalio. *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880 y 1916*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998 [1977], p. 3.

Many recent studies have addressed these questions, including Beatriz Bragoni and Eduardo Míguez's edited volume on provincial politics, Ariel de la Fuente's work on gaucho insurgency in the 1860s and Hilda Sabato's account of the upheaval in Buenos Aires in 1880.⁹ This literature has shown that during state formation, the most serious disputes arose around federalism, particularly regarding the what role Buenos Aires—the richest and most powerful province—should assume in the new country. Part of those conflicts centered on the way in which the financial resources of the Buenos Aires port should be divided among the provinces, though this was partially resolved early-on with the nationalization of customs. More complicated was the issue of Buenos Aires' political leadership and the province's aspiration to lead the unification process by expanding its institutions and political practices to the rest of the country. Those disputes generated two political groups: Liberals, which were led by Bartolomé Mitre (based in Buenos Aires) and had varying levels of support in the provinces (later the group would take the name, Nationalists), and Federals, which had a stronghold in the provinces. The Federals were led by Justo José de Urquiza, as well as other regional leaders, like Angel Vicente Peñaloza and Felipe Varela. The confrontations between the two parties were a defining feature of politics during the 1850s and 1860s, and became less important in the 1870s, when the Federals were defeated, and the prominence of Mitre's Liberals began to wane. These developments triggered the emergence of a new political constellation, the National Autonomist Party (PAN), organized in the late 1870s by the ruling groups of most provinces, several important Army personnel, and parts of the Autonomist Party of Buenos Aires.¹⁰

9 BRAGONI and Eduardo MÍGUEZ (eds.), *Un nuevo orden político. Provincias y Estado Nacional, 1852-1880*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2010, pp. 29-60; DE LA FUENTE, Ariel. *Children of Facundo. Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency During the Argentine State-Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853-1870)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; SABATO, Hilda. *Buenos Aires en armas. La revolución de 1880*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008.

10 The Autonomist Party of Buenos Aires did not have a unified view on the legitimacy of political violence. Probably because of that, it also had an ambiguous position towards the development

How did the parties settle their disputes? What were the limits of legitimate oppositional action? These two questions have been on the center of recent studies, that have suggested that the three parties set forth proposals to exercise this right that were at odds. Broad sectors of the Liberals and the Federals understood that the concerted efforts of citizens, rather than parties, should protect freedom.¹¹ They argued that the people's active exercise of civic responsibility was critical to the limitation of governmental power and served as a safeguard against despotism. The people had the right to petition, to choose their rulers, and to control the exercise of power through the press, and, in particularly extreme cases, through their right to bear arms in the defense of the Constitution. According to this view, in many cases they advocated a wide-ranging freedom of the press, popular juries to protect those freedoms, and a military organization based on popular militias, rather than on a professional army. By contrast, the National Autonomist Party interpreted the balance between liberty and power quite differently. This party proposed that government accountability and control was conditional on the separation of powers of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches. Accordingly, they supported laws to control the freedom of the press and a military organization based on a professional army rather than on armed citizens and argued for minority representation in Parliament to pacify political unrest. They rejected the notion that the opposing party was the embodiment of the sovereign people and thus was endowed with the power to control government. They belie-

of the PAN. HALPERÍN DONGHI, Tulio. Op. Cit. The terms Liberals, Federals, Nationalist and Autonomists refer to the names used by the political parties to identify themselves, not to other uses of those concepts that were frequent at the time and more closely connected to political doctrines such as liberalism, nationalism, etc.

11 DE LA FUENTE, Ariel. Op. Cit.; CUCCHI, Laura. Opinión pública, legitimidad y partidos. Miradas sobre el adversario político en Córdoba a finales de los años setenta del siglo XIX. *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani"* 38, pp. 78-107, 2013; MACÍAS, Flavia. *Armas y política en la Argentina. Tucumán, siglo xix*. Madrid: CSIC, 2014; SCHMIT, Roberto (ed.). *Caudillos, política e instituciones en los orígenes de la Nación Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2015.

ved that there was not one single national will—the so-called “will of the people”—but different opinions and interests.¹²

In that framework, revolutions became a key point in party debates over the acceptable limits of popular politics. Even when they disagreed about the legitimacy of certain insurrections, Mitre’s Liberals and Federals both claimed that insurrections were acceptable under certain conditions: when the government violated rights and freedoms, the people should take direct action to re-establish constitutional rule.¹³ In this sense, violence was not necessarily at odds with the institutionalization of the republican order. On the other hand, the emerging PAN considered that such an action could never be legal in a republican system. Under constitutional rule, when governmental action was considered arbitrary, detrimental or even unconstitutional, the people should restrict themselves to choosing new representatives. This position was very clear in the journalistic and doctrinal work of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who played an important role in the organization of the party as a coalition of all the Autonomist parties from the provinces at the end of the 1870s.¹⁴ Therefore, the PAN rejected the ideas that a solid republican state implied high levels of mobilization and political participation, the PAN considered, on the contrary, that strong governmental authority was necessary. In its view, civic mobilization was an obstacle in the country’s path to economic development: Argentina needed to establish effective authority to pave the way for commercial and industrial growth. In short, while Federals and Mitre’s Liberals generally agreed on the legitimacy of armed civic action, Autonomists started developing a different perspective on the matter; this new view rose to pro-

12 CUCCHI, Laura. *Opinión Pública*. Op. Cit.

13 DE LA FUENTE, Ariel. Op. Cit.; SABATO, Hilda, *Resistir la imposición*. Op. Cit.

14 CUCCHI, Laura. Entre la ‘anarquía’ y el ‘despotismo’: debates sobre la acción armada y las formas de la contienda política en Córdoba en 1880. *Nuevo Mundo/ Mundos Nuevos* N°14, 2014.

minence after 1880 but continued to be disputed until the beginning of the new century.¹⁵

Organizing rebellions: actors and motivations

For decades, historians of Argentina largely adopted the PAN's position, considering revolts to be disruptive actions that impeded the institutionalization of the political system that was outlined in the Constitution.¹⁶ However, recent studies examined the links between rebellions and other forms of politicization, such as elections, demonstrations, and the political press, and argued that uprisings contributed to the creation of a citizenry by integrating adult men into politics. Rather than considering popular participation in armed conflicts as an obstacle to state formation, they believe it played an important role in citizenship education and indoctrination.

Between 1862 and 1880, armed struggles took place in a variety of contexts. They happened in the poorest provinces, like La Rioja, and those closely connected to capitalist development and modernization, like Santa Fe, Córdoba, or Entre Ríos; even the country's richest and most powerful province, Buenos Aires, was host to several of the largest insurrections (in terms of participation and bloodshed). Claiming they acted in defense of the Constitution, hundreds of armed uprisings challenged, and sometimes replaced, provincial or national authorities. We could divide these uprisings into two groups.

15 ALONSO, Paula. *Between Revolution and the Ballot Box. The Origins of the Argentina Radical Party in the 1890s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and *Jardines secretos, legitimaciones públicas. El Partido Autonomista Nacional y la política argentina de fines del siglo XIX*. Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2010.

16 HALPERÍN DONGHI, Tulio. Op. Cit.; BONAUDO, Marta; SONZOGNI, Élide. Los grupos dominantes entre la legitimidad y el control. In BONAUDO, Marta. *Nueva Historia Argentina. III*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2000, pp. 27-96; ANSALDI, Waldo. La trunca transición del régimen oligárquico al régimen democrático. In FALCÓN, Ricardo. *Nueva Historia Argentina. IV*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2000; MÍGUEZ, Eduardo. Política y partidos en la organización nacional. In LANTERI, Ana L. *Actores e identidades en la construcción del estado nacional*. Buenos Aires: Teseo, pp. 171-210, 2013, among many others.

In the first were local and regional rebellions waged against national government, especially under the administration of President Mitre, Argentina's first president, in office from 1862 to 1868, who was attempting to build a nation-state under the Liberals predominance. He found resistance to his plan in many of the thirteen other provinces who had, for decades, existed as independent states in a loose confederation. Among the insurrections that fell into this category were the Federal rebellions that shook the Cuyo and northern region in the 1860s, led by Angel Vicente Peñaloza and Felipe Varela (among other Federal leaders). Sometimes upheaval arose from the refusal to pay the new "national" taxes. In other cases, insurrections were linked to resistance against massive recruitment, as was the case during the War of the Triple Alliance, waged by Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, against Paraguay (1864-1870).¹⁷

In the second group were uprisings closely connected to the competition for power and election results. Insurrections of the second category, include the 1874 and 1880 armed uprisings in Buenos Aires against the national government among many other insurrections in the provinces. The first was led by then-former President Mitre to protest what he regarded as a fraudulent election of congressional representatives in early 1874. The long-term goal of the uprising was to prevent the presidential succession once Mitre had been defeated as a candidate. Outside Buenos Aires, the movement had less support; the national army was ultimately able to put down the insurrection.¹⁸ The 1880 rebellion also took place in Buenos Aires; its leader was Carlos Tejedor, the governor of the province and a candidate for president. When the election was won by Julio Roca, a former Minister of War and a member of the National Autonomist Party, Tejedor mobilized

17 DE LA FUENTE, Ariel. Op. Cit.; QUINTIÁN, Juan Ignacio. La rebelión de los Uriburu. Movilización popular y política facciosa en Salta a mediados de la década de 1860. In *XIII Jornadas Interescuelas*. Catamarca: 2011.

18 MÍGUEZ, Eduardo. *Mitre montonero. La Revolución de 1874 y las formas de la política en la organización nacional*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2011; DAGHERO, Sergio. Las facciones y las armas: la Revolución de 1874 en Córdoba y Cuyo. *Coordenadas*, Río Cuarto, 1:1, pp. 118-142, 2014.

the province's military in a fight against the national army, claiming that Roca's triumph had been imposed by the national government's politicians and military.¹⁹ Tejedor was defeated and, as a result, the province lost the city of Buenos Aires, which was federalized. At the same time, the military forces of the provinces were dismantled to prevent further rebellions, as I will analyze in a later section.

Beyond the differences between these cases, they share many qualities among themselves and with the other uprisings that took place during those years. Conspiracies to organize an insurrection began often in secret; political leaders and local figures planned meetings and agreements to mobilize followers to support or execute the uprising. Usually, the intermediate leadership was made up of landowners, men that held commanding positions in the military, or of other socially-powerful individuals who had political connections in rural areas and who could use their positions to recruit participants for the insurgency. Also, professional urbanites, such as lawyers, journalists, or public figures from civil and political associations, held an important role in these intermediate ranks because they could also engage support for the movement. In those secret meetings, the heterogeneous group of political, social, and military figures made key decisions. First, they organized a "revolutionary committee" to coordinate all political and military actions. They also agreed on the day that the rebellion was to break out and the plan to follow. They often decided to begin the action by capturing the authorities and seizing control of the government building or, in other cases, by occupying the police building or premises where weapons were stored, capturing trains, vessels or other means of transport that might allow the rebels to achieve political and military control of the territory. Finally, they negotiated the material resources that would be available for the uprising (horses, provisions, weapons and ammunition, money),

19 SABATO, Hilda. Buenos Aires en armas. Op. Cit; CANCIANI, Leonardo. *Frontera, militarización y política armada. La Guardia Nacional de la Provincia de Buenos Aires durante la construcción del Estado Nacional (1852-1880)*. La Plata: Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires "Dr. Ricardo Levene", 2017.

and, in many cases, the benefits that each party would derive from the insurrection, including, sometimes, compensation for subordinates who participated in the attack.²⁰

Who were these men? Empirical studies show that participants were quite poor, many of them peasants, farm workers, or farm hands, as well as some men from the rural middle sectors, like overseers (*capataces de estancia*) and government employees based in the countryside. But urban men also often played a role: merchants, master artisans, and their apprentices took part. Most already belonged to some level of military organization, including the national guard and local police. They were driven to join the movement by their sympathies with certain political leaders, as well as other motivations that included kinship, friendship, and camaraderie, financial compensation or military loyalty towards their commanders. As Liliana Chaves has shown for a rebellion in the province of Córdoba in 1880, sometimes the participants signed agreements that stated specifically what kind of support they would supply the movement and the financial compensation they would receive in exchange.²¹

Similarly, in analyzing a Liberal conspiracy that took place in 1858 in Tucumán, Flavia Macías and María José Navajas have shown that a broad and heterogeneous set of factors, including coercion, financial compensation, and beliefs, led men to join conspiracies. In the case of Tucumán, the goal was to overthrow the governors of two provinces, Tucumán and Salta, and to prevent the appointment of new deputies from those districts to the National Congress. The leaders were a military commander, a priest, and a landowner, and followers included peasants, hacienda managers, soldiers, artisans, as well as a few merchants and landowners, all between 17 and 50

²⁰ CHAVES, Liliana. *Tradiciones y rupturas de la élite política cordobesa (1870-1880). La clave conservadora de la modernización política*. Córdoba: Ferreyra Editor, 1997, p. 190; MACÍAS, Flavia; NAVAJAS, María José. Un hacendado, un cura y un comandante: entramados de una conspiración fallida. Tucumán, 1858. *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, Sevilla, 69:2, pp. 477-505, 2012, p. 491; QUINTIÁN, Juan Ignacio. Op. Cit., pp. 10-11.

²¹ CHAVES, Liliana, Op. Cit., pp. 193-194.

years of age. The uprising was cut short when the Tucumán government learned about the revolutionary plan and captured the rebels. In the trial against the conspirators, some of them stated that they had joined the movement because of economic pressures or threats of physical coercion, while others claimed that they had done it in exchange for financial pay or in terms of loyalty to the leaders.²²

Although the material incentives and pressure were a factor, the new literature warns us that to understand these movements, one must also consider shared political values and beliefs. Sabato²³ and Macías,²⁴ among others, have stressed that armed insurrection was presented as a legitimate way to fulfill one's civic duty of protecting constitutional rights and institutions. This means that there was a close connection between the practice of rebellion and the ideas of republican governance expressed in the Constitution and its Article 21, and it was one that both Liberals and Federals invoked.

Carrying out rebellions: the role of the armed forces

The armed forces are a key element in the formation and definition of a state. The centralization of the military resources and the monopoly of the legitimate use of force have become a fundamental characteristic of statehood in the twentieth century. But recent historiography claims that this idea did not prevail in the Americas during the previous century. On the contrary, local political elites held extensive debates about the pros and cons of centralized or decentralized armed forces.²⁵ Was it necessary to have a strong, professional, and centralized army to defend the nation against its external or internal enemies? Or could such an army be used to overpower civil government and become a tool of despotism? Partly because of

22 MACÍAS, Flavia; NAVAJAS, María José. Op. Cit.

23 SABATO, Hilda. Buenos Aires en armas. Op. Cit.

24 MACÍAS, Flavia. Op. Cit.

25 SABATO, Hilda. Buenos Aires en armas. Op. Cit

those controversies, Argentina kept during the second half of the nineteenth century a military design that combined professional (centralized) and citizen armies (decentralized) like other Spanish-American countries. The main difference between both was that the former worked as a regular service of both professional soldiers and convicted outlaws serving their sentence, while the latter was a citizen militia of occasional service. This combined system arose in part from a widespread idea that a citizen militia was a fundamental part of republican life, insofar as it was up to this force to defend the liberties and civic rights granted by the Constitution. Additionally, military centralization was impossible in a *de facto* decentralized political situation. Therefore, the management of the citizens' militias was left to the provinces.²⁶ The most decisive steps towards centralization and professionalization came later, during the presidency of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1868-1874). Sarmiento understood that the nature of the Argentine military organization was a key factor in making rebellions possible. The very option of carrying out a revolt was largely based on the position that citizen militias occupied within the military forces, which effectively made every citizen a soldier. Although the mobilization of this army was a prerogative of the national government, it was carried out by the governors, who retained extensive powers in the matter. Macías has reminded us that the provinces, not the national government, were responsible in providing military instruction to the militias, as well as in organizing and mobilizing them to fight in external confrontations like the War of the Triple Alliance, to protect the internal borders from Indian raids and to repress insurrections in other provinces.²⁷ This means that, unlike the Standing Army that was controlled by the national government, the National Guard was largely connected to local political realities. Recent studies such as Luciano Literas²⁸ and Leonardo Cancia-

26 MACÍAS, Flavia. *Armas y política*. Op. Cit.

27 Ibidem.

28 LITERAS, Luciano. *Vecindarios en armas. Sociedad, Estado y milicias en las fronteras de Pampa y Norpatagonia (segunda mitad del siglo XIX)*. Rosario: Prohistoria, 2017.

ni²⁹ have extensively probed that the National Guard of Buenos Aires spurred the militarization and politicization of popular countrymen, and that such militias could be used as a provincial army against national government or in local confrontations between provincial parties.

Furthermore, until 1877, enrollment in the National Guard was a prerequisite for voting rights. This meant that the local commanders who provided the certificates of enrollment required to cast a ballot had an opportunity to place pressure on their troops on election day. Thus, legislation increased the connection of citizen armies to local electoral disputes and spread the notion that military units were the very embodiment of the citizenry and the nation.³⁰ For all these reasons, militias contribute to the integration of broad sectors of the population into politics and function as a place where loyalties and leadership were built. They also constituted a key factor in the formation of local, regional, and national political networks, and offered the military an organizational structure that made rebellions—like the insurrections of Cuyo, the Buenos Aires rebellions of 1874 and 1880, and hundreds of other provincial confrontations—possible.

In summary, the militias became a key space for the formulation of political relations and alliances; as a result, leaders could use them for conspiracy purposes. Who were these leaders and how did they gain the support of the troops? They were men with extensive social connections who used a vast set of tools like assertion of authority and leadership, the displays of bravery, and paternalism to develop a political relationship with the troops. Usually, the soldiers were loyal to their commanders and followed them in their political endeavors; this could mean voting for a candidate that the commander endorsed or joining them in rebellions against the local or national authori-

29 CANCIANI, Leonardo. Op. Cit.

30 MACÍAS, Flavia. “El deber de enrolarse y el derecho a votar. Reflexiones en torno a la ciudadanía armada y el sufragio en Argentina, 1863- 1877”, *Revista de Indias*, Madrid, 76:266, pp. 233-258, 2016.

ties.³¹ President Sarmiento (1868-1874) saw breaking those ties and establishing a direct chain of command between militias and the National Executive as an utmost priority. To build an army that was beyond the influence of the strong men of each province and region, he put forward legislation to promote military professionalization and centralization; for example, the creation of the Military College and the Naval Military School and a national recruitment law that sought to increase the national government's power in organizing the provincial National Guards until militias could be replaced by a strong, large, and professional standing army.³²

But, as Ana Leonor Romero and I have recently suggested, Sarmiento faced resistance.³³ Mitre's Liberals, among some other members of the political elite, considered militias, in which citizens enjoyed political rights, to be the type of army best suited for a republican system. Because of such disagreements, Congress could not come to a consensus and suppress the National Guard during the nineteenth century. Such a disagreement perpetuated the ambiguities in the organization of the Army and was directly connected to the controversies within political elites regarding republican governance during the late 1870s: what was the role of popular mobilization in a republic? Did the exercise of those sovereign rights and duties sustain or undermine the republican system? These issues, and a sort of stalemate between the advocates of public order and the advocates of public freedoms, characterized the period of state formation. And, as we shall later see, only at the beginning of the twentieth century did the fear of a war with Chile and deep internal political unrest (related to party disputes and to the organization of the labor movement)

31 SABATO, Hilda. Buenos Aires en armas. Op. Cit.

32 MACÍAS, Flavia. Armas y política. Op. Cit.

33 CUCCHI, Laura; ROMERO, Ana. L. Tensions between Congress and the Executive in 19th Century Argentina: Federal Intervention and Separation of Powers. *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, London, Vol. 37, N°2. pp. 193-205, 2017b.

persuade Congress to vote for a compulsory enlistment of soldiers in the standing army, thus eliminating citizen militias.

Repressing rebellions: emergency powers and the moderating role of the judiciary

The new studies on political violence have also analyzed the connections between insurgency and the changes in governmental power. Throughout the period, the executive and the legislative branches resorted to different institutional instruments to repress political conspiracies. One such tool was the state of siege which Congress or the president could declare in case of internal commotion. Under a state of siege, the national government had the power to arrest conspirators, to move them from one point of the national territory to another, and to close newspapers that “incited” rebellion, which meant that during that period any oppositional activity could be persecuted by the government. Between 1862 and 1880, this mechanism was used 15 times to disarm insurgents.³⁴

Ana Romero and I have examined another instrument that Congress and the president could use to controlling rebellions in the provinces: the federal intervention that, according to Article 6 of the Constitution, gave national authorities the power to take over provincial government to “guarantee the republican form of government” and “to repel foreign invasions.” We showed how, during this period, the national government made use of this power on 20 occasions. At times, the president or the Congress sent civilian commissioners to work with local authorities to restore order. In other instances, they also sent army troops to fight the insurgents. In extreme cases, the federal authority took over the three branches of the provincial go-

³⁴ MOLINELLI, Guillermo; PALANZA, Gabriela; SIN, Gisela. *Congreso, presidencia y Justicia en Argentina. Materiales para su estudio*. Buenos Aires: Fundación Gobierno y Sociedad- Temas, 1999, pp. 492-3.

vernments, seizing complete control of local affairs.³⁵ But throughout the period, Congress checked presidential powers to prevent an authoritarian use of this institution.

The federal judiciary also played an important role in securing internal order, as Jonathan Miller,³⁶ Carlos Malamud,³⁷ and Eduardo Zimmermann³⁸ have suggested. The 1863 Law of Jurisdiction and Competence of National Courts established that the federal courts and the Supreme Court of Justice (not the local judiciaries) dictated and enforced sentences for rebellion and sedition in the provinces. The first consisted of uprisings against the national government with the purpose of amending the Constitution and changing the form of government; overthrowing the president or preventing his succession; dissolving Congress or hampering its action; or preventing the election of national deputies or senators from taking place. This offense was punishable by fines, two or four years of military service at the borders, or banishment for four, six, or ten years. Sedition was generally used in public debate to describe any revolt against government, but legally it was defined as the uprising of one province against another to prevent the enforcement of laws, popular elections, or the exercise of power by national authorities. In this case, the penalties were fines, military service at the border for two years, or exile for six years. Only when the uprisings were under enemy flags or to deliver the territory to a foreign power could the leaders of the insurrection be charged with treason and receive capital punishment.

35 CUCCHI, Laura; ROMERO, Ana Leonor. El «modelo» norteamericano en la reglamentación de las intervenciones federales en la Argentina decimonónica. Debates en el Congreso Nacional (1869 y 1894). Anuario de Estudios Americanos, Sevilla, Vol. 74, N° 2, pp. 615-642, 2017.

36 MILLER, Jonathan. Courts and the Creation of a “Spirit of Moderation”: Judicial Protection of Revolutionaries in Argentina, 1863-1929. *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, San Francisco, 20:2, pp. 231-329, 1997.

37 MALAMUD, Carlos. La restauración del orden: represión y amnistía en las revoluciones argentinas de 1890 y 1893. In POSADA CARBÓ, Eduardo (ed.). *In Search of a New Order: Essays on the Politics and Society of Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. London: ILAS, 1998.

38 ZIMMERMANN, Eduardo, En tiempos de rebelión. La justicia federal frente a los levantamientos provinciales, 1860-1880. In BRAGONI, Beatriz; MÍGUEZ, Eduardo. Op. Cit., pp. 245-273, 2010.

Such moderate punishment did not discourage insurrections,³⁹ and those who participated in uprisings also counted on the Federal Justice to respect their rights and guarantees during trial, knowing that the Supreme Court would not allow military courts to assert authority over civilians and that conspirators could leave custody on bail and could reasonably expect an official pardon.⁴⁰ For these reasons, Miller has suggested that the Supreme Court was a moderating political influence in the context of violence and instability during state formation.⁴¹ Why did authorities engage in these displays of moderation? On the one hand, it could have been related to a recognition of armed politics as a legitimate way to exercise popular sovereignty. Judicial guarantees were thus related to the fact that the judiciary did not see all insurrection as a practice completely at odds with the republican system. On the other hand, moderation could be explained by the judiciary's lack of material and human resources—a problem that hampered the Argentine state throughout this period. During the nation-building process, an important part of the state budget was allocated to the Ministry of War for the military resources needed to deal with internal insurrections and to fund the Triple Alliance, formed by Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, to fight against Paraguay (1864-1870). But, at the same time, the largest budget within the Ministry of Justice, Worship and Public Instruction, was assigned to education. As Zimmermann has pointed out, this means that the state did not place exclusive emphasis on repression and judgment of the conspirators, but also on the creation of what the government called “responsible citizens”: citizens that would not contest governmental authority in illegal ways. In such a view, civic education and not repression would gradually contribute to discouraging rebellions in the long run.⁴²

39 MALAMUD, Carlos. Op. Cit., p. 130.

40 MILLER, Jonathan, Op. Cit.; ZIMMERMANN, Eduardo. En tiempos de rebellion. Op. Cit.

41 MILLER, Jonathan, Op. Cit., pp. 233-234.

42 ZIMMERMANN, Eduardo. Poder Judicial, la construcción del estado, y el federalismo: Argentina, 1860-1880, in Eduardo Posada Carbó (ed.). Op. Cit, p. 151.

In short, recent historiography suggests that the frequency of rebellions cannot be exclusively explained by the widespread idea that citizens functioned as the guardians of republican governance, or by their role in the military. Uprisings were also related to the relatively low political risks of participation. Penalties were mild, and in many cases the federal justice system could not even enforce punishments. Moreover, those who joined uprisings counted on the federal judiciary to guarantee their constitutional rights against government persecution; they knew that they were likely to be granted amnesty, as was ultimately the case for participants in the Buenos Aires rebellion of 1874, the Córdoba rebellion of 1880, and the Tucumán rebellion of 1858, among many others.⁴³

(De)legitimizing rebellions: Revolts and revolutions in public debate

Judicial, executive and parliamentary action towards insurrections connected to controversies about the features of republican life that took place beyond the realm of government: in public debates in the political press and in legal publications, in lectures and dissertations at universities, in public demonstrations in the streets of Buenos Aires, Tucumán or Córdoba, as well as other public forums. Ana Leonor Romero and I have pointed out that taming rebellions were a particularly complex matter because any judicial decision against conspirators or any law regarding military organization could affect other issues like individual rights, citizenship (if the militias were to be dismantled) and federalism (if the national government were to take its organization into its hands). The controversies were aggravated by the U.S. Civil War and the strengthening of the U.S. federal government in the war's aftermath.⁴⁴ In the late 1860s, the Argenti-

43 MILLER, Jonathan. Op. Cit. pp. 249, 259; MACÍAS, Flavia; NAVAJAS, María José. Op. Cit: CUCCHI, Laura. Entre la 'anarquía' y el 'despotismo'. Op. Cit.

44 CUCCHI, Laura and ROMERO, ANA L. Tensions. Op. Cit.

ne government commissioned the acquisition and translation of major U.S. constitutional and political treatises to disseminate U.S. constitutional law. This was particularly the case for books that were published after the Civil War that advocated for stronger executive power to maintain order (like W. Whiting, *War Powers Under the Constitution of the United States* and John Norton Pomeroy, *An Introduction to the Constitutional Law of the United States*).⁴⁵ The Spanish editions were extensively used by members of the Argentine executive, legislative and judiciary branches to justify their positions and settle disputes that arose in or between branches, particularly when addressing rebellions and their connections to the fragmented military organization.⁴⁶

The link between the intellectual and public debates and the political disputes was clear in the controversies among two of the most prominent Argentine intellectuals and politicians: presidents Mitre and Sarmiento. In Congress, Mitre often presented counter arguments to Sarmiento's legislative projects regarding military organization and the regulation of institutional tools to control insurrections (state of siege and federal intervention). In their proposals, both politicians connected the problem of rebellions to what, in their opinion, were the greatest threats to the republic: despotism, for Mitre, and anarchy, for Sarmiento. Mitre and his followers understood that armed action was an important side of the practical politics deriving from the principle of popular sovereignty in a republic, and that citizens had the duty, the right, and the need to control the governmental exercise of power. Mitre organized or supported many of the rebellions of this period (like the insurrections of 1874 and 1880 in Buenos Aires). Additionally, he considered revolutions to be a key element in national history since it was the armed action of citizens

45 ZIMMERMANN, Eduardo. Translations of the "American Model" in Nineteenth Century Argentina: Constitutional Culture as a Global Legal Entanglement. In DUVE, Thomas. *Entanglements in Legal History: Conceptual Approaches to Legal History*. Frankfurt: Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, pp. 385-425, 2014.

46 CUCCHI, Laura; ROMERO, Ana Leonor. El "modelo" norteamericano. Op. Cit.

that secured independence from the Spanish crown and led to national organization. For these two reasons, Mitre's Liberals thought that it was important to preserve the citizen militias, insofar as they could counterbalance a concentration of power by the authorities (particularly in the national government) and secure the counterweights of federalism. For this same reason, they condemned the use of the so-called emergency powers that tipped the balance of authority in favor of the National Executive: the state of siege and the federal intervention. Disagreements with the Autonomists meant that the two institutions were left without legal regulation.

By contrast, Sarmiento believed that following the enactment of the 1853 Constitution, revolutions were neither legal nor legitimate. When the "people" judged governmental measures as arbitrary or unconstitutional, the appropriate way of dealing with such problems was to elect new representatives.⁴⁷ Following this idea, he put forward bills to strengthen the executive's emergency powers, to forbid military forces from influencing the elections, and to professionalize the Standing Army.⁴⁸ In his writings as a publicist and his actions as president and later as Minister of Interior, Sarmiento promoted a "new era" of political demobilization and concentration of power that had a deep influence on the organization of the PAN, which came to power in 1880. Sarmiento wrote the PAN's first platforms, and, following his proposals, the party advocated a transformation of oppositional practices (among other changes) by moving party struggles from the usual arenas (elections, political press, and uprisings) to the legislatures and the National Congress. Political conflict had to be resolved within institutions, away from the direct action of citizens. Therefore, the first PAN president, Julio Roca (1880-1886), and his supporters followed Sarmiento's ideas and put forward several bills regarding control of the press, organization of the military, and

47 CUCCHI, Laura. La política como administración. El surgimiento y consolidación del Juarismo en la provincia de Córdoba, Argentina (1877-1883), *Historia y Sociedad*, Medellín, 27, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, pp. 71-99, 2014b.

48 MACÍAS, Flavia. *Armas y política*. Op. Cit.

electoral law, to tear up the material and symbolic fabric that made rebellions possible.

Epilogue: suppressing rebellions after the consolidation of the state

The new literature has focused mainly on explaining the connections between political violence and the republican system during the period between the 1853 Constitution to the triumph of the national state over Buenos Aires in 1880. Scholars also appear to agree that the views on the legitimacy of popular mobilization changed in the following period.

Flavia Macías⁴⁹ and I⁵⁰ have shown that the PAN tried to bureaucratize police tasks in the provinces, that were till then carried out by citizen militias, to undermine the connection between citizens and armed mobilization. Paula Alonso has probed how the party underpinned these proposals with an intense campaign to delegitimize armed politics and direct citizens' actions beyond the ballot box.⁵¹ Hilda Sabato has connected the growing loss of legitimacy of revolutions to the spreading of positivism and new ideas regarding political and social order that focused on the need to domesticate political uncertainty. She has suggested that the PAN, among other Latin-American political elites of the turn of the century, sought to “centralize authority in a strong national state that would monopolize the use of force, discipline the elites, and reshape the citizenry.”⁵² Nicolás Sillitti has addressed the ways in which national government strengthened its agencies and, above all, its repressive state apparatus, connecting the professionalization of the army to decisive changes in the legislation

49 MACÍAS, Flavia. El deber de enrolarse. Op. Cit.

50 CUCCHI, Laura. La política como administración. Op. Cit.

51 ALONSO, Paula. Between Revolution and the Ballot Box. Op. Cit.

52 SABATO, Hilda. *Republics of the New World. The revolutionary political experiment in 19th- century Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018 p. 197.

that prosecuted members of the military that took part in rebellions.⁵³ Finally, Leonardo Hirsch has placed the issue of the rebellions of the late 19th century in the bigger discussion regarding the promotion of new institutional and political mechanisms to process opposition and handle partisan disputes. He has analyzed the legislative debates regarding the need to improve electoral system to ensure the representation of political minorities and shown that, one of the main reasons driving the political elites to modify electoral regime, was a growing concern about political violence.⁵⁴

In sum, although there remains work to be done on the topic, the new scholarship has offered clues to explain the changes in political violence not as an inevitable result of political modernization, but as combination of novelties in values, legislation and practical organization of armed forces that were put forward by the PAN. But, as these studies also show, the problem of political violence did not disappear. On the contrary, at the turn of the century, the contentious defense and condemnation of armed politics continued to be a key point in the disagreements held by the Argentine political elites over how the Constitution should be implemented, and politics should be practiced.⁵⁵

A better understanding of the concept and practice of violence (and politics in general) in the late 19th century requires more empirical studies on how the process of demobilization took place; on its scope and limits. In the same way that recent scholarship has contested traditional narratives of state formation, we need to reexamine the canonic views on the features the “conservative order” of PAN’s domination between 1880 and 1916. The values put forward by the PAN were contested, and the scope of its achievements in changing the legislation and in transforming politics must be assess in the

53 SILLITTI, Nicolás. El levantamiento armado de 1905. Estado, ejército y delito político en la Argentina a comienzos del siglo XX. Tesis de maestría inédita, UDESA, 2014.

54 HIRSCH, Leonardo. La república proporcional de Buenos Aires (1890-1898). La consagración de los partidos en Argentina. Tesis doctoral inédita, UBA, 2017.

55 ALONSO, Paula. Between Revolution and the Ballot Box. Op. Cit.

bigger picture of the balances of power between different political groups (even within the ruling party) that had very different ideas about how a republican government should work. This means that we need go beyond an analytical perspective of political confrontations as placing limits on institutional innovation.

Final Remarks

Recent empirical and case studies on political violence during state formation have contested many aspects of the more classic interpretations. Argentine historiography has traditionally seen violence as rooted in the permanence of cultural elements (like a violent or authoritarian political culture),⁵⁶ or as a result of disputes over conflictive economic interests, family affinities, or personal disagreements.⁵⁷ On the contrary, the recurrence of the rebellions can be explained by normative factors (constitutional ambiguity), ideological elements (parties' varied ideas of legitimate ways to exercise popular sovereignty and to control government power in a republican system), and practical ones (the challenges of settling disagreements peacefully in a framework of regional conflicts, institutional weakness, and a simple majority electoral system).

The new literature argues that the important role of rebellions in politics derived from the fact that insurrections linked abstract notions of the nature of popular sovereignty to a specific and extreme form of political action that was considered by many to be a legitimate form of contesting power. It shows that different ideas regarding the shaping of the national state coexisted during state formation, and that such disagreements were connected directly and indirectly to rebellions: directly, because some political elites resorted to arms to defend their way of understanding the Constitution and indirectly, because these disagreements affected broader discussions re-

⁵⁶ ANSALDI, Waldo. La trunca transición. Op. Cit.

⁵⁷ HALPERIN DONGHI, Tulio. Op. Cit.

garding the shaping of a new political system in general, and many of its agencies in particular, as the controversies over military design and the judiciary budget show. For broad sectors of political elites, rebellions were not at odds with state institutionalization; they were one possible way to exercise the relationship between rulers and the people and put in motion a republican system. They were a critical part of modern republican politics in the constitutional era.

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Received on: 28/09/2018 – Approved on: 02/05/2019