

In This Issue

We devote this issue to the political history of Latin America. The articles cover only two countries, Argentina and Colombia, but their findings raise important questions about the political history of the region as whole. These questions deal with issues of modernization and stability, the rise of a politically relevant middle class, the impact of electoral regimes on conflict and stability, and divisions of power between executive and legislative branches of government.

Ezequiel Adamovsky's study of the Unión Cívica Radical offers a revisionist narrative about this party's relationship with the Argentine "middle class." The UCR is typically described as the political voice of urban-based middle sectors that were politically excluded from the Argentine oligarchic state at the turn of the twentieth century. As one of the first "modern" political parties in Latin America, the Radicales constitute an early example of how these middle sectors struggled to wrestle political power away from the landowning elites. Adamovsky shows that rather than channeling the interests of a previously existing, discernible social class, the UCR contributed to the constitution of that middle class. The discursive invocation of the "middle" reflected the need to counter popular forms of mobilization and their egalitarian proposals. The chronology of the formation of the Argentine middle class is revised as a result. According to Adamovsky, it is only after the 1920s that the UCR discursively referred to the middle class, a social group that it helped to constitute as much as it represented.

José Antonio Sánchez Román's study of tax reform in Argentina offers another revisionist account of Argentine politics in the 1920s and 1930s. The second Radical administration, led by President Marcelo de Alvear, tried to approve the country's first income tax law. This tax reform was not successful. Contrary to what one would expect, however, this lack of success was not due to the opposition of the economic elites (the *estancieros* or urban entrepreneurs). The tax law was defeated in Congress, particularly in the upper house, by representatives of the interior provinces. This leads Sánchez Román to question the historiography's characterizations of the Radical governments as a period of

growing centralization of power. Such characterization, this study shows, does not pay enough attention to the legislative power, where regional elites maintained significant power over taxation and budgetary issues.

As in most of Latin America, the Radical administrations collapsed under the weight of the Great Depression. In Colombia, however, elections were held and power was transferred peacefully to the Liberal opposition. What accounts for this development, which is even more remarkable in light of Colombia's perennial instability during the nineteenth century? Although Colombia is always thought of as a place of endemic political violence and instability, this was not the case for most of the first half of the twentieth century.

Sebastián Mazzuca and James A. Robinson argue that the transition from "chaos" (in the nineteenth century) to "order" (in the twentieth century) was caused by changes in how power was shared by the two main political parties, Liberals and Conservatives. A 1905 electoral reform replaced majoritarian rule with the "incomplete vote," a system by which the minority party was guaranteed one-third of seats in the national legislature. This system, in turn, was replaced with a system of regular proportional representation in 1929. Mazzuca and Robinson note that the Conservatives in power agreed to the 1905 reform—that is, to reduce their own power—as a way to achieve political pacification. The importance of electoral reforms for peaceful power sharing seems to be validated by other Latin American countries that also introduced the incomplete vote, such as Uruguay and Argentina. Indeed, it was the implementation of this system that opened the door for the UCR—the political party studied by Adamovsky and Sánchez Román—to come to power in Argentina.