

# **Political Realignment and Democratic Breakdown in Argentina, 1916-1930**

**Eduardo Alemán**

Department of Political Science  
**University of Houston**

**Sebastián M. Saiegh**

Department of Political Science  
**University of California, San Diego**

## **Abstract**

This paper revisits one historical event that has been repeatedly discussed by the literature on democratic breakdown: the rise and fall of Argentine democracy between 1916 and 1930. First, we demonstrate why the claim that demands for drastic redistribution led to democratic breakdown is not a convincing explanation for the 1930 coup. Instead, we contend that the coup was the product of a polarizing *political* realignment that led to a legitimacy crisis. We evaluate this argument using estimates of Argentine legislators' latent preferences (ideal points) between 1916 and 1930. Our roll call data analysis suggests that disputes over socioeconomic issues did not precipitate the breakdown of the regime. What mattered was the allocation of political power. These findings support the view that stable democracy requires that all major groups in society have a sufficiently large chance of being in power.

Understanding what makes democracies fragile and more likely to break down has generated a great deal of scholarly interest in the field of comparative politics. In the last decade alone, several important works in political economy have focused on whether economic development and income inequality affect the stability of democracy (Przeworski et al. 2000, Boix and Stokes 2003, Boix 2003, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, Epstein et al. 2006,). However, despite this recent surge of research, the proximate causes of democratic breakdown remind elusive.

Two major limitations have affected the study of this phenomenon. First, many recent contributions tend to “paint with too broad a brush”. Searching for greater degrees of generality, these studies often rely on models that are too simplistic to understand the problem at hand.<sup>1</sup> The second limitation has been the tendency of country-level studies to emphasize unsystematic or exceptional factors as the main drivers behind democratic breakdown.

This paper contributes to fill this gap by providing an empirical evaluation of an historical event that has been discussed by the literature on democratization: the rise and fall of democracy in Argentina between 1916 and 1930. By focusing on this case, we can anchor the analysis in a concrete historical incident; yet, we also take into account the general aspects that have been discussed in the relevant literature.

First, we demonstrate that socioeconomic factors do not offer a convincing account for the downfall of Argentine democracy. Next, we examine an alternative explanation. Specifically, we investigate the link between political polarization and democratic breakdown. Employing estimates of Argentine legislators’ latent preferences (ideal points) between 1916 and 1930, we find that the progressive polarization of political conflict was not driven by particular policies, or by ideological concerns. Instead, it was the hegemonic tendency in the allocation of political power that polarized Argentine politics, trampling democratic consolidation.

This paper is closely related to Smith (1974a)’s seminal analysis of the failure of democracy in Argentina, as well as to Rosenthal and Voeten (2004) and Hansen and Debus (2011), who use roll call votes to examine the collapse of the French Fourth Republic, and the fall of the Weimar Republic, respectively. It is also associated with a growing literature relying on roll call data to examine inter-party dynamics in Argentina, for example Jones (2002), Jones and Hwang (2005; 2006), Jones, Hwang and Micozzi (2009), and Aleman et al. (2009).

More generally, the paper relates to the aforementioned debate regarding the link between socioeconomic conditions and democratic survival. Recent studies rely on relatively simple models of redistributive politics. However, as Casper and Taylor (1996) note, democratization is a more complex process that entails a transition away from authoritarianism, the installation of a democratic regime, and its consolidation. Hence, our paper is closer in spirit to studies that view elite cooperation as one of the main factors that affects democratic consolidation (Dahl 1971; Smith 1974a; Bermeo 1992; Higley and Gunther 1992; Casper and Taylor 1996).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In section 1, we provide a discussion of the alternative views regarding democratic breakdown. Section 2 links the process of political polarization with legislative behavior and describes the voting data and method on analysis. Section 3 presents the main empirical findings, and a brief final section concludes.

## **1. Two Views of the Road to Democratic Breakdown**

Democratic transition in Argentina begins after the passage of the Sáenz Peña Law in 1912, which established the secret ballot and obligatory male suffrage. This reform ended a long period of oligarchic republicanism, which began after the pacification of the country following the civil war (circa 1868). The reform first went into effect with midterm elections in 1914, and then in 1916 for presidential and congressional posts. The Radical Civic Union (UCR) won the three presidential elections held during this period; it was the main opposition party to the prior regime and was most closely identified with the electoral reform. Before the reform, the Radicals staged three uprisings and abstained from electoral competition.

The first democratic president, Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-22), led the Buenos Aires party machine; the second president, Marcelo T. de Alvear (1922-1928), was an aristocratic former lieutenant of Yrigoyen during the 1890s. Yrigoyen returned to the presidency in 1928, after standing out for one term due to a constitutional limitation on reelection. The third Radical administration was interrupted by a military coup on September 6, 1930. In the next section, we summarize the two different perspectives that seek to explain democratic breakdown.

## 1.1 The Redistributive Struggle Perspective and its Weaknesses

The *redistributive struggle* perspective emphasizes the importance of class struggle over income redistribution in explaining democratic breakdown. The argument starts by assuming that in a democracy, citizens (i.e., the median voter) determine the amount of income redistribution – a choice that can trigger elite efforts to mount a coup. When income inequality is high, elites have more to fear from democracy than when income inequality is low (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001, Rosendorff 2001, Boix 2003, Robinson 2006). Because salient disparities of income are intended to lead to demands for drastic redistribution, elites resist democratization or undermine democratic consolidation.

In the case of semi-consolidated democracies, elites can use their current (and temporary) political power to change political institutions as a way to reduce the burden of future redistribution. The government can also pledge concessions to the elite, but are usually ineffectual because they are insufficiently credible. Because democracy has a limited potential to commit to low redistribution in the future, greater inequality increases the elite's temptation for a coup in the present (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

According to Acemoglu and Robinson, Argentina in the twentieth century represents the case of an unconsolidated democracy, where high “levels of inequality still lead to democratization, but democracy does not consolidate because coups are attractive” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 38). The authors argue that the ascendance of the Radical party to power in 1916 severely endangered the traditional interests of the upper classes. The political hegemony of the Radical party between 1916 and 1930 is seen as the consequence of the Conservatives' failure to build a unified party. But more significant than the elite's lack of coordination were their economic motives: “traditional interests were too threatened by the rise to power of the Radicals and continuously worked to undermine democracy” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 7).

Other scholars have also appealed to the *class conspiracy* argument to explain this period of Argentine history. The perspective usually begins by noting that suffrage expansion entailed a significant cost to the upper classes, and proceeds to highlight its presumably conspiratorial behavior. For instance, according to Guillermo O'Donnell, Hipolito Yrigoyen's government operated in an uncertain context because the conservative oligarchy was a constant threat, ready to materialize if governmental policies were unacceptable to the old ruling class (O'Donnell

1973). Likewise, Alberto Ciria claims that Conservative forces adopted an attitude of uncompromising opposition and criticism, trying to incite military rebellion against the Radicals (Ciria 1974: 4). Both authors thus attributed democratic breakdown to the elite's assessment of the redistributive threat, which was dependent on the country's inequality of wealth distribution

Although the centrality of class struggle to democratization has reemerged to prominence in the literature, several important reasons exist to question the presumed links between inequality, redistributive demands, and democracy. For example, the *redistributive struggle* perspective assumes a median-voter model of political competition where the equilibrium tax rate reflects the ideal tax rate of the median voter. From this common political economy perspective, higher taxes are associated with an asymmetric distribution of income.<sup>2</sup> However, as Roemer (2001) demonstrates, in an alternative model where each political party represents its "average member", this conclusion is generally false. He shows through a series of examples that increases in inequality can often decrease the expected tax rate (Roemer 2001:93-94).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in models that incorporate party positions, uncertainty, valence, or other dimensions, the expectations of the median-voter model are generally not applicable.

The argument that democratization depends on inequality and fears of income redistribution also appears incompatible with the historical path followed by many contemporary democracies. As Keefer (2009) underscores, the recent experiences with regime change show little evidence that redistributive conflicts motivate democratization; new democracies are not characterized by redistributive struggle between rich and poor; and stable democracies are only slightly more equal in terms of income distribution than poorer less stable democracies. Kauffman (2009) also casts doubt on the argument that links inequality with democratic stability. He notes that democracy empowers middle-income and working-class interest groups that are better organized and frequently oppose shifting resources to the poor. Focusing on Latin America, he finds no evidence in support of the view that inequality affects electoral support for incumbents or for leftist parties, and highlights how the region's poor do not vote for hiking taxes on the rich or significant redistributive demands. Moreover, Reenock et al.'s (2007) study indicates that no obvious association between Gini coefficients and regime breakdown exists. Whether democracy is at risk as a result of distributional issues, they argue, is not a function of relative income distribution (as captured by Gini coefficients) but a function of basic needs deprivation.<sup>4</sup>

While contemporary cross-national patterns show that democratization has not brought about massive redistribution from rich to poor,<sup>5</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) argue that democracies tend to promote equality and policies designed to favor the poor. In contrast, according to them, non-democratic governments, tend to promote the inequality that the rich prefer.

In Figure 1, we present a series of social and economic indicators for the period between 1913 and 1943. These include (in clockwise direction): social inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient); real wages; stock market price index; and the rate of return on capital in the agricultural sector. The top left panel of Figure 1 reproduces the data included in Acemoglu and Robinson (2006: 74).<sup>6</sup> The historical series does not appear to support the redistributive threat hypothesis championed by Acemoglu and Robinson (2006). Inequality decreased in Argentina after the 1916 transitions to democracy, but as the graph clearly demonstrates, there was not significant reversal in this trend in the following in the 13 years. This is very important because this era, commonly known as the “infamous decade,” was marked by the restoration of the Conservatives, who continually used electoral fraud to maintain power. In consequence, the claim that the 1930 coup was “... motivated by a desire to reverse [pro-poor] ... policies” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 75) does not square well with the historical evidence.

[Figure 1, about here]

Another way to scrutinize Acemoglu and Robinson’s claim that the restoration of the Conservatives would entail a reversal in the fortunes of the less well off is to examine the evolution of real wages throughout the 1913-1943 period. As the top right panel of Figure 1 indicates, real wages increased during the Radical administrations of Yrigoyen and Alvear. Yet, no significant reversal occurred in the years following the 1930 coup.

Acemoglu and Robinson discuss yet another possible test of their argument. In their words, “... to the extent that democracy leads to redistribution and taxation of the assets of the rich (land and capital), we would expect the prices of these assets to fall with democracy and rise after a coup ...” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 72). They illustrate this proposition with data from Chile’s stock market. To assess whether this implication squares with the Argentine data, the bottom right panel of Figure 1 shows the values of the stock market index for the period of 1913 to 1935.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the expectations of Acemoglu and Robinson, democratization in

1916 did not bring about a fall in the stock market, and dictatorship did not provide relief (at least for the five years following the coup). In fact, the period encompassing the Radical presidencies shows market gains even in the face of external shocks. Noticeably, in 1930 the stock market was still above its level in the first half of the decade.

It could be argued, though, that the stock market is not a very good indicator of the wealth and prosperity of the elite in the 1920s. As Rocchi (2005) notes, few companies were represented and it was seldom the source of capitalization for industrial firms. More importantly, the Argentine upper class was primarily agrarian. The remaining panel in Figure 1 shows the rate of return to capital in the agricultural sector. Once again, it is quite clear that agriculture was as profitable before and after the Radical administrations of Yrigoyen and Alvear. If anything, the data suggests that effects of the *Great Depression* rather than particular policies adopted in Argentina affected the rate of return associated with agricultural production.

In sum, the empirical evidence does not support the view that, after 1916, the rich were assaulted by redistributive demands from democratic government catering to the newly enfranchised poor. The evidence is also inconsistent with the notion that Radical presidents implemented drastic economic policies to the detriment of the economic elites. While inequality decreased and wages increased for the poor, the wealthy also enjoyed the benefits of economic growth, which was substantial during the time period of 1916-1930.

Indeed, as David Rock notes, Argentine Radicalism avoided any explicit political program. In his view, UCR governments “were not aiming for changes in the country’s economy. Rather they aimed to strengthen the primary export structure by promoting a spirit of cooperation between the elite and the urban sectors” (Rock 1975: 51-52).<sup>8</sup> In addition, as Solberg (1973) points out, large landed interests held powerful influence in the party and within the Yrigoyen government. After all, the president himself was a landowner, and several cabinet ministers were members of the *Sociedad Rural*, the powerful, exclusive, and aristocratic cattleman's association (Solberg 1973).

In consequence, more important than any economic threat to the elites was a perception of a sociological threat. Many of the Radicales who became members of the Argentine congress were professional politicians whose backgrounds were working class or lower middle class (they were often referred as rabble or *chusma* in slang). The conservatives certainly distrusted these

politicians, and vice versa (they considered them hideous oligarchs); but the problem was political (and perhaps sociological) and not the squeezing of the elite by the Radicals.

### **The Political Polarization Perspective**

The impact of political polarization on democratic breakdown is based on the premise that democracy requires a balance of political power that makes it impossible for any single leader or group to suppress its competitors or maintain its hegemony (Vanhanen 1990; Olson 1993; Casper and Taylor 1996). Lipset (1959) noted long ago that if the conditions facilitating the perpetuation of an effective opposition are absent, a tendency towards authoritarianism will emerge. According to this view, stable democracy requires that all major groups, including the previous elites, have a sufficiently large chance of being in power (Przeworski 1991; Casper and Olson 1996). So, in order for democracy to take hold, political institutions must limit the ability of those in power to subvert the system to prevent those in the opposition from winning the next election (Weingast 1997).

The seminal contributions by Dahl (1971) and Linz (1978) provide additional insight on the relationship between legitimacy and democratic consolidation. Dahl (1971) argues that democracy requires both *legitimacy of public contestation* as well as *legitimacy of public participation*. The first demands a belief in fair competition between opposing organizations and toleration of the opposition, while the second requires a commitment to inclusive electoral participation. It is possible to commit to one and not the other, and the rejection of either one by relevant political actors harms democratic consolidation. In Linz's view, legitimacy – the popular and elitist belief in the right of those in power to rule – constrains a regime in terms of their ability to activate supporters in the face of threats. As such, those governing new democracies are more vulnerable if, after having achieved power through elections, no basic consensus emerges on their constitutional right to rule.

Weingast (1997) examines the link between social values and the incentives of political actors to obey constitutional restrictions. From this perspective, democratic stability emerges when citizens and elites construct a focal solution that resolves their coordination dilemmas about the appropriate limits on the state. This focal solution leads to mass behaviors that create a consensus on certain democratic values. Absent a basic consensus about the appropriate limits on

public officials and what constitutes a transgression, the prospect of opportunism by incumbents is high (Weingast 1997). Incumbents have incentives to use state resources to perpetuate themselves in power and exclude the opposition – they are not required to commit to what Dahl calls the *legitimacy of contestation*. In order to be binding, institutional rules need to be self-enforcing – if lack of compliance fails to generate the kind of costs (in terms of active popular and elite opposition) that would induce compliance amongst those in power, then violations of democratic rights are likely to go unpunished. In this polarizing context between the ruler and the opposition, those out of power, regardless of their original commitment to contestation, are more likely to consider extra-constitutional mechanisms to attain power. If the excluded groups are also those that dominated politics before political participation was enlarged, then their original distrust of what Dahl calls the *legitimacy of participation* is likely to be enhanced.

This set of propositions regarding democratic stability provides a different framework to understanding the events leading to Argentina’s democratic breakdown in 1930. As Dahl (1971), Smith (1978), and Potter (1981) argue, socioeconomic factors did not drive the coup – though economic conditions may have intensified political problems, many other governments endured similar conditions without falling. Instead, the government’s weakness stemmed mainly from its eroding legitimacy.

The roots of modern Argentine democracy can be traced to the 1912 electoral reform. As Smith (1978) noted, the reform “...would guarantee and institutionalize the central tenet of the code: power would be shared among competing factions that would reach government by consensus ...” (Smith 1978:11). Therefore, the political bargain that led to the 1912 reform was intended to bind Conservatives and Radicals to support both inclusion and competition in democratic politics.<sup>9</sup>

This bargain, however, was problematic from the start. It demanded that the prior elites and the new entrants be committed to both the *legitimacy of contestation* and the *legitimacy of participation*. Yet, prior to the reform, Conservatives disregarded constitutional and electoral laws for decades, and in doing so, they failed to promote a belief in the legitimacy of democratic institutions, particularly the notion that elections were the rightful way of displacing political leaders (Dahl 1971:136). And, after the transition, Radicals would not do much better in fostering a belief in democratic institutions: Yrigoyen and his followers did show a commitment

to electoral inclusion, but their commitment of to the *legitimacy of contestation* eventually faltered. Leveraging on its electoral dominance, the Yrigoyenistas used their governmental authority to exclude the political opposition and take away their remaining bases of power.

The practice of federal intervention is a case in point.<sup>10</sup> A total of twenty federal interventions (fifteen by decree) took place during Yrigoyen's first term in office. As Rock notes, the immediate goal of these interventions was to create "... local carpet-bagger regimes subservient to the president, which would be in a position to control elections to the National Senate ...” (Rock 1975: 114-15). Hence, while there was some possibility in 1916 that the newly-elected Radical government could work in harmony with the old-line Conservatives on matters of mutual interest, after the Conservatives saw their provincial bases of power systematically attacked and destroyed, the possibility of cooperation ceased (Potter 1981).<sup>11</sup>

In sharp contrast with the prevailing practices during Yrigoyen's administration, Alvear sought to find common ground with some of the old Conservative forces in the legislature. As a result, the Yrigoyenistas broke with the rest of the party, and intense personalism came to replace programmatic alignments. The members of the UCR behind Yrigoyen started to define themselves publicly as *personalistas*, highlighting their allegiance to the *caudillo*. In fact, after his return to the presidency, the confrontations between Yrigoyen and his opponents exacerbated. The Yrigoyenistas lacked a majority in Senate, which was controlled by an ideologically broad coalition (composed by Conservatives, Socialists, Progressive Democrats, and anti-*personalist* Radicals). The president sought to alter this balance of power by capturing even more provincial administrations. In 1930, he was one step closer to this goal: the September 7 elections in the provinces of Mendoza and San Juan, along with other forthcoming ones would have enabled the *personalistas* to increase their seats in the Senate (Rock 1975).<sup>12</sup> However, on September 6, 1930, Yrigoyen was deposed in a quick and almost bloodless coup.

In sum, by centralizing power in the presidency and marginalizing all other arenas in which Conservatives were present, Yrigoyen and his followers made the presidency the only viable prize of Argentine politics (Gibson 1996). In addition, over time, the distinction between the “ins” and “outs” became fixed because, as Remmer notes, “... no party other than the [Radicals] stood any real chance of controlling the national government” (Remmer 1984: 94). Eventually, the confrontation between the government and the opposition, in a context of

extreme political polarization, weakened whatever original commitment the economic elites and the military had to inclusive democratic politics.

## **2. The Argentine Congress and the Polarizing Realignment**

The Argentine Congress played a significant role during this early democratic experiment. It is particularly relevant for the purposes of this study because it reflects the public interactions of political parties and prominent party leaders. As Smith (1974a:xix) remarked, the Argentine Congress was a key arena for the articulation of policy alternatives and a stepping stone for those politicians who went on to make executive decisions. It was the main institution incorporating the relevant political groups that competed for governmental power. In the following section, we use roll-call data to examine the dimensionality of the policy space, the alignment of parties, and the positions of individual legislators in key votes. This analysis allows us to make relevant inferences about political conflict during this volatile era.

We focus on two propositions derived from the previous discussion. First, we do not expect the main dimension of political conflict during this period to reflect socio-economic (left-to-right) divisions, as the redistributive threat perspective implies. Instead, we expect the main dimension of conflict in the Argentine Congress to capture the divisive impact of Yrigoyen, which is consistent with the political polarization perspective.

Second, we expect to find evidence of a polarizing realignment of congressional forces, centered on the *legitimacy of contestation* issue, rather than socio-economic disputes. As argued before, the failure of consensual democratic politics built progressively as opportunism eroded the political bargain of 1912. This implies that, at the onset, the new Yrigoyenista versus anti-Yrigoyenista dimension should have coexisted with a substantive policy dimension, allowing for some cross-cutting consensus on relevant policy issues. The escalation of conflict between Yrigoyenistas and the opposition occurred from the mid 1920s onwards, leading to a further repositioning of partisan actors. This change, reflecting the diminishing incentives to compromise and the increasing stakes of political competition, implies the disappearance of cross cutting tendencies and the establishment of a pattern of political conflict in which the major dimension is coterminous with the Yrigoyenista-Anti-Yrigoyenista schism.

## 2.1 Roll-Call Data

Two different types of roll call votes exist in Argentina. Votes of the first type are used to elect the assembly's authorities. The other kind involves substantive as well as procedural issues. Our analysis employs roll call votes on substantive/procedural issues taken in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies between May 19, 1916 and December 27, 1929. These data represent seven two-year legislative periods, corresponding to the biennial partial renovations of the Chamber (1916-17, 1918-19, 1920-21, 1922-23, 1924-25, 1926-27, 1928-29).<sup>13</sup> All roll call vote data and delegation affiliation were obtained from Smith (1974b).

The initial sample included 378 substantive/procedural roll call votes held between 1916 and 1929. In order to avoid convergence problems stemming from unanimous votes, we excluded all lopsided votes in which fewer than 0.5 percent of the deputies were on the losing side. After discarding these votes, the resulting sample contains 368 votes (97% of the roll call data included in the original sample). To recover reliable estimates of legislators' ideal points, it is necessary to exclude legislators who cast ballots on a small number of votes. Following the standard practice in these kind of studies, those legislators who casted less than ten votes in a legislative session were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in a reduction in the number of scaled legislators from 1042 to 963 (by roughly 7.5% of the legislators in the original sample).

Table 1 provides details on the composition of our roll call vote data. Two points are of principal note. First, the number of valid roll call votes varies across the different periods of analysis from lows in the thirties to highs of more than sixty. Second, the number of participant legislators also varies, including a minimum of 82% in the 1918-1919 session and a maximum of 97% in the following two-year period. Overall, roughly 7,396 individual voting decisions in each of the seven two-year legislative periods are modeled.

[Table 1 about here]

## 2.2 Estimation: Optimal Classification

We examine the roll-call data using Optimal Classification (OC), a scaling procedure that performs non-parametric unfolding of binary choice data (Poole 2005). Given a matrix of binary choices by individuals (for example, “aye” or “nay”) over a series of legislative votes, OC

produces a configuration of legislators and cutting lines/planes that maximize the correct classification of the choices. The main advantage of using this method is that no assumptions are made about the parametric form of the legislators' "true" preference functions, other than they are symmetric and single-peaked (Rosenthal and Voeten 2004; Poole 2005).

From a practical standpoint, consider that there are  $n$  legislators,  $q$  roll calls, and  $s$  dimensions, indexed by  $i = 1, \dots, n$ ,  $m = 1, \dots, q$ , and  $d = 1, \dots, s$ , respectively. Suppose that on roll call  $m$ , parties  $j$  and  $k$  support the Yea and Nay outcomes, respectively. Then, legislator's  $i$  utility for "Yea" can be written as:

$$U_{imj} - U_{imk} = u_{imj} - u_{imk} + \varepsilon_{imj} - \varepsilon_{imk},$$

so that she votes Yea if

$$u_{imj} - u_{imk} > \varepsilon_{imk} - \varepsilon_{imj}.$$

Armed with these assumptions, we can calculate the probability that a legislator will vote either Yea or Nay as  $P(\varepsilon_{imk} - \varepsilon_{imj} < u_{imj} - u_{imk})$ , and  $P(\varepsilon_{imk} - \varepsilon_{imj} > u_{imj} - u_{imk})$ , respectively.

The unfolding solution to the roll call voting problem provided by OC is characterized by two sets of parameters. The first is the set of legislators' ideal points. Second, for each roll call, there is an associated separating line  $L$ , that partitions the space into two half spaces. Legislators with ideal points to either side of  $L$  are predicted to vote "aye" and "nay", respectively. More specifically, the set of estimates includes the following elements: for each legislator, (1) his/her ideal point; and for each roll call of a bill, (2) the normal vector  $W = (w_1, w_2)$  (perpendicular to  $L$ ), (3) the projected midpoint on the normal vector,  $\ell$ , and (4) the polarity (where the "yeas" and "nays" fall relative to the projected midpoint on the normal vector).<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Main Results

We begin our analysis by considering the fit of the model and the question of dimensionality. A standard way to evaluate the fit of the models is to focus on the aggregate proportional reduction in error, or the APRE, of the models. The APRE is defined as

$$APRE = \frac{MV - CE}{MV}$$

where  $MV$  denotes the total number of choices cast on the minority side of all roll calls, and  $CE$ , the total classification error. This measure takes the value of one when there are no classification errors and zero the spatial-model errors equal the minority vote (Poole and Rosenthal 1997: 30). Figure 2 plots the aggregate proportional reduction in error for the one- and two-dimensional models for every session of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies from 1916-1929.

[Figure 2, about here]

An important element to take into account is the evolution of the “dimensionality” over time. At the beginning of the period under study, adding the second dimension produces a significant reduction in the APRE. However, after 1926, the one-dimensional model classifies almost as well as the two-dimensional one. As such, these findings can be considered as evidence of realignment and issue change. We address this change in more detail in the next sections, where we examine the substantive content of the space.

The APRE values plotted in Figure 2 indicate that the location of Argentina's main political actors between 1916 and 1930 can be accurately represented by a low-dimensional space. The key issue, of course, is to establish the actual issue content of the two dimensions in a systematic fashion. One of the most important factors that should be accounted for is the alignment of the political forces represented in the legislature along a recognizable schism. For example, if the president's party is located at one end of the spectrum and all the other parties are located at the other end, then we may infer that the dimension on which the parties are located is government-opposition. Yet, given the dimensionality of the policy space, it is quite possible that even within the forces of the government and the opposition, other relevant distinctions exist. Most notably, it is quite possible that, among the opposition forces, some parties will position themselves to the right of the government and some to the left.

Therefore, to properly identify the substantive dimensions of conflict, we need to take into account both the partisan and policy positions of Argentine legislators. In particular, we are interested in examining the alignment of political forces with regard to the alternative views regarding democratic breakdown discussed above: did legislators predominantly align

themselves along a traditional left-right dimension; or did they stand apart along a legitimacy of contestation divide? In order to answer these questions, in the next section we explore graphically the location of Argentine legislators throughout the 1916-1930 period. We further examine the issue by focusing on a number of key votes that were taken in the Chamber. These votes can be clearly classified as pertaining to each of the dimensions under scrutiny (i.e. the allocation of authority or the policy dimension), thus facilitating the task of interpreting the underlying recovered dimensions.

### **3.1 Dimensions of Conflict in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies (1916-1930)**

Figure 3 presents a spatial map from our OC scaling of the 1916-1917 session of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies. The R tokens represent the Radicals; the C tokens are the Conservatives; the P tokens are the Progressive Democrats; and the S tokens are the Socialists. The horizontal axis resembles the government-opposition setup discussed above. The Radicals (in control of the presidency) are positioned to the left, whereas the members of all the other opposition parties are placed to the right. The fact that both the Conservatives and the Socialists, two parties with radically different worldviews, are located on the same side of the axis is a good indication that this dimension should be interpreted as a government vs. opposition divide.

The differences between the Socialists and the Conservatives became apparent when we focus on the vertical axis of our spatial map. As Figure 3 shows, Socialist legislators are located at the bottom of the axis, while the Conservatives tend to be placed at the top. In the case of the members of the Radical party, distinctions along this particular dimension also clearly exist. It seems, however, that most Radicals are located in the middle of the axis denoting a somewhat moderate position. Given legislators' placements along this axis, it is safe to assume that the second dimension is picking up differences that are distinctive from the government-opposition divide. This evidence also indicates that in order to obtain a good description of the structure of conflict in the Argentine legislature, a second dimension is needed.<sup>15</sup>

A key question, then, concerns the substantive interpretation of this second dimension. One hint regarding its possible content is given by the disparate location of the Socialists and Conservatives. Yet, to further analyze the nature of the division captured by this second dimension it is useful to focus on some key votes that were taken in the 1916-1917 session of the

Argentine Chamber of Deputies. In particular, given the arguments presented above, it would be necessary to identify if the partisan divisions depicted in Figure 3 actually respond to the “legitimacy of contestation” (i.e. allocation of authority) and/or the “redistributive struggle” (policy) issues.

To identify institutional versus policy divisions, we selected votes that explicitly required the members of the Argentine deputies to take a position in each of these dimensions, respectively. For example, on the left panel of Figure 3 we examine a critical vote regarding the federal intervention in the province of Buenos Aires that took place in 1917. On the one hand, the Radicals claimed that the intervention was necessary to prevent Conservatives from continuing to use electoral fraud. On the other hand, as discussed above, Yrigoyen often used federal interventions to destroy the provincial bases of Conservative political power.<sup>16</sup> Hence, legislators’ positions on this particular issue should reflect their disagreements regarding the appropriate limits of presidential authority.

For the second type of votes, those reflecting differences over redistributive policies, we chose issues that would also provide a clear divide along this issue. For instance, the right panel of Figure 3 presents a vote regarding tariffs for sugar imports. This is the kind of issue that is typically associated with a conflict of interest between urban consumers and rural producers. The first group favored low (or no) tariffs on imported sugar, in order to lower its price. In contrast local producers, which were predominantly concentrated in the province of Tucuman, sought to keep high tariffs on imported sugar to protect their industry.

To illustrate how votes on issues that tap the two distinct dimensions under consideration produce different voting coalitions, we present on both panels of Figure 3 the cutting line associated with each particular vote. This line (indicated in black in both graphs) is the perpendicular bisector of the line joining two alternatives, and separates the Yea and Nay voters (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). In both panels, we superimpose the cutting line on a given vote on the spatial map of the legislative session (obtained using all the roll call votes taken in that session). Hence, while the location of the legislators does not vary in the underlying spatial map does not vary, it is possible to ascertain how their overall position compares with the divide created by the issue under consideration.

As mentioned above, the left panel of Figure 3 shows the cutting line associated with a

vote on a “legitimacy of contestation” issue. Buenos Aires, the most important Argentine province, was Yrigoyen's first target for intervention. On April 24, 1917, a week before Congress was to convene for its regular sessions, Yrigoyen declared the federal intervention of the province (Walter, 1985: 44). The sitting governor, Conservative Marcelino Ugarte, agreed to leave office but pledged to fight the intervention on the floors of the national Congress. Following a series of debates that occurred during May-June 1917, the Chamber of Deputies voted to repeal the intervention.

The bill was opposed by all 36 Radicals, and supported by a coalition of Conservatives, Progressive Democrats, and Socialists. The Chamber’s decision is illustrated in Figure 3: the Yea voters are located to the right of the cutting line and Nay voters the left. Yrigoyen ignored the resolution and persisted with the intervention; hence, the vote only seemed to have symbolic importance. Yet, as later events would show, the intervention permitted the Radicals to lay the foundations for their own twelve-year domination of Buenos Aires (Walter 1985).

[Figure 3 about here]

Moving onto the second dimension, the right panel of Figure 3 displays the cutting line separating the Yea and Nay voters on the sugar tariff vote that took place on August 2, 1917. Facing a rise in the domestic price of sugar, the Yrigoyen administration sought to modify law 8877 to lower its import tariff. Consumers were poorly organized, and thus few interest groups actively opposed protectionism. Still, urban masses remained restless about the high cost of living; and they possessed an effective political ally in Argentina's Socialist Party, a staunch defender of free trade.

With the support of the Socialists, a proposal to eliminate import tariffs on sugar if the domestic price of sugar exceeded a certain price was put under consideration of the House. A particularly contentious issue was the determination of the exact price that would trigger the tariff elimination. Article 1 of the bill establishing the product retail’s price at 0.40 pesos *moneda nacional* per kilo passed with 41 votes in favor and 30 against. It received the support of a few Conservatives and Progressive Democrats, as well as all the Socialists; but, unlike Buenos Aires' intervention, the Radical party cast a split vote. Among those who supported the proposal were some of Yrigoyen's strongest supporters, including Carlos F. Melo, and Celestino Marco. Nonetheless, some prominent members of the party, such as Vicente C. Gallo challenged

Yrigoyen's orders and voted against it.

Moving onto the next legislative period, Figure 4 depicts a spatial map of the 1918-1919 session of the Chamber of Deputies. As before, looking at the horizontal axis indicates that there is a clear divide between the Radicals and the legislators of all the other parties along the first dimension (i.e. government versus opposition). It is also evident that a second significant dimension also exists in this legislative session. The Conservatives and most Radicals can be found on top; whereas, all Socialists and a few Radicals are located in the bottom part of the graph.

Regarding the interpretation of these divisions, we focus as before on the two dimensions under scrutiny (i.e. the allocation of authority and the policy dimension). The left panel of Figure 4 shows the cutting line of a vote on a “legitimacy of contestation” issue. The proposal under consideration called for a condemnation of Yrigoyen’s action in a labor dispute in the port of Buenos Aires that took place on March 20, 1919. The bill came at the heels of the event known as the “Tragic Week” (la Semana Trágica). In January of 1919 more than 100 protesters died in Buenos Aires, after a general strike was quashed with machine guns by the army and by employers' vigilante groups. The events dealt a severe blow to Yrigoyen's labor policies.

[Figure 4, about here]

In the aftermath of the *Semana Trágica*, the government attempted to recover its position among the working class (Horowitz 2008). The first opportunity came during the negotiations to resolve the strike in the maritime shipping industry. On January 24, the government helped to arrange an agreement between the unions and the ship-owners. The latter offered an increase in wages in return for the workers’ organizations abandoning the use of boycotts. To associate the government with a union victory, the minister of Marine insisted that the clause restricting the use of boycotts be kept secret (Rock 1975). However, the ploy failed as the ship owners eventually decided not only to reject the agreement, but also to make it public.

As the March legislative elections approached, the Conservative members of Congress seized the opportunity to discredit the government. In the words of Matías Sánchez Sorondo, a leading Conservative deputy, the ordeal was evidence of “... culpable inaction and even complicity on the part of the executive with the labor agitators...”.<sup>17</sup> Hence, as Rock (1975) notes, the shipping dispute should be considered a legitimacy of contestation conflict, as it

stemmed from the political rivalries between Yrigoyen and his opponents. As depicted in Figure 4, the bill was supported by most Radicals (located to the right of the cutting line), and opposed by a coalition of Conservatives, Progressive Democrats, and Socialists (located to the left of the cutting line).

In contrast to the March 20 vote, the one that took place on August 13, 1919 tapped the policy, rather than the political contestation dimension. The bill under consideration called for a revision of the tax exemptions granted to the railroad companies. Facing decreased commerce (due to the war), and increased costs of operation, British-owned railways demanded better terms after 1917. In so doing the companies became involved in a prolonged conflict with the Yrigoyen administration (Wright 1974). The controversy centered on the ambiguity of the law regulating the railroad industry (known as the Mitre Law).<sup>18</sup> According to the companies' interpretation of the law, their low profits entitled them to raise their rates without government permission.

Yrigoyen did not react to this issue on purely commercial grounds; instead, he assumed a popular anti-foreign stance (Wright 1974). However, his plan to carry out a sustained drive against the foreign-owned railways did not succeed. His failure, as Wright (1967) notes, can be attributed, in part, to the heterogeneous nature of the Radical party itself. As the cutting line presented in the right panel of Figure 4 indicates, the vote created a split within the Radical party. Many UCR legislators took Yrigoyen's position, which was hostile to the railway companies' interests. This group of loyalists (located below the cutting line) included the likes of Francisco Beiro, one of Yrigoyen's closest collaborators (Rock 1975). However, many other Radicals -- those located above the cutting line in the right panel of Figure 4 -- broke ranks and joined the opposition. Juan Adrián O'Farrell, a Radical who supported the position of the railway companies, is a case in point. O'Farrell was a long-standing member of the Radical Party. Yet, he also had a personal connection to the railway companies. His eldest brother, Santiago G. O'Farrell, was the chairman of the local board of directors of the Buenos Aires-Pacific Railway.

Overall, figures 3 and 4 present similar patterns in legislators' positions during the periods of 1916-1917 and 1918-1919. The first dimension accurately captures the government-opposition division. On one side of the dimension are the Radical deputies; and on the other side are all the members of the opposition, from Socialists to Progressive Democrats to Conservatives. The four votes examined in more detail suggest that the first dimension coexisted

with a second “policy” dimension. The votes on sugar tariffs and on tax exemptions to foreign railways companies suggest that the second dimension represents, at least partially, divisions over the administration’s economic policies.

The transformation of the government-opposition dimension into the more personalistic schism between Yrigoyenistas and anti-Yrigoyenistas began with the Presidential inauguration of Marcelo T. de Alvear. Figure 5 shows a spatial map of the 1922-1923 session of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies. In principle, the map looks quite similar to those characterizing the previous sessions of the legislature discussed above: the horizontal axis capturing the government versus opposition divide, and the vertical axis the policy dimension.

The analysis of the substantive dimensions of conflict, however, reveals some important differences. Specifically, while “legitimacy of contestation” issues generated a clear-cut division between the Radicals and the opposition in previous sessions of the legislature, this pattern of conflict mutated under the Alvear presidency. For example, the left panel of Figure 5 shows the cutting line associated with a key vote regarding the approval of the elections in the province of San Juan.<sup>19</sup>

[Figure 5, about here]

The controversial 1923 election of Federico Cantoni, a Radical of the *Bloquista* faction to the governorship of San Juan exposed the rifts within the UCR. At the time of his election, Cantoni was facing the possibility of serving a lifetime prison sentence for presumably masterminding the assassination of Amable Jones, a personal friend of Yrigoyen and then governor of San Juan. Despite the animosities between the two opposing Radical factions, President Alvear declared Cantoni to be the legal governor of the province. Hard-core Yrigoyenistas in Congress, reluctant to forgive the Jones incident, dissented with the president. As the left panel of Figure 5 demonstrates, when the approval of the San Juan elections was brought to the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, many Radical legislators opposed it (these are the legislators located to the left of the cutting line). This was certainly Yrigoyen's position, but not of president Alvear. Yet, the schism between the Radicals was still in its early stages. As the left panel of Figure 5 indicates, many Radicales (including moderates such as Horacio Oyhanarte, who was a close associate of Yrigoyen) joined the members of the opposition and followed Alvear’s lead (these legislators are located to the right of the cutting line).

Regarding the policy dimension, the right panel of Figure 5 displays the cutting line on a vote regarding import tariffs, which was held on November 8, 1923. Alvear started to assert his independence by ending the politically inspired provincial interventions that characterized Yrigoyen's presidency. He had also resolved to establish his own basis of support among the urban population. Accordingly, by October 1923, Alvear decided support massive tariff reductions (Solberg 1973).

The extent of Alvear's policy switch was crystallized when the Chamber of Deputies met to consider the tariff legislation. A coalition of Progressive Democrats and Socialists together with some Radicals, sought to reject a sixty percent general increase in import duties proposed by the Senate. However, they needed a two-thirds majority in order to override the Senate. Impetus for higher import duties came from a number of new industries born during the war. Yet, the strongest supporter of higher tariffs was Argentina's most powerful interest group, composed of large landowners and dominated by cattle fatteners: the *Sociedad Rural*. Faced by the export crisis of the post-war years, the *Rural* actively embraced industries that used cattle by-products (Solberg 1973). Radical deputies were deeply divided over tariff issue. Legislators from urban areas, like the Federal Capital (located below the cutting line in the graph), voted strongly for repealing the tariff increase, but representatives from the rest of the country, as well as every Conservative (located above the cutting line in the graph), voted against it. Hence, despite the administration's support for lower tariffs, the protectionists won the day.

The analysis of roll-call votes during Alvear's administration reveals that the first dimension of conflict turned into an Yrigoyenista vs. anti-Yrigoyenista divide, despite the fact that the Radical *caudillo* was no longer in the executive office. Again we observe a second dimension present, which, as before, appears to capture policy differences. As Figure 5 highlights, the second dimension appears to pick up the conflict between consumers and producers over tariffs. There were undoubtedly some traces of Yrigoyenistas in the protectionist camp (as witnessed by Oyhanarte's vote). But the Radical party did not behave as a monolithic entity beholden to Yrigoyen's wishes.

The two-dimensional structure that characterized the early years of the Alvear administration was short lived. During his last two years in office, the second policy dimension would collapse and be absorbed by the main Yrigoyenista vs. anti-Yrigoyenista dimension.

Figure 6 shows the pivotal 1926-27 session.

The first thing that should be noticed is how the spatial map is structured. The horizontal axis still captures differences between the Radicals and the opposition parties. The locations of a significant number of members of the former group, however, tend to overlap with those of the opposition. Regarding the second dimension, the “spread” of the Radical’s locations along the vertical axis is much more compressed. Something similar can be observed among the Conservatives. The only group that stands apart from both Radicals and Conservatives in this dimension is the one comprised by the Socialists and Progressive Democrats. This pattern stands in contrast with the previous three sessions examined above. It thus indicates that the second dimension may not be needed in order to get a good description of the structure of conflict in the Argentine legislature at this stage. Nonetheless, to systematically evaluate the substantive content of the political divisions – and in line with the rest of the analysis presented in this section—, we examine in more the two dimensions under scrutiny (i.e. the allocation of authority and the policy dimension) one again.

[Figure 6 about here]

The left panel of Figure 6 depicts the cutting line dividing the Yea and Nay votes in the June 14<sup>th</sup> vote that would approve the recently held 1926 elections in Buenos Aires province. Throughout the 1920s, the province of Buenos Aires was the main battleground in the fight between Yrigoyen’s *personalistas* and the *anti-personalistas* Radicals.<sup>20</sup> The Chamber’s decision is illustrated in Figure 6 (the Yea voters are located to the left of the cutting line and Nay voters the right): the bill passed with 68 votes in favor and 44 against, with Yrigoyenistas, Socialists and Progressive Democrats supporting the bill; and the so-called *contubernio*, an anti-Yrigoyen alliance of Conservatives and anti-personalist Radicals, voting against it. As this vote illustrates, the main dimension of conflict thus reflected the Yirigoyen/anti-Yirigoyen schism rather than the old government versus opposition divide.

A crucial showdown between the Yrigoyen and his opponents occurred during the petroleum debates of 1927 in the Chamber of Deputies. President Alvear's plan, which essentially gave private investors the right to participate in the oil industry, enjoyed support among the *anti-personalistas* Radicals and some Socialist deputies, as well as among

Conservatives from the littoral provinces. Yrigoyen, in contrast, instructed his followers to formulate an alternative plan that would nationalize the petroleum industry and place it under the state's monopoly (Solberg 1979).

The right panel of Figure 6 presents the cutting line associated with the critical vote regarding the creation of a state petroleum monopoly; legislators voted 65 to 55 in favor of a national oil monopoly (those voting Yea are located to the left of the cutting line, and those voting Nay to its right).<sup>21</sup> The vote closely corresponded with the Yrigoyenista vs. anti-Yrigoyenista alignment. The followers of the Radical leader voted heavily in favor of the proposal, while the *anti-personalista* Radicals, Conservatives, and Progressive Democrats voted just as strongly against it. Socialist deputies were divided over the issue. A schism, resulting primarily from personal disputes among the leadership, had led to the formation of two Socialist parties in August of 1927. The newly created Independent Socialist Party (PSI), supplied the Yrigoyenista Radicals the winning margin in this crucial vote.

Along with information about the dimensionality of the policy space (Figure 2), the analysis of these two key votes reveals the extent to which the Yrigoyenista/anti-Yrigoyenista divide came to dominate the political landscape. The realignment appeared to be sealed after the passage of the petroleum legislation in the lower chamber. The support for petroleum nationalization emerged as the most important single issue in Yrigoyen's successful 1928 reelection bid.

A crucial question, though, is whether the evidence presented in Figure 6 indicates that the realignment occurred along the socioeconomic dimension rather than along Yrigoyenista/anti-Yrigoyenista lines. While it is tempting to conclude that, being a redistributive issue, the nationalization of the oil industry allowed the emergence of two well-defined ideological poles (a left-wing one a right-wing one) out of the traditional political divide, the historical record does not support this view. As Solberg (1979) notes, the former president did not conceive the state monopoly as part of a larger developmentalist scheme, but rather as an opportunity to expand patronage and government control. He presented himself to the electorate as a champion of patriotism, and relied on anti-imperialist and populist rhetoric to rally the electorate behind his petroleum plan (Solberg 1979). This strategy, of framing the election as a contest between “us” versus “them,” further polarized Argentine politics.

In fact, as a result of this particular (and highly opportunistic) electoral strategy, the 1928 presidential election was mostly a competition between two factions of the Radical party (which hardly represented a pro-redistribution versus anti-redistribution divide). Indeed, the “fraternal” nature of the dispute resulted in a very peculiar composition of the legislature following the 1928 electoral contest. Figure 7 shows the spatial configuration of the 1928-1929 session of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies. By then, the conflict was so intense that the two-dimensional structure of legislative voting disappeared: the APRE for the one-dimensional model is 0.995; and no gap between the APRE for the one- and two-dimensional models exists. Thus, it is appropriate to represent legislators’ positions during this session as one-dimensional: the coordinates indicate legislators’ OC ranking (horizontal axis) and their first-dimension ideal points (vertical axis).

The locations of several prominent Yrigoyenista and anti-Yrigoyenista members of the Chamber are also presented in Figure 7. The former included party officials and ward bosses, such as David Saccone, Pedro Podesta, Pedro Bidegain, Hector Bergalli and Nicolas Selen, The anti-Yrigoyenistas comprised disgruntled radicals, including Juan Luis Ferraroti, Enrique Mosca, Manuel C. Cáceres (marked in red), as well as Conservative deputy Edgardo Miguez (in blue) and independent Socialists Héctor González Iramain and Antonio de Tomaso (in green).

[Figure 7 about here]

Invigorated by Yrigoyen's presidential victory, *personalista* legislators sought to expand the scope of their petroleum policy in 1928. Eventually they introduced new legislation enabling the president to expropriate the assets of existing private oil companies (Solberg 1979). The proposal was met with vigorous protest, and provoked a bitter political divide. On September 17 the expropriation legislation was approved by a 79 to 17 vote. Demoralized by the Yrigoyenista majority, few opposition deputies appeared for the balloting (Solberg 1979). The solid line in Figure 7 depicts the cutting line that maximizes the correct classification of legislators' choices in this particular vote (legislators to its left supported the proposal and those to its right opposed it).

Once again, it could be argued that, given the content of this particular piece of legislation, the political sides were polarized over the extent of the government’s involvement in the economy rather than between those who supported Yrigoyen and those who did not. Yet, the all the opposition parties, regardless of their ideological orientation united against the proposal.

Indeed, its main consequence was to unite all the opposition parties. Even the Independent Socialist Party abandoned the Yrigoyenistas, claiming that the expropriation legislation was financially irresponsible (Solberg 1979). Therefore, this alternative read would be inaccurate. Instead, some sort of “extremes-against-the-middle” dynamic seemed to have occurred.<sup>22</sup>

Additional evidence indicating that the nationalization of oil had become a matter of “legitimacy of contestation” rather than a redistributive issue is provided by Yrigoyen’s political calculations regarding the proposal. When the legislation reached the Senate, the anti-Yrigoyenista majority voted to postpone consideration pending further study of the issue. As Solberg (1979) notes, Yrigoyen was aware that the Senate would reject his plan. But the President hoped that the Senate's action would discredit its members and open the way to the election of pliant senators -- through provincial intervention if necessary (Solberg 1979). Hence, the oil issue and federal interventions became intertwined: in order to have sufficient power to pass his oil legislation, Yrigoyen had to gain control over the Senate; and in order to change the Senate's composition, he needed to dislodge the opposition parties by federal interventions (Solberg 1979; Rock 1975). Determined to alter the composition of the Senate, Yrigoyen deepened his strategy of using provincial interventions. Between 1928 and 1929, he took over by executive decree the provinces of San Juan, Mendoza, Corrientes, and Santa Fé. The opposition parties responded to these interventions with accusations that he planned to impose a dictatorship.

Finally, another piece of evidence indicating that the nationalization of the petroleum industry was seen as a political power-grab by Yrigoyen rather than a redistributive policy is given by the opposition’s reaction to a purely “legitimacy of contestation” issue. The dashed line in Figure 7 shows the cutting line in a key vote held on September 30, 1928 to ratify the intervention in San Juan. Once again, the Yrigoyenistas carried the day, and won by an 82-46 margin. As the cutting line demonstrates, voting on the bill occurred along personal loyalty lines: the Yrigoyenistas supported the bill, and all the members of the opposition rejected it.

Put together, the evidence supports the view that Yrigoyen's return to office in 1928 sealed the political realignment. By the end of the 1920s, the primary political divide had been clearly established. The Yrigoyenistas and its opposition were inevitably voting against one another, and deviations from the party line disappeared. Moreover, the dominant political

cleavage had acquired a perceptible institutional overtone, as the main issue in dispute concerned Yrigoyen's compliance with constitutional restrictions.

The tension between the president and the opposition peaked at the onset of the 1930 legislative session. Badly outnumbered, opposition parties attempted to resist Yrigoyen's machine by boycotting sessions, in an effort to prevent quorum. In addition, debates over the electoral credentials of deputies consumed an enormous amount of time. In this context of increasing polarization, the legislature spent little time on the actual passage of laws (Smith 1978).

On August 9, 1930, legislators from the opposition parties published the "Manifesto of the Forty-four", protesting Yrigoyen's "arbitrary and despotic" rule (Smith 1978). Several of the legislators included in Figure 7, such as Conservative deputy Edgardo Miguez, and independent Socialists Héctor González Iramain and Antonio de Tomaso were among the signers of the manifesto. A few days later, on August 20, all Radical deputies from the *anti-personalista* faction publicly announced a very similar document. The signers included Juan Luis Ferraroti, Enrique Mosca, Manuel C. Cáceres and Enrique Mihura. The latter, as Figure 7 shows, was still voting with the Yrigoyenista faction in this legislative session.

The end was near. On September 6, General José F. Uriburu deposed Yrigoyen. It was not the first time that Yrigoyen faced the prospect of a military revolt. In January of 1919, in the midst of the *Semana Trágica*, General Luis F. Dellepiane descended with his forces on the federal capital to defend the governmental palace. Being confronted by Dellepiane, Yrigoyen allegedly offered his resignation in the belief that a coup was being staged. Dellepiane, himself a sympathizer of the Radical cause, had no intentions of bringing the government down. Yet, a group of military men approached him with the intention of staging a military revolt. A key difference between 1919 and 1930 was the extent of political polarization around Yrigoyen's figure.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Explanations for the breakdown of Argentine democracy in 1930 can be grouped into two camps. The redistributive struggle perspective emphasizes the effect of income inequality,

particularly the redistributive threat faced by the oligarchic classes, who were the main political players during the prior period of restricted electoral competition (1868-1912). This view fits well with recent influential works in political economy. The polarization perspective emphasizes how the problem in Argentina was *political*, particularly the bitter conflict between a dominant faction in control of government and excluded groups in the opposition. Such a perspective is in line with accounts that see dispersion of power, which makes it impossible for any single leader or group to overpower all others, as a key factor for the consolidation of democracy. Overall, the analysis presented in this paper casts serious doubts on the validity of the redistributive struggle perspective, while lending support to the alternative view of political polarization.

Using roll call vote data, this study has examined the evolution of political conflict in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies between 1916 and 1930. The empirical evidence provides several important insights on the fall of Argentine democracy. First, the socio-economic division implied by the redistributive threat perspective was not the principal dimension of political conflict between 1916 and 1930. Instead, the main cleavage in the Argentine Congress reflected the divisive impact of Yrigoyen. What mattered was the distribution of power, which is consistent with the political polarization perspective. Petroleum policy, discussed above, is a case in point. The fact that all the opposition parties, regardless of their ideological orientation united against the proposal suggests that an “extremes-against-the-middle” dynamic rather than a division over the extent of the government’s involvement in the economy prevailed. Indeed, as the evidence presented in this paper indicates that the expropriation issue, federal interventions, and the conflict between the executive branch and the Senate were all part of the wider problem created by the increasingly hegemonic allocation of political power.

Second, the analysis reveals that, after the the 1928 presidential election. which was mostly a competition between two factions of the Radical party, a pattern of fluid party allegiances was replaced by forceful partisan struggles. This realignment did not occur because economic redistribution suddenly emerged as a new and destabilizing dimension of conflict. Legislators’ alignments changed because the previously salient policy issues waned in the face of the overwhelming animosity between the Yrigoyenistas in power and their opponents. The latter was composed of an ideologically diverse group of parties, which in the present context had little chance of accessing power through elections.

In conclusion, the polarizing realignment brought about by Yrigoyen's accession to power and the subsequent failure of the 1912 political bargain, facilitated the demise of Argentina's democracy. In terms of the broader debate regarding democratization, a key implication of this finding is that, rather than needing a specific distribution of wealth, democratic consolidation requires that all major groups in society have a sufficiently large chance of being in power.

## Tables and Figures

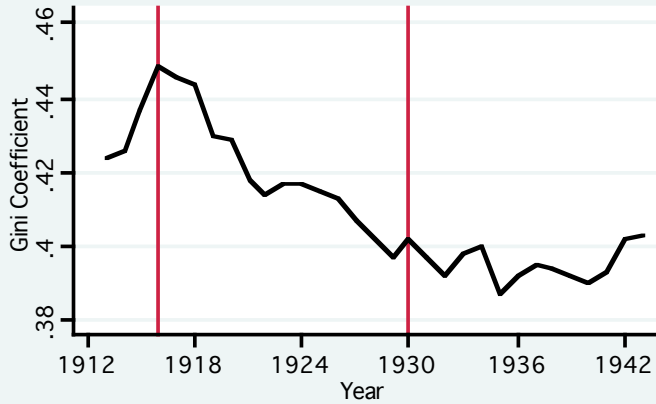
**Table 1. Roll Call Votes in Argentina, 1916-1929**

SESSION	ROLL CALL VOTES	ROLL CALL VOTES USED	VOTING DEPUTIES	VOTING DEPUTIES USED
1916-17	34	32	125	106
1918-19	48	48	126	103
1920-21	67	64	158	153
1922-23	66	65	160	150
1924-25	55	54	160	150
1926-27	56	55	157	150
1928-29	52	50	156	151
Total	378	368	1042	963

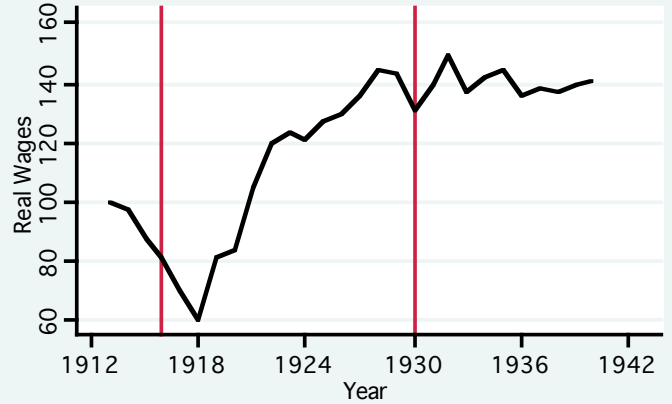
Source: Smith (1974).

**Figure 1. Social and Economic Indicators, Argentina (1913-1943)**

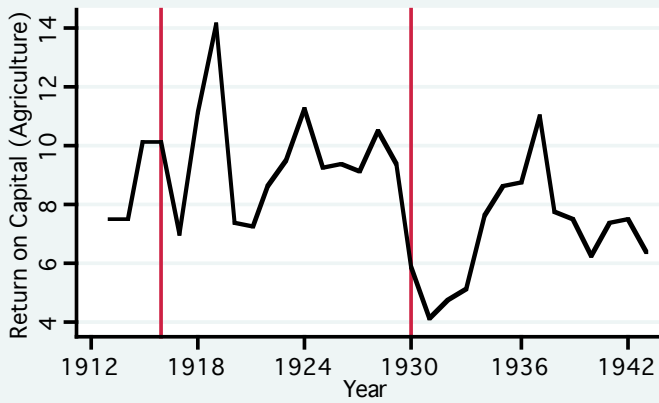
## Social and Economic Indicators



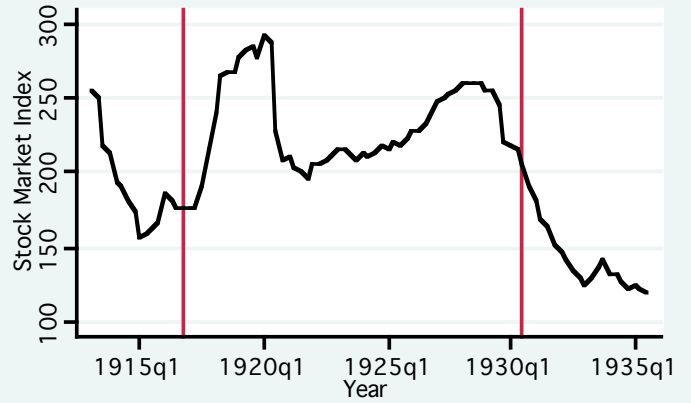
Source: Calvo et. al. (2001)



Source: Williamson (2002)

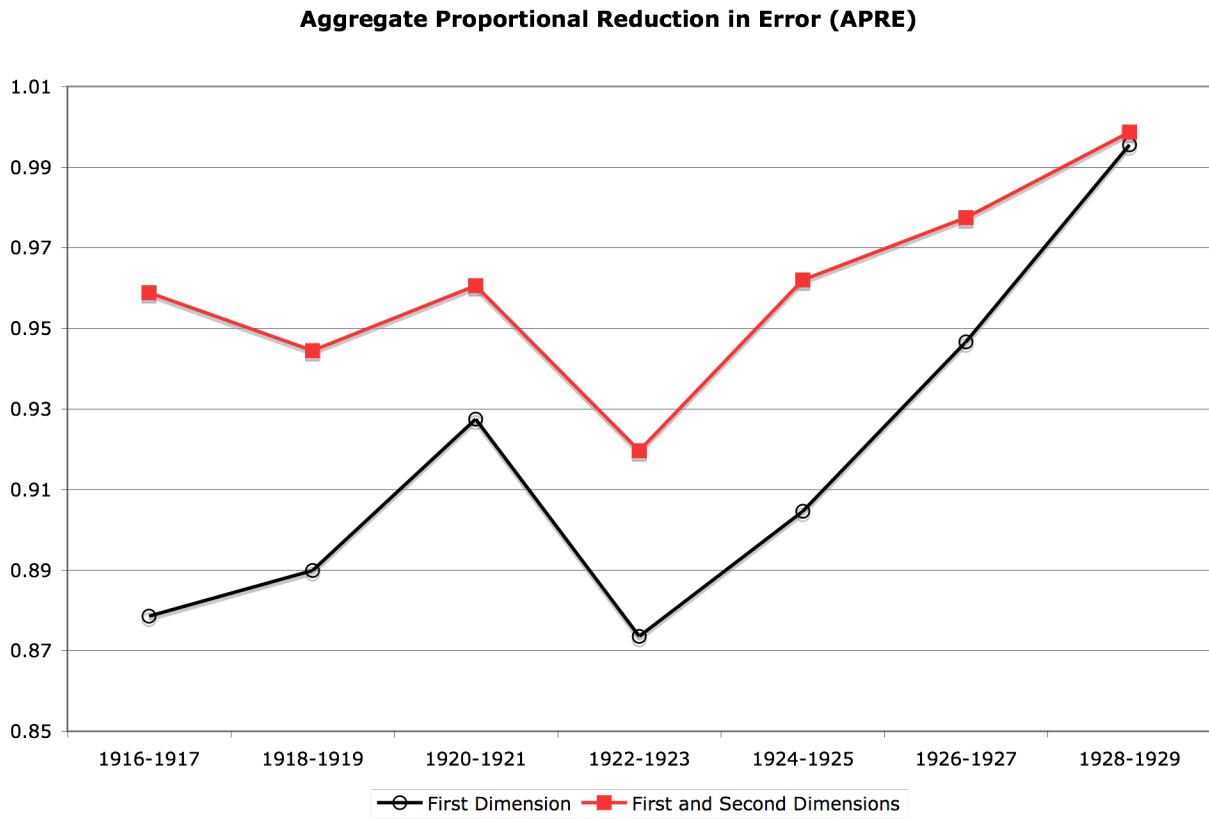


Sources: IEERAL (1986) and Mundlack et. al. (1989)

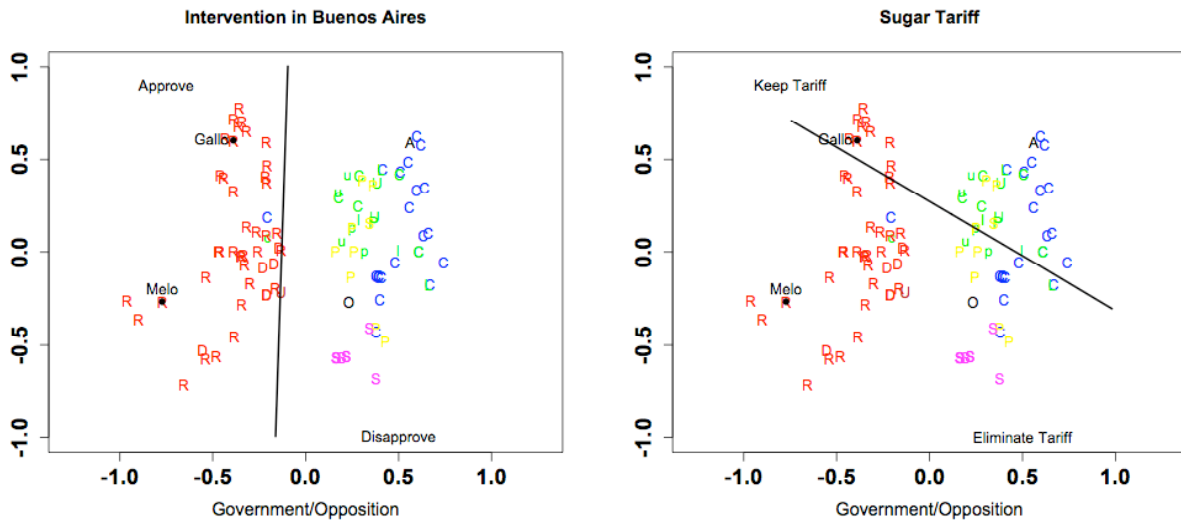


Source: Nakamura and Zarazaga (2003)

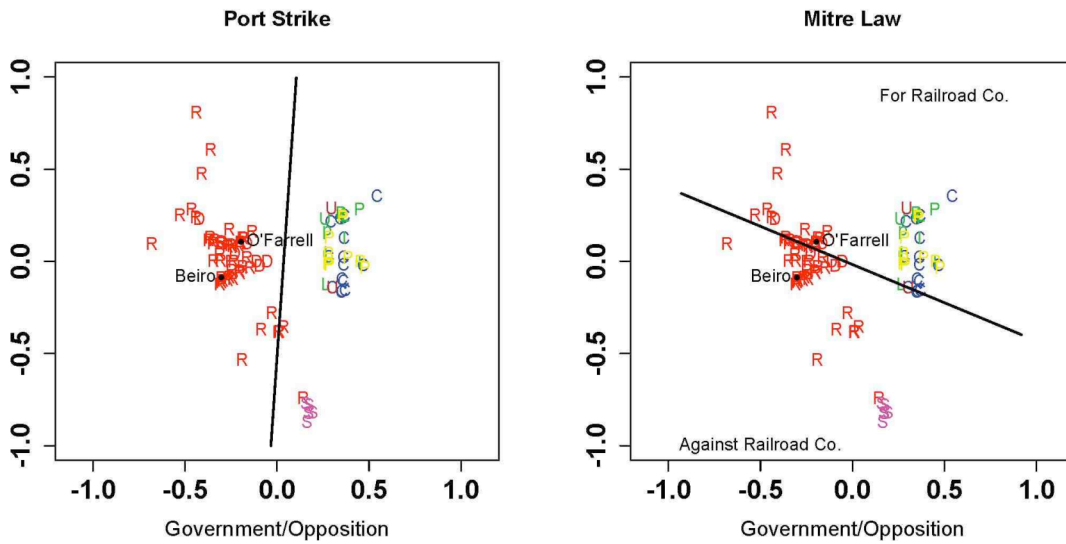
**Figure 2. Dimensionality of the Policy Space in Argentine Congress (1916-1929)**



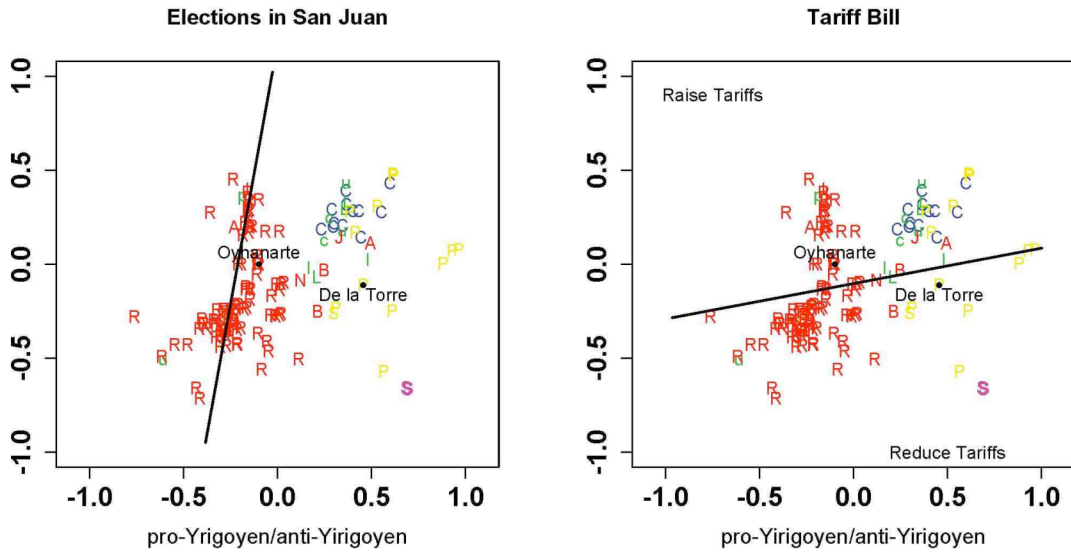
**Figure 3. Legislator's Ideal Points during Yrigoyen's First Term 1916-1917 Session**



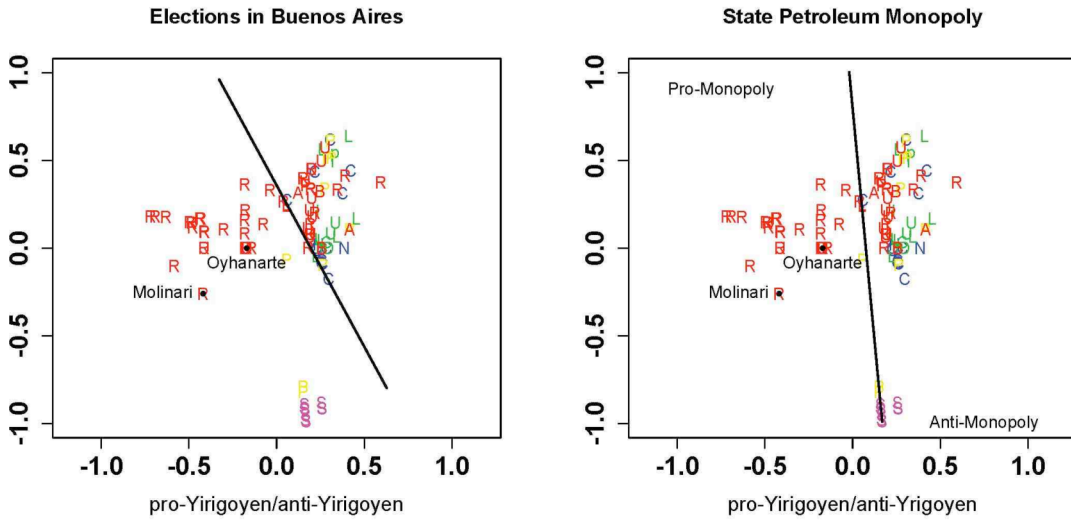
**Figure 4. Legislator's Ideal Points during Yrigoyen's First Term 1918-1919 Session**



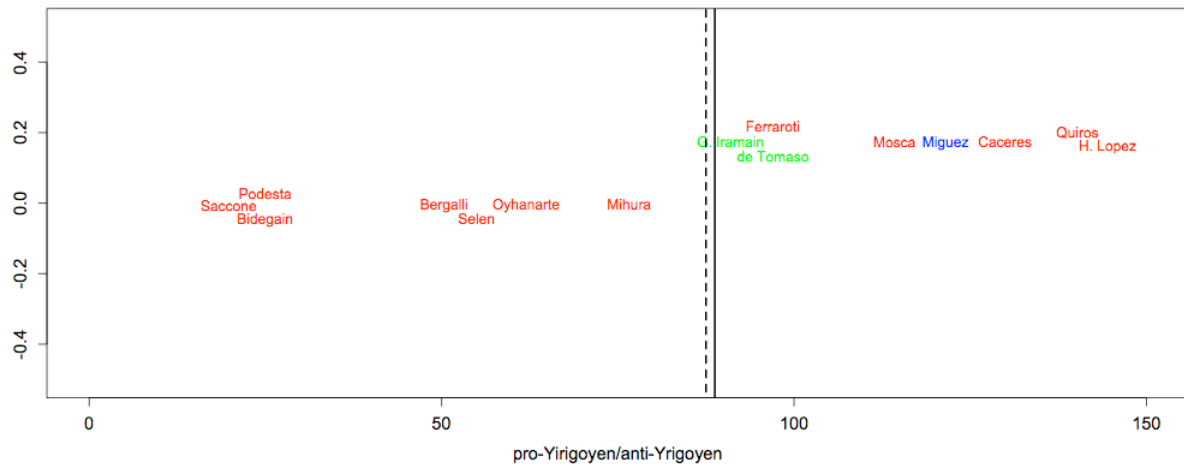
**Figure 5. Legislator's Ideal Points during Alvear's Term  
1922-1923 Session**



**Figure 6. Legislator's Ideal Points during Alvear's Term  
1926-1927 Session**



**Figure 7. Legislator's Ideal Points during Yrigoyen's Second Term  
1928-1929 Session**



Note: The coordinates indicate legislators' OC ranking (horizontal axis) and their first-dimension ideal points (vertical axis).

## References

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2001. "A Theory of Political Transitions," *American Economic Review*, 91: 938-63.
- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, James A. Robinson, and Pierre Yared. 2009. "Reevaluating the Modernization Hypothesis," *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 56:1043-1058.
- Alemán, Eduardo, Ernesto Calvo, Mark P. Jones, and Noah Kaplan. 2009. "Comparing Cosponsorship and Roll-Call Ideal Points," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1): 87-116.
- Bermeo, Nancy. 1992. "Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship," *Comparative Politics*, 24: 273-91.
- Boix, Carles. 2003. *Democracy and Redistribution*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boix, Carles, and Susan Stokes. 2003. "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics*, 55:517-49.
- Calvo, Ernesto, Juan Carlos Torre, and Mariela Szwarcberg. 2001. "The New Welfare Alliance," mimeo, Universidad Di Tella, Buenos Aires.
- Carroll, Royce, Jeffrey Lewis, James Lo, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2009. "Comparing NOMINATE and IDEAL: Points of Difference and Monte Carlo Tests," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34 (4): 555-591.
- Casper, Gretchen, and Michelle M. Taylor. 1996. *Negotiating Democracy*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Ciria, Alberto. 1974. *Parties and Power in Modern Argentina*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Epstein, David L., Robert Bates, Jack Goldstone, Ida Kristensen and Sharyn O'Halloran. 2006. "Democratic Transitions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 3: 551-569.
- Gibson, Edward L. 1996. *Class and Conservative Parties*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goodwin, Jr., Paul B. 1974. "The Politics of Rate-Making: The British-Owned Railways and the Union Civica Radical, 1921-1928," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 6, 2: 257-287.
- Highley, John and Richard Gunther. 1992. *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horowitz, Joel. 2008. *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1926-1930*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Jones, Mark P. 2002. "Explaining the High Level of Party Discipline in Argentine Congress," in Scott Morgenstern and Benito Nacif (eds.). *Legislative Politics in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, Mark P. and Wonjae Hwang. 2005. "Party Government in Presidential Democracies: Extending Cartel Theory Beyond the U.S. Congress," *American Journal of Political Science*, 49: 267-282.
- Jones, Mark P. and Wonjae Hwang. 2006. "Provincial Party Bosses: Keystone of the Argentine Congress," in Steven Levitsky and Maria Victoria Murillo (eds.) *Argentine Democracy: The*

- Politics of Institutional Weakness*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Jones, Mark P., Wonjae Hwang, and Juan Pablo Micozzi. 2009. "Government and Opposition in the Argentine Congress, 1989-2007: Understanding Inter-Party Dynamics through Roll Call Vote Analysis", *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 1: 67-96.
- Kaufman, Robert P. 2009. "Inequality and Redistribution: Some Continuing Puzzles," *PS*, 42: 657-60.
- Keefer, Philip. 2009. "Inequality, Collective Action, and Democratization," *PS*, 42: 661-66.
- Linz, Juan. 1978. "Crisis, Breakdown and Re-equilibration," in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds.). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Meltzer Allan, and Scott F. Richard. 1981. "A Rational Theory of the Size of Government," *Journal of Political Economy*, 89:914-27.
- Nakamura, Leonard I., and Carlos Zarazaga. 2003. "Banking and Finance, 1900-1935," in Gerardo Della Paollera and Alan M. Taylor (eds.). *A New Economic History of Argentina*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo A. 1973. *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies.
- Olson, Mancur. 1993. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," *American Political Science Review*, 87, 3: 567-576.
- Poole, Keith T. 2005. *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. 1997. *Congress, a Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Potter, Anne Louise. 1979. *Political Institutions, Political Decay, and the Argentine Crisis of 1930*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University.
- Przeworski Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Przeworski Adam, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Remmer, Karen L. 1984. *Political Competition in Argentina and Chile*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Reenock, Christopher, Michael Bernhard, and David Sobek. 2007. "Regressive Socioeconomic Distribution and Democratic Survival," *International Studies Quarterly*, 51: 677-699.
- Robinson, James A. 2006. "Economic Development and Democracy," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9:503-27.
- Rocchi, Fernando. 2005. *Chimneys in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina During the Export Boom Years, 1870-1930*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rock, David. 1975. *Politics in Argentina 1890-1930*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rock, David 1993. "From the First World War to 1930," in L. Bethel (ed.) *Argentina since Independence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Roemer, John E. 2001. *Political Competition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenberg, Emily S. 1975. "World War I and 'Continental Solidarity'," *The Americas*, 31 (3): 313-334
- Rosendorff, B. Peter. 2001. "Choosing Democracy," *Economics & Politics*, 13:1-29.
- Rosenthal, Howard and Erik Voeten. 2004. "Analyzing Roll Calls with Perfect Spatial Voting: France

- 1946-1958,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 48: 620-632.
- Sarobe, Jose Maria. 1957. *Memorias sobre la Revolucion del 6 de Septiembre de 1930*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Gure.
- Smith, Peter H. 1974a. *Argentina and the Failure of Democracy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Smith, Peter H. 1974b. *Argentine Chamber of Deputies, 1904-1955: roll call records and member characteristics*. [machine-readable data file]. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin. Data and Program Library Service. Study Number: MA-502-001-1-1-Argentina-DPLS-1904.
- Smith, Peter H. 1978. “The Breakdown of Democracy in Argentina, 1916-1930,” in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds.). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Solberg, Carl. 1973. “The Tariff and Politics in Argentina 1916-1930,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 53, 2: 260-284.
- Solberg, Carl E. 1979. *Oil and Nationalism in Argentina*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Spiller, Pablo T., and Mariano Tommasi. 2007. *The Institutional Foundations of Public Policy in Argentina*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Walter, Richard J. 1984. *The Province of Buenos Aires and Argentine Politics, 1912-1943*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Weingast, Barry R. 1997. “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law,” *American Political Science Review*, 91:245-63.
- Weinmann, Ricardo. 1994. *Argentina en la Primera Guerra Mundial*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Biblos.
- Wright, Winthrop R. 1974. *British-Owned Railways in Argentina*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> As James Robinson put it, "... recent empirical papers are aggregate macro studies that look for general relationships between various socioeconomic and political variables and measures of democracy. As such, they are fairly far removed from the theory and testing explicit mechanisms ... (Robinson 2006: 525).

<sup>2</sup> The classic on the subject is Meltzer and Richard (1983).

<sup>3</sup> The empirical evidence is mixed. While Milanovic (2000) finds that in more unequal countries there is greater redistribution to the poor, he does not find much support for the view that the median voter hypothesis explains redistributive transfers – the social segment representing the median voter is not a clear beneficiary of redistribution and whether it gains or not seems independent of initial inequality.

<sup>4</sup> Reenock et al. (2007) also clarify the distinction between inequality and basic needs and provide cross-national evidence that lends support to the view that basic needs deprivation, and not inequality, increases the likelihood of democratic breakdown.

<sup>5</sup> See Keefer (2009).

<sup>6</sup> These data were originally collected by Calvo et al. (2001). We thank Ernesto Calvo for sharing them with us.

<sup>7</sup> The data comes from Nakamura and Zarazaga's (2003) study of banking and finance in early twentieth century Argentina.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Remmer further highlights the vague principles of the Radicals; "the UCR was a populist party, a heterogeneous collection of social interests with a vague anti-status quo ideology, and none of its national pronouncements indicated an interest in fundamental socioeconomic reform" (Remmer 1984: 100). Karen Remmer further highlights the vague principles of the Radicals; "the UCR was a populist party, a heterogeneous collection of social interests with a vague anti-status quo ideology, and none of its national pronouncements indicated an interest in fundamental socioeconomic reform" (Remmer 1984: 100).

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive account of the logic behind a "negotiated" processes toward democracy see Casper and Taylor (1996).

<sup>10</sup> From the point of view of the vertical distribution of authority, Argentina was a federal system. However, the constitution allowed the Congress and the President (acting jointly when Congress was in session or the President acting alone when Congress was not in session) to remove provincial governments and replace local authorities with others of their own choosing.

<sup>11</sup> Yrigoyen also antagonized the armed forces by politicizing internal promotions (i.e., favoring Radical sympathizers) and using the army in the politically charged federal interventions. In addition, he turned the army into a source of patronage, often to repay favors to loyalists; in the process, he angered many officers who took pride in the army's professional autonomy (Smith

1978).

<sup>12</sup> Yrigoyenistas were accused of assassinating the leader of the Mendoza opposition, Carlos Washington Lencinas, at the end of 1929 (Rock 1993:169).

<sup>13</sup> Only nine substantive/procedural roll call votes were held between June 27, 1930 and the September 6 coup.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed description of the OC method see Poole (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Figure 2 above shows, when the two-dimensional representation is taken into account, we correctly classify 96 percent of the votes cast versus 88 percent for the unidimensional model.

<sup>16</sup> Yrigoyen's main objective was to alter the composition of the Conservative-dominated Senate, whose members were selected not by direct election, but by provincial legislatures, which usually operated under tight gubernatorial control (Gibson 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Cited in (Rock 1975: 186)

<sup>18</sup> The Ley Mitre of 1907 was Argentina's basic rate legislation. It exempted the companies from all import duties, as well as municipal and provincial rates, for 40 years. In return, the law allowed the federal government to impose an annual tax of 3 percent on the net income of the companies. The law also gave the government authority to reduce rates if the net profits of a company exceeded 6.8 percent on invested capital for three consecutive years (Wright 1974).

<sup>19</sup> The vote took place on September 12, 1923.

<sup>20</sup> In 1925, the minister of interior, Vicente Gallo, launched an offensive to intervene the province. Gallo, who was the main leader of the anti-personalistas, intended to use Yrigoyen's own tactics to weaken the strongholds of the former president. However, Alvear was philosophically opposed to intervention and stood firm in his resolve not to intervene. Out of frustration, Gallo resigned from the cabinet in July of 1925 (Walter 1985). This setback reinvigorated Buenos Aires' Yrigoyenistas: a few months later, they obtained a resounding victory in the national deputy elections. As Walter (1985) notes, the triumph moved the US embassy to predict that either Yrigoyen himself, or the candidate of his choosing would be the next president.

<sup>21</sup> The vote took place on September 8, 1927.

<sup>22</sup> At one end of the political spectrum, the fiscally conservative newspaper *La Prensa* asked how much the expropriations would cost and who would finance them. At the other end, *La Protesta*, the newspaper of the anarchist unions, declared its opposition because "... the State is the worst boss and a very bad administrator ..." (cited in Solberg 1979: 128).