

Ideological Tensions in the Foundational Decade of “Modern Argentina”: The Political Debates of the 1880s

Paula Alonso

Standard historiography states that between 1880 and 1916, Argentina underwent a profound social and economic transformation led by a hegemonic political party, the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN). This transformation has been portrayed as the achievement of a generation of public men, the Generation of Eighty, who envisioned a project that would integrate Argentina into the social and economic changes occurring in the transatlantic world. The 1880s—with record levels of immigration, foreign investment, the triumph of the PAN, and the strengthening of the state—have generally been characterized as a crucial decade in consolidating the main hallmarks of “Modern Argentina.”¹

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The following abbreviations will be used in the notes: *La Tribuna Nacional* (LTN); *La Nación* (LN); *Sud-América* (SA); and *El Nacional* (EN).

1. Examples of classic works include José Luis Romero, *Las ideas políticas en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: FCE, 1959); and Thomas F. McGann, *Argentina, the United States and the International System, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957).

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Along with unquestionable economic and social growth, as well as the PAN's unflinching presidential victories, there are other significant reasons why this period has been perceived in this way. The first two presidents of this period, Julio A. Roca (1880–86) and Miguel Juárez Celman (1886–90), spoke of an abrupt break with the past followed by a promising future. In this rhetoric, 1880 marked the first page in the history of modern Argentina, forged with the promise that the country would never return to the previous dark times of tyranny and war.² This perception of 1880 as a new beginning, with no connection to the past, was crafted by the party in power and repeated by later analysts with few exceptions. The idea that the Generation of Eighty envisioned a modernizing project was first ensconced over time in the historiography and then entered into public debates as one of the main explanations for the country's fate.³ The possession of a project—like the Generation of Eighty—or the lack of one has been used ever since as a yardstick to measure the quality of Argentina's leaders and their chances of success. The notion that the Generation of Eighty conceived of a plan for the country went hand in hand with the idea that the period was characterized by ideological consensus, in contrast with both prior and later times.⁴

While the general public continues to accept the concept of the Generation of Eighty and their project, recent studies have documented ideological contentions, not only between government and opposition groups but also among politicians, intellectuals, and the scientific community.⁵ Most of this research has concentrated on the period after 1890, when opposition groups organized against the government, and particularly between 1900 and 1916, when political and intellectual circles grappled with the social question and the need for political reform.⁶ The 1880s have, in contrast, received relatively little attention in this reexamination. Historians have generally viewed increasing Catholic

2. Paula Alonso, "‘En la primavera de la historia’: El discurso político del roquismo de la década del ochenta a través de su prensa," *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana* "Dr. Emilio Ravignani," 3rd series, no. 15 (Spring 1997).

3. See Paula Bruno, "Un balance sobre los usos de la expresión *generación del 80*, 1920–2000" (working paper no. 34, Department of Humanities, Universidad de San Andrés, Jan. 2005).

4. See Luis Alberto Romero, "Para un proyecto colectivo," *LN*, Mar. 23, 2005, p. 15.

5. See Bruno, "Un balance."

6. Natalio Botana and Ezequiel Gallo, *De la República posible a la República verdadera (1880–1910)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1997); Paula Alonso, *Between Revolution and Ballot Box: The Origins of the Argentine Radical Party in the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); Eduardo Zimmermann, *Los liberales reformistas: La cuestión social en la Argentina, 1890–1916* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana / Univ. de San Andrés, 1995); Oscar Terán, *Positivism and nation in the Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Punto Sur, 1987).

opposition to liberal reform during this decade as a minor disturbance to the ideological consensus of the time.⁷ A few works have posited that the ideological division between the 1880s and previous times was less sharp than once thought and have also suggested that the decade was not free from debate, evidenced particularly in the debates over the federalization of the city of Buenos Aires in August and September of 1880.⁸

Building on this historiographic trend, I here analyze the ideological contentions between different political parties in the 1880s, using the party press as the main source for the "dialogue of the parties."⁹ This dialogue was highly confrontational, given that attempting to impose one's particular vision of society and government over other alternatives is a fundamental form of political struggle.¹⁰ This avenue for debate became particularly important during the 1880s, a decade that witnessed an unusual degree of political demobilization following the dispersion of the old opposition parties and the ascendance of the PAN. The party in government encountered little opposition at the polls, but countervailing political groups took their struggle to the pages of their dailies. Until now, this latter form of politics has been overlooked. Indeed, the demobilized political world of the 1880s has been cast either as a period in which all groups consented to the main trends of the new ideological climate or in which the ideological homogeneity was so strong that the isolated voices of discordant groups could not undermine it.

My research indicates that public debate during the 1880s primarily took place in, and was constructed by, the party press. After the fall of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829–52), the Buenos Aires press became one of the main protagonists of an effervescent republican life.¹¹ Almost one hundred periodicals and

7. Néstor Tomás Auza, *Católicos y liberales en la generación del ochenta* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1975); Andrés Allende, "Las reformas liberales de Roca y Juárez Celman," *Revista de Historia* (Buenos Aires) (1957).

8. Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Un nuevo clima de ideas," in *La Argentina del ochenta al centenario*, ed. Gustavo Ferrari and Ezequiel Gallo (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1980); Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Una nación para el desierto argentino," in *Proyecto y construcción de una nación (Argentina 1846–1880)* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1980); Ezequiel Gallo, "El roquismo, 1880–1916," *Todo Es Historia* 100 (Sept. 1975); Botana and Gallo, *De la República posible*.

9. Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Beliefs*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1960), v–ix.

10. Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 5.

11. See Alberto R. Lettieri, *La República de la opinión: Política y opinión pública en Buenos Aires entre 1852 y 1862* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1998); and Hilda Sabato, *La política en las*

newspapers were published in Buenos Aires in 1872, a number that continued to rise dramatically in the following years. Among them, the political press—half a dozen dailies whose content and format was a hybrid between pamphlets and modern newspapers—played a crucial role.¹² Previously, the press mainly echoed and expanded on the disputes between strong individuals, but during the 1880s it became the chorus that dominated the public domain.¹³ These newspapers, created and financed by the political parties and factions, represented a kind of journalism that did not survive into the twentieth century, when they were gradually replaced by self-financed enterprises claiming to follow modern standards of objectivity in presenting an independent source of information and not just opinion.¹⁴ In nineteenth-century Argentina, as elsewhere at that time, the party press had none of the characteristics of its successors. The editors and staff worked for the party and strove to provide not the latest news but rather the party's opinions. Through these papers political organizations spread their ideas, fought their adversaries, defended themselves from attacks, and created their own identities.

These newspapers played an important role in each party's search for legitimacy. As we will see, presidents Julio A. Roca and Miguel Juárez Celman employed *La Tribuna Nacional* and *Sud-América*, respectively, to propose and defend a set of ideas they hoped would generate legitimacy for their presidencies. During this process, both appealed to the idea of progress but employed the word with different meanings, objectives, and, ultimately, results. Both presidents primarily targeted the newspapers of the two main opposition parties: the old Liberal Party (known by then as the Nationalist Party) and the porteño Autonomists. As the mouthpiece of Bartolomé Mitre's Nationalist Party and the most respected newspaper in the country, *La Nación* became the main adversary to *La Tribuna Nacional*. Mitre had unsuccessfully supported

calles: *Entre el voto y la movilización. Buenos Aires, 1862–1880* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998), 62–74. This does not mean that the press was not important before then. Even under Rosas, the press was so significant that the governor invested considerable effort in curbing opponents and launching his own discourse; Jorge Myers, *El discurso republicano en el régimen rosista* (Buenos Aires: Univ. Nacional de Quilmes, 1995).

12. See Tim Duncan, "La prensa política: *Sud-América*, 1884–1892," in Ferrari, *La Argentina del ochenta*, 773. For more on the political press, see Alonso, "En la primavera de la historia," 37–50.

13. Halperin Donghi, "Un nuevo clima de ideas."

14. A more complete description of these newspapers can be found in Alonso, "En la primavera de la historia."

Carlos Tejedor, then governor of Buenos Aires Province, in the 1880 election. After this electoral defeat, and their subsequent defeat on the battlefield two months later, the Nationalists disbanded their loose party structure and opted to abstain from electoral participation in protest against the government. Mitre and his followers entrenched themselves behind *La Nación*, one of the largest and most respected daily newspapers in the country.

The other opposition group, the porteño Autonomists, joined the PAN in August 1880 but split again in 1883. Once back in the opposition, they also abstained from participating in elections and instead turned *El Nacional*—the second-most-important political daily after *La Nación*—into one of the most implacable opponents of the government. Catholic groups also organized themselves as an opposition party (the Catholic Union) after a series of anticlerical laws were passed in 1884, but they avoided electoral contests.¹⁵ These opposition parties organized a coalition (Partidos Unidos) for the presidential election of 1886, which then disbanded after its defeat. They would meet again in 1889 to organize the revolution against President Juárez that would be carried out the following year. As we can see, the PAN faced little electoral challenge in the 1880s but met with strong opposition in other forums of public debate, especially from these two papers.

The debates between these papers occurred within “a common climate of political ideas,” but this did not negate existing tensions created by different dialects within the language of liberalism.¹⁶ Liberalism in Argentina, as elsewhere, has proved to be “capacious”; its inherently expansive character made room for, and even generated, ideological conflict.¹⁷ I define ideology here as a loose asso-

15. I have excluded the Catholic Union and its press from this study because religious conflict was not the main dividing line between the government and the opposition during these years. Indeed, the Catholic Union remained a very small organization that joined forces with non-Catholic parties for electoral purposes.

16. To quote the phrase from Tulio Halperin Donghi, “Un nuevo clima de ideas.”

17. For a characterization of liberalism as “capacious,” see Alan Gibson, “Ancients, Moderns, and Americans: The Republicanism-Liberalism Debate Revisited,” *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 261–307. Many have pointed out the eclectic nature of Argentine and Latin American liberalism. See, e.g., Ezequiel Gallo, “Las ideas liberales en la Argentina,” in *El pensamiento político argentino contemporáneo*, ed. Aníbal Iturrrieta (Buenos Aires: Síntesis, 1994), 51–163; Natalio Botana, *La tradición republicana: Alberdi, Sarmiento y las ideas políticas de su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1984); and Botana, *La libertad política y su historia* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1991); Alan Knight, “México bronco, México manso: Una reflexión sobre la cultura cívica mexicana,” *Política y Gobierno* (Mexico City) 3, no. 1 (Spring 1996); Elías Palti, “Las polémicas en el liberalismo argentino: Sobre virtud, republicanism y lenguaje”; and Gabriel L. Negretto, “Repensando

ciation of ideas intended to gain support, to construct shared beliefs, to generate enthusiasm, and to inspire action. Ideologies define roles, rank values, and create identities for the organizations grouped around them.¹⁸

I seek to place these debates of the 1880s within the broader ideological landscape of late-nineteenth-century Argentina. Although the ideological tensions of the 1880s have their own peculiarities, they were linked to earlier debates that survived into the decade. Similar tensions can also be traced, again with some modifications, after the 1890 revolution. Rather than characterizing the 1880s as an exceptional decade of ideological consensus or upholding 1880 as watershed year when romanticism gave way to positivism, I argue that the 1880s can indeed be connected with the political and ideological worlds of the preceding and subsequent periods.

I will first analyze the political discourse of the two presidential administrations of the 1880s, as expressed in their party papers. While the discourses of *La Tribuna Nacional* and *Sud-América* were symptomatic of the new climate of ideas, they were far from identical; indeed, when we pay attention to each paper's reformulation of key political concepts, we note significant differences in meanings. I then reconstruct oppositional discourses launched in *La Nación* and *El Nacional*. While these discourses shared common ground, they also differed in the primary target of their attacks, as well as in the different content they used to address similar topics. Although the Mitristas and Autonomists found themselves together on the side of the opposition in the 1880s, they had been electoral rivals in the previous decade; this history revealed itself in differences of discourse, strategy, and language in their papers. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of these debates in the political context of the 1880s, as well as in the wider ideological landscape of fin de siècle Argentina.

The Political Discourse of the PAN

President Julio A. Roca launched *La Tribuna Nacional* a few days before assuming office in October 1880. It had a press run of five thousand copies and was financially supported by subscriptions from the national and provincial governments, as well as through credit from the National Bank and the usual system

el republicanismo liberal en América Latina: Alberdi y la Constitución Argentina de 1853," both in *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica*, ed. José Antonio Aguilar Rivera and Rafael Rojas (Mexico City: FCE, 2002), 167–210 and 210–43.

18. These concepts are explored in greater depth in Alonso, "En la primavera de la historia," 36–37.

of individual subscriptions from friends and sympathizers.¹⁹ By launching his own newspaper, Roca showed that he had quickly learned from the mistakes of his predecessor (and fellow Tucumán native), Nicolás Avellaneda (1874–80), an outsider who enjoyed little support in Buenos Aires. Newspapers were essential tools of political propaganda at the time, and, given the circumstances that surrounded Roca's election, *La Tribuna Nacional* became one of the most important instruments of his presidency. He took office just four months after the governor of Buenos Aires Province, Carlos Tejedor, had led the most violent revolution of the last quarter of the century against the national government in an attempt to prevent him from assuming power. Roca now had to rule from a city he did not know well, where he had no friends and few acquaintances, with the local support of new political allies whom he did not entirely trust, and from a building that stood near the site where 20,000 men had raised arms against him a few months earlier. More significantly, he had to rule from a city where public opinion could not be ignored and whose political parties either bitterly opposed him or only reluctantly accepted him.²⁰

Two of the most prestigious and successful papers of the time—*La Nación* and *El Nacional*—belonged to Roca's opposition. Roca could not ignore the opinion of the country's new capital, as expressed through their dailies, not only because the political practices of the port city demanded it but also because his opponents were still too powerful. True, their strength had been gradually eroding. But although the Nationalist Party was in disarray after the defeats of 1874 and 1880, *La Nación* still commanded respect, and its influence required attention. And while as a political paper *El Nacional* was relatively less fearsome, the Autonomists enjoyed a political clout that the president needed to counteract if he wished to retain control of national politics. The Autonomists were ready to give battle in the 1886 presidential elections, and they stood a good chance of success.²¹

Under these circumstances, *La Tribuna Nacional* became one of Roca's most important political instruments, the president's voice in a political world where he was a relative outsider. Through it Roca created his identity, promoted his goals, explained his values, and attempted to shield himself from the attacks of

19. For the finances of *LTN*, see Agustín de Vedia to Roca, Apr. 1, 1888, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter, AGN), Archivo Julio A. Roca, leg. 57.

20. I define public opinion in this context as the "opinion of public men," a concept I elaborate in "En la primavera de la historia."

21. Paula Alonso, "La política y sus laberintos: El Partido Autonomista Nacional entre 1880 y 1886," in *La vida política en la Argentina del siglo XIX: Armas, votos y voces*, ed. Hilda Sabato and Alberto Lettieri (Buenos Aires: FCE, 2003), 277–92.

his rivals. The paper was the main instrument he used to legitimate his rule. That is, it was the site of those activities in which all governments and political parties engage to justify their actions, define their public image, and make claims to authority.²² *La Tribuna Nacional* purported that it was not the official government paper and that its aim was not to inform on policies, decrees, or laws; when Roca or his ministers published in it, they did not sign their columns. *La Tribuna Nacional* claimed time and again that it was the voice of the PAN, not the government, and that it intended to enter the field of public debate on par with other party papers. Naturally, the distinction between a party paper and the official paper of the government was not clear-cut; in the public imagination, *La Tribuna Nacional* was known as the newspaper of the president.

Roca used *La Tribuna Nacional* to promote the idea that his administration represented political change and a rupture with the past, portraying 1880 as the beginning of a new era that signaled the arrival of progress. In Argentina, the notion of progress was prominent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as it was elsewhere.²³ However, the meaning and popularity of progress varied widely from country to country, as well as among contesting voices within each country. In Argentina, different sectors of the elite used the term with different connotations. And though it was once thought that the ubiquity of the term *progress* in public discourse was a sign of the triumph of positivism over liberalism, we now know that—far from being hegemonic—positivism in Argentina manifested itself in weak, fragmented, and vague terms within both the scientific professions and (even more so, I argue) the political groups.²⁴ Although we can detect traces of what Charles Hale labeled “scientific politics,” particularly in the second half of the 1880s, this language was sporadic and unintentional; that is, it was employed without any explicit awareness of its theoretical implications and without reference to the theoretical works that had stronger impact

22. See Rodney Barker, *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

23. See Hugo Biagini, “El progreso y sus avatares,” *La generación del ochenta: Cultura y política* (Buenos Aires, 1995), chap. 1.

24. For the traditional interpretation of positivism as the hegemonic ideology of these years, see David William Foster, *The Argentine Generation of 1880: Ideology and Cultural Text* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1990); and Terán, *Positivismo y nación*. For scientific positivism, see Marcelo Montserrat, “La mentalidad evolucionista: Una ideología del progreso,” in Ferrari and Gallo, *La Argentina del ochenta*, 785–818; and Oscar Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires de fin de siglo (1880–1910): Derivas de la “cultura científica”* (Buenos Aires: FCE, 2000). Terán convincingly establishes the mitigated impact of positivism within the scientific profession.

in other Latin American countries, particularly Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela.²⁵

When *La Tribuna Nacional* employed the language of progress, it stressed that it should not be reduced to material development, roads and bridges, immigrants and credit, or railways. Instead, by *progress* it referred to the moral development of the people. Progress went well beyond material gain: it fostered an individual work ethic, respect for the law, and love of peace, thus strengthening society's conservative feelings for leading an orderly life.²⁶ Progress also had positive political consequences, reflected in the institutions that individuals built for themselves: modern societies developed the wisdom to implement good laws and in this way distinguished themselves from backward countries through their capacity for reflection and through government accountability.²⁷

La Tribuna Nacional proceeded from a view of human nature that was by then well established: that men are internally torn between passions and interests. The effects of progress—on individuals, societies, and institutions—arose from the disciplining effect of economic development on men's passions.²⁸ *La Tribuna Nacional* insisted that these passions represented men's dark destructive tendencies—negative impulses that expressed themselves through politics and were channeled through the political parties. Politics was responsible for destruction, hatred, and war. *La Tribuna Nacional* argued that the current government was successful because it sustained that the destructive political passions could only be tamed by developing society's conservative interests. Moral progress would be brought about through material progress and not

25. For the concept of "scientific politics," see Charles A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989). Studies on the impact of positivism in Latin America are numerous; one of the finest is Arturo Ardao, "Asimilación y transformación del positivismo en Latinoamérica," in *Estudios latinoamericanos de historia de las ideas* (Montevideo: Monte Aguila, 1978), 99–110. On Brazil, see José Murilo de Carvalho, *La formación de las almas: El imaginario de la república en el Brasil* (Bernal: Univ. Nacional de Quilmes, 1997); and Robert G. Nachaman, "Positivism, Modernization, and the Middle Class in Brazil," *HAHR* 57, no. 1 (Feb. 1977): 1–23; on Venezuela, see Nikita Harwich Vallenilla, "Venezuelan Positivism and Modernity," *HAHR* 70, no. 2 (May 1999): 327–44.

26. "Anacronismos," *LTN*, July 21, 1892.

27. *LTN*, Feb. 12, 1887.

28. On the different meanings and roles attributed to the passions and the interests over the centuries, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977). On the development of these ideas in the United States, see, for example, Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992).

the other way around; it was through economic development that civilizations were built.²⁹

According to *La Tribuna Nacional*, this far-reaching impact of economic progress began to be felt in Argentina in 1880. Previously, politics had consisted of violence, intolerance, and disorder; every attempt to build good and stable institutions had perished in the flames of political passion fanned by the parties.³⁰ However, only two years after Roca had assumed the presidency, *La Tribuna Nacional* confidently announced that an inalterable peace prevailed throughout the country; governors, senators, and deputies were regularly elected in all provinces without violence and coercion. The old politics of intolerance and hatred had given way to mutual acceptance and understanding. “[E]ach passing day, intransigence disappears, tensions are dissolved, and resistance is eliminated.” By fostering commerce and industry, the government had eradicated the foundations for anarchy and put an end to “politics as drama. . . . There are no more idle multitudes plotting revolts.”³¹

In the government’s public discourse, progress not only brought peace and civilization but also fostered civil and political liberties. Modern economists, *La Tribuna Nacional* argued, taught that freedom and the rule of law were the result of economic progress. It was not the case that economic development could take place only when the law and civil and political liberties were respected; in fact, it was love of work and caring for one’s enterprise that led people to appreciate the advantages of order, good government, and personal freedom. “[G]reater guarantees and liberty exist among the people where work habits are more developed and where the fruits of industry are more abundant,” while “these values are more precarious . . . where the revitalizing currents of progress have not yet penetrated.”³² Thus, in the PAN’s discourse, the meaning of progress was broad and its effects far reaching. Progress contributed to the development of people’s work habits, fostered love of order, helped to establish good governments with just laws, and brought about peace and liberty.

Naturally, *La Tribuna Nacional*’s discourse hailed Roca as singularly responsible for the arrival of progress. Roca had “given national activity a new and fertile direction in the glorious and peaceful feats of work and progress, converting the energies that used to be wasted on bloody destructive struggles

29. “El mensaje y la política,” *LTN*, June 11, 1888.

30. For the PAN’s construction of its own version of the country’s political history and its implications, see Alonso, “En la primavera de la historia.”

31. “Progresos que no se mencionan,” *LTN*, Jan. 1, 1881.

32. *Ibid.*

into an element of life and reproduction."³³ These achievements were all the more impressive, *La Tribuna Nacional* insisted, when viewed against conditions between independence and 1880. The newspaper proclaimed its own vision of Argentina's history, beginning with an appalling colonial legacy that "left us with neither political education, orderly habits, regular institutions of government, a proper legislative system, love for work, commerce, nor industry," followed by repeated attempts at state building, each of which had been immolated in the flames of political passions, "a history of infighting, misfortunes, and martyrs" that led the country from the horrors of anarchy to the clutches of tyranny.³⁴ Even when most basic problems appeared to have been resolved with the adoption of the 1853 constitution, years of potential progress were wasted as bloody revolutions erupted, inaugurating a period of misfortunes that reached its peak in the confrontation of 1880.

Fortunately, the last of Argentina's great problems had found a permanent solution, and the generous sentiment of nationalism triumphed over malicious localism. This happy ending to Argentina's tortured tale was, according to *La Tribuna Nacional*, authored by General Roca. Thanks to Roca and his party, the country had left behind the "age of inexperience" and successfully reached "the age of reflection and calm . . . which eliminates chimerical abstractions, which runs from dangerous illusions and seeks practical solutions."³⁵ The country had entered a stage similar to that of mighty nations that had made the great leap from the Middle Ages into modern times.

In *La Tribuna Nacional's* version, Argentine history was marked by a series of peculiar characteristics. It was not a story of state building in which a group of men fought against adversity to construct a nation, as we see in the narrative of the U.S. Founding Fathers. Instead, the central protagonist was Progress itself, struggling to clear a path against the obstacle of political passion. *La Tribuna Nacional's* historical vision served many purposes. The most obvious was to highlight the Roca administration's achievements each day through a detailed list of the fruits of progress purportedly enjoyed since the first day of his presidency. This discourse of a Roca-led period of greatness, honor, and triumph in contrast with a dark past demonstrates, above all, the urgent need to legitimize the new government. Roca's reputation would be built on a disjuncture between past and present. In this discourse, Roca did not intend to build on the work of his predecessors or improve upon any enterprise in process before he came to

33. "Los partidos," *LTN*, Dec. 16, 1887.

34. "1888-1889," *LTN*, Jan. 1, 1889, and "La lucha legal," *LTN*, Jan. 8, 1886.

35. "La lucha legal," *LTN*, Jan. 8, 1886.

power. The newspaper did not present the PAN as a party with a prestigious lineage and roots in previous presidencies. On the contrary, it was heralded as a completely new and modern organization, founded at the beginning of 1880 with no contact with the past. The past was portrayed as at once near and distant—chronologically near but distanced by the breach between backwardness and progress.

The discourse *La Tribuna Nacional* unfurled to legitimate the Roca presidency was not limited to saluting the arrival of progress and recounting its effects, however. It also sought to build the president's reputation based on his strict compliance with the constitution in his exercise of power, a strategy developed in response to opposition attacks.³⁶ As we shall later see, *La Nación* rejected the PAN's ideas on progress and questioned Roca's legitimacy, while *El Nacional* charged that his administration had violated the spirit of the constitution. *La Tribuna Nacional's* constitutionalist rhetoric centered on three key features of the institutional system that the opposition had targeted: (i) the principle of representation, (ii) the role of political parties, and (iii) the federal system of government.³⁷

(i) One of *La Nación's* main criticisms of the Roca administration was that, from the moment of his election, Roca had violated the principle of representation. According to the paper, Roca's candidacy had been imposed by a League of Governors over the will of the people, and since entering office, he had used fraud to manipulate the electoral system. In order to avoid reopening wounds that Roca preferred to let heal, *La Tribuna Nacional's* defense of the president sidestepped the circumstances surrounding the 1880 election. And although it did not deny the existence of electoral fraud, *La Tribuna Nacional* insisted that such irregularities had been a constant aspect of the electoral process. The paper asked, "[A]re we to be told that there used to be an old and sound, established education in politics, a tradition of clean suffrage that was lost with the country's moral and political development?"³⁸ If *La Nación* challenged the government on the grounds of electoral fraud, *La Tribuna Nacional* contended, it

36. *LTN's* discourse on the limits of presidential power confirms the view that many Latin American leaders based their governments on a constitutionalist discourse; see Gabriel Negretto and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, "Rethinking the Legacy of the Liberal State in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina (1853–1916) and Mexico (1857–1910)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 2000): 361–98.

37. Analyzed more extensively in Paula Alonso, "*La Tribuna Nacional y Sud-América: Tensiones ideológicas en la construcción de la 'Argentina moderna' en la década de 1880,*" in *Construcciones impresas: Panfletos, diarios y revistas en la formación de los estados nacionales en América Latina, 1820–1920*, ed. Paula Alonso (Buenos Aires: FCE, 2004).

38. "La ley electoral," *LTN*, Aug. 9, 1883.

was only to justify Mitre's decision to abstain from the polls, a stance devised to mask the disarray within his own party ranks. The paper reprinted complaints of fraud from previous elections, as well as similar accusations made in the United States, England, and Spain, to support the claim that fraud was pervasive and unexceptional.³⁹

While the opposition blamed Roca for the electoral wrongdoings, *La Tribuna Nacional* instead blamed an uneducated populace, ripe for exploitation by the parties themselves. Under Argentina's system of universal male suffrage, *La Tribuna Nacional* estimated that 75 percent of the electorate was illiterate, a situation the parties exploited to their own ends. After long and repetitive editorials on the subject, *La Tribuna Nacional* concluded that the solution was not to change electoral laws or restrict the vote but rather to educate the electorate. Roca's administration, it claimed, was doing more to improve the situation than previous governments, opening the gates to progress that would enable the necessary gradual improvements.⁴⁰

Elections in Argentina were necessary but not yet sufficient to legitimate the victorious candidate and did not provide a framework for the consensual transfer of power from subjects to rulers.⁴¹ Thus, *La Tribuna Nacional* sought to legitimate Roca's presidency by appealing to the constitutionality of his exercise of power. "The Constitution," the paper stressed, "guarantees freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of industry, freedom of government, etc. Is any one of these liberties suspended or suppressed in the Republic?"⁴² Time and again, *La Tribuna Nacional* appealed to the "inverted principle of representation" by which the sovereignty of the people is guaranteed through the exercise, and not the source, of a government's power. "Legislation, government initiatives, congressional debate, and the relentless work of the executive are not elements produced by tyrannies, imported to the country like manufactured goods, or the product of imaginary visions, but the expression of the public sovereignty in whose name we rule. This is the representative system from the point of view of universal doctrine and from the point of view of our organization."⁴³

(ii) *La Tribuna Nacional* also sought to teach citizens and opposition parties

39. "Conquistas morales," *LTN*, Dec. 10, 1885; "Las elecciones," *LTN*, Feb. 8–9, 1888; "Prácticas electorales," *LTN*, May 9, 1886.

40. "La democracia práctica," *LTN*, Oct. 1, 1885.

41. See Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador: La política argentina entre 1880–1916* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1997); and Botana, "Comentarios finales," in *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX*, ed. Antonio Annino (Buenos Aires: FCE, 1995).

42. "Las libertades públicas," *LTN*, Feb. 6, 1886.

43. "El sistema representativo," *LTN*, Oct. 15–16, 1883.

that old political practices were incompatible with the new, "Modern" Argentina. The country had set out on the road to progress in 1880, and politics should function to smooth out that road by preempting potential factional conflicts. Those who viewed politics as a dispute between the "truth and error, between good and bad," had been confused by "one of the most absurd sophisms invented by political passion."⁴⁴ The opposition mistakenly thought that public agitation was synonymous with political freedom. On the contrary, public agitation "interrupts the course of the economic and moral interests of the country, ends stability and safety, and suspends all legal safeguards."⁴⁵ Instead, it was necessary "to humanize the political struggle and the impatience of the political parties, and to spread more rational and practical concepts."⁴⁶ Since politics existed to resolve practical questions, political parties were to have a more limited role. The PAN defined them as "associations of an incidental kind," necessary only to support electoral campaigns. After the election, political parties should be dissolved until the next election "in order to return peace to society . . . which cannot withstand the unnecessary strain for very long."⁴⁷

However, while *La Tribuna Nacional* envisioned a more modest role for political parties in the new era, it also held that they did have a central role to play in the republican form of government.⁴⁸ Political parties, "far from being an evil or a symptom of weakness, are a prime condition of freedom . . . the same way that uniformity and public indifference are signs of oppression."⁴⁹ The models for what political parties should look like were to be found abroad, in England and the United States. There, *La Tribuna Nacional* claimed, parties forced governments to be accountable and contributed to the political debates of their times. *La Tribuna Nacional* begged Argentine political parties to transform themselves from vehicles for personal passions and tools of destruction into prime elements of republican government and tools of institution building in the country.⁵⁰

(iii) *La Tribuna Nacional* examined the federal system in detail, mainly in

44. Ibid.

45. "Política," *LTN*, Nov. 11, 1885.

46. "El medio y la aspiración," *LTN*, Feb. 19, 1887.

47. Ibid.

48. Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Un término de comparación: Liberalismo y nacionalismo en el Río de la Plata," in *Los intelectuales en el poder en México*, ed. Roderic Ai Camp, Charles A. Hale, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1991), 115.

49. "Los partidos," *LTN*, Apr. 28, 1886. See also "Una anécdota," *LTN*, Dec. 23, 1885.

50. "Los partidos." See also "Oposición negativa," *LTN*, May 5, 1887; and "Oposición," *LTN*, June 3, 1888.

response to its opponents.⁵¹ As we shall see, *El Nacional* decried that the provinces had increasingly lost their autonomy under a system of one-party rule and as a result of the centralization policy that Roca had pursued. Against this charge, *La Tribuna Nacional* insisted that Roca showed the utmost respect for the principle of "self-government" in the provinces, pointing to the relatively small number of federal interventions that had taken place under his administration.⁵² However, *La Tribuna Nacional* also hurried to explain that this did not mean that the president restrained himself from exercising influence in the internal affairs of the provinces—only that he chose to do this by other means he considered more legitimate. He provided personal advice to his friends in the provinces, and, in cases of serious conflict, his policy was to seek a solution outside the institutional arena. For example, when a revolt broke out to overthrow the governor of Corrientes Province in 1882, Roca went personally to see to the matter and mediated an agreement between the opposing groups. While opposition newspapers in Buenos Aires rushed to denounce this interference as a violation of provincial autonomy, *La Tribuna Nacional* praised the actions of a president who "with his mere presence had succeeded in putting out the fire."⁵³ When a few months later Roca's influence swayed the heated Entre Ríos gubernatorial election in favor of his candidate, *La Tribuna Nacional* defended this practice as employing peaceful means to achieve peaceful ends, in marked contrast with his three predecessors. Roca portrayed his exercise of personal influence as more constitutionally sanctioned than previous presidents' use of the army, revolts, and federal interventions to install their allies in the provincial governments.

The PAN's ideology defined the identity of its 1880s administrations and established a hierarchy and web of values to shape and defend government policies. Roca's legitimacy rested on the idea of progress and the constitutional exercise of power. In January 1887, three months after he had left office, *La Tribuna Nacional* proudly published the final balance sheet of his administration. The country had successfully completed its first phase of evolution: "[I]ts government is democratic; power is divided; its diverse parts had their functions

51. Federalism in Argentina merits further research. For a starting point for the period analyzed here, see Natalio Botana, "El federalismo liberal en Argentina: 1852–1930," in *Federalismos latinoamericanos: Mexico/Brasil/Argentina*, ed. Marcelo Carmagnani (Mexico City: El Colegio de México / FCE, 1993).

52. Federal intervention refers to the national government's constitutional right to intervene in the political affairs of a provincial government by law or decree under vaguely defined circumstances.

53. "De regreso," *LTN*, Apr. 19, 1882.

allocated and an institutional spirit dominates over all the parts." *La Tribuna Nacional* urged the incoming Juárez administration "to continue on this path" and "do more of the same."⁵⁴ Juárez, however, had different plans.

Until now, historians have portrayed these two presidents as ideologically identical. Random quotes from their public speeches and their respective supporting newspapers have been employed indistinguishably to represent the political climate of the period. Comparative studies have stressed the remarkable homogeneity of party ideology, in contrast to the situation in Mexico, Brazil, and Chile at that time.⁵⁵ And the rivalry that did exist between Roca and Juárez has been cast as a simple power struggle rather than a reflection of ideological clashes.⁵⁶

Sud-América was Miguel Juárez Celman's official paper, from his 1885 presidential campaign to his August 1890 resignation.⁵⁷ More than any other party paper, *Sud-América* actively "created" the product it spoke for: it published and expounded upon the president's every official word, political action, and policy with daily regularity.⁵⁸ While *La Nación* viewed itself as the sole representative of public opinion, *Sud-América* expressed that the true role of papers was to "discuss, . . . shed light on issues, . . . examine these issues according to their own points of view and to their passions," and "to form opinion, not to represent it."⁵⁹ The editorial content of *Sud-América* was, for this reason, much less considered than that of other papers, and its tone more combative. *Sud-América* antagonized rivals, deepened schisms, and made no motions toward healing wounds, a policy whose costs were soon seen. *Sud-América* christened the president with the title "sole leader of the one party [*jefe único del partido único*]"; the political

54. "La república Argentina: Su estado actual," *LTN*, Jan. 26, 1887.

55. Charles A. Hale, "Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 5, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1986), 392.

56. On the rivalry between Roca and Juárez, see Duncan Gustavo Ferrari, *Apogeo y crisis del liberalismo, 1886–1890* (Buenos Aires: La Bastilla, 1978); Timothy Duncan, "Government by Audacity: Politics and the Argentine Economy, 1885–1892" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Melbourne, 1981).

57. The paper was founded in 1884, but once it became a tool for the Juárez presidential campaign, some members of the editorial board resigned and the paper remained in the hands of Roque Sáenz Peña, Lucio V. López, and Carlos Pellegrini; see Paul Groussac, *Los que pasaban* (Buenos Aires: Huemul, 1972), 215–19.

58. On *Sud-América*, see Timothy Duncan, "La prensa política: *Sud-América*, 1884–1892," in Ferrari and Gallo, *La Argentina del ochenta*, 761–84. On Juarismo, see Duncan, "Government by Audacity."

59. "La prensa: A propósito del mensaje," *SA*, May 11, 1888.

isolation of this stance drove the circumstances that forced Juárez to leave office in August 1890, less than four years after stepping into power.

Juarismo pushed certain concepts of the previous administration to their limits. *Sud-América* reformulated notions of peace, order, and progress, the role of the political parties, and the country's past to reflect Juárez's style. During the first months of his administration, for example, *Sud-América* celebrated the arrival of progress with a tone similar to *La Tribuna Nacional's* discourse.⁶⁰ Gradually, however, the familiar formulas gave way to different meanings. In 1887, *Sud-América* declared that "apart from the United States, there is no other example of a people . . . who have reached the greatness of the Argentine nation"; in light of this great achievement—"the resounding spectacle of the present era"—readers were urged to "stand up and sing out to this our homeland, our blessed homeland."⁶¹ The paper proclaimed: "[R]ailways are spreading through the territory, powerful industries are starting up, numerous credit establishments are opening, land values are increasing a hundredfold, Argentine funds take the markets by storm, public debt diminishes, official income increases in surprising amounts, commerce is increasingly successful, immigrants arrive and settle, throughout the whole country there is a feeling of well-being provided by work and trust inspired by the government of order, administration, and liberty. We are the greatest and happiest nation of South America."⁶²

Sud-América's countless articles on progress are remarkable not only for their exaggerated, enthusiastic, arrogant tone but also for their linear view of history. While *La Tribuna Nacional* underlined the fragility of the present times, constantly reminding its readers that any turmoil could send the country back to the darkness of previous years, *Sud-América* insisted that such days were definitively over and that even its opponents "will have to agree that the Nation is fast fulfilling its great destiny."⁶³ *La Tribuna Nacional* made the reconstruction of Argentine history a favorite topic; *Sud-América*, however, seldom harked back further than Mitre's administration (1862–68).⁶⁴ Its brief, sporadic references to history signaled the place this young president was filling in the republic; representing "a new bloodline, a new sap, a new life," his administration was

60. See, for example, "La Nación y la provincia," *SA*, Mar. 7, 1887; "Roca y Juárez," *SA*, Oct. 19, 1886.

61. "El país," *SA*, Aug. 23, 1887.

62. "En progreso," *SA*, Sept. 13, 1887.

63. "El país," *SA*, Aug. 23, 1887.

64. "El primer año," *SA*, Oct. 12, 1887.

Argentina's moment of splendor.⁶⁵ The myth of a country "condemned to progress," which would remain in the public imagination for decades to come, owed much to the pages of *Sud-América*.

The main ideological contrast between the two 1880s administrations, however, was in their conception of politics, the exercise of power, the role of political parties, and the federal system. These topics were addressed differently in the two mouthpiece publications, and certain themes prominent in one paper were notably absent in the other. One example is the principle of representation. The opposition parties launched the same attacks on Juárez that they had on Roca, plus, as Roca's brother-in-law and benefiting from his support in the election, Juárez was an easy target for charges of nepotism. But while *La Tribuna Nacional* sought to legitimate Roca by stressing the constitutional exercise of power, *Sud-América* simply made no reference to the nature of Juárez's elections and ignored opposition attacks on the violation of the people's sovereignty.

On themes that *Sud-América* did engage, the contrasts with *La Tribuna Nacional* are notable. For example, it stressed the role that politics and political parties were to have in the new era. The paper departed from *La Tribuna Nacional's* advocacy of a limited role for parties and calls for opposition parties to transform themselves from channels of destructive passions into essential components of republican government.⁶⁶ In the first of his speeches to inaugurate the congressional session (the single most important presidential speech each year), Juárez stated that "true and healthy politics consists, simply, in administration" and refrained from further reference to the political and institutional life of the country, the traditional centerpiece of the annual congressional address. On the same occasion the following year, he went even further by celebrating the end of politics in the country while recommending that the congressmen should not "busy themselves with the discussion of political bills that the country is not demanding."⁶⁷ *Sud-América* echoed and developed this presidential doctrine, sustaining that "public indifference is the best testimony to the progress public opinion has made."⁶⁸ In response to opposition complaints of the country's atrophied political life, the paper insisted that this was a positive sign that Argentina "had left the wrong path and had turned to produc-

65. "Los hombres de ayer y los hombres de hoy," *SA*, May 7, 1888.

66. "La oposición y las palabras del Doctor Juárez," *SA*, Sept. 28, 1886.

67. Heraclio Mabragaña, *Los mensajes: Historia del desenvolvimiento de la nación argentina redactada cronológicamente por sus gobernantes, 1810–1910*, vol. 4, 1881–1890 (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Cía. Gral. De Fósforos, 1910), 259.

68. "El mensaje: Política," *SA*, May 10, 1888.

tive work in search of the satisfaction of its needs through reproductive labor."⁶⁹ In a similar vein, *Sud-América* proudly announced, "Above many other nations of the globe, the Argentine Republic has the immense privilege of not having political parties to divide its citizens by questions of radical principle. . . . Here there are no Conservatives and Liberals, there are no Whigs and Tories, there are no Republicans and Democrats."⁷⁰

Sud-América's celebration of the end of politics was not the festive expression of a general consensus finally reached between old enemies. It was a celebration based on the victory of some who had vanquished others, rooted in antagonism and not conciliation. Indeed, one of the many paradoxes of the period was that neither Juárez nor his paper intended to construct a system of supreme power by winning over new allies and gaining the support of the reluctant or the independent. Rather, *Sud-América* pursued a politics of exclusion and enmity; old divisions were exacerbated and new ones crudely and unnecessarily created. During the electoral campaign, its sharpest arrows had been directed against Juárez's main rival, Dardo Rocha, until a headline declared him "A Finished Issue."⁷¹ Once in power, *Sud-América* did not hesitate to reopen the wounds, first inflicted during Roca's presidency, between the state and the Catholic Church. Congressional discussion during the second half of 1888 over civil marriage gave rise to new debates about the institutional powers of the church. *Sud-América* attacked the church boldly during this time, declaring that "the clergy is generally ignorant and of less than mediocre intelligence" and referring to the Catholic press as "those wimps at *La Unión*."⁷²

Nor did *Sud-América* attempt to heal the old division between Buenos Aires and the interior, which had reemerged during the 1886 presidential campaign due to the geographic distribution of competing political groups. Initially, the main presidential contenders came from the PAN: Dardo Rocha (governor and later senator of Buenos Aires Province), Bernardo de Irigoyen (Roca's minister of foreign affairs and minister of the interior), and Juárez (governor and later senator from Córdoba). In mid-1885, once it became obvious that Roca supported Juárez's candidacy, Rocha and Irigoyen joined forces with Mitre's Nationalist Party and with the recently formed Catholic Union, and the country's regional division played out, once again, in the presidential contest. Juárez

69. Ibid.

70. "Ya llegó el General," *SA*, Nov. 5, 1888, also quoted, in part, in Duncan, "La prensa política," 772. "Jefaturas de partido," *SA*, Dec. 5, 1888, expresses similar concepts.

71. *SA*, Dec. 6, 1886.

72. "El obispo Toro," *SA*, Sept. 1, 1888; see also *SA*, Sept. 3, 1888.

represented the interior, while the opposition coalition, Partidos Unidos, had its main stronghold in Buenos Aires city and province. *Sud-América* portrayed the porteño opposition as the remnants of an era that refused to die, the “feeble explosions of old localism, rickety crowds fed by senile sap.” This “crude, intolerant, and harmful metropolitanism,” the paper continued, “cannot resign itself to sit back and silently watch the political and administrative work of the party” and could not accept a president who had not been raised on Calle Florida or been a member of the Club del Progreso, the social symbols of porteño society.⁷³ The paper targeted Bartolomé Mitre as the main example of the “old localism.”⁷⁴ Such defeated “old men” were contrasted with today’s triumphant youth—as the paper put it, “on old tombs, how many new inscriptions.”⁷⁵ Juárez’s party, in contrast, was made up of “the most educated youth in the Republic and of liberal progressive men who do not use their age and experience as the only legitimate qualification for serving the country. Young men in line with advanced ideas and modern spirits.”⁷⁶

The defeated and disjointed opposition was an easy target for *Sud-América*. The obstacle to Juárez’s supremacy, however, came not from the weak opposition but from Julio Roca’s strong leadership over the PAN. Roca had supported Juárez’s candidacy, thinking that he could easily return to office in 1892. He made sure that all provinces responded to him, that he remained the president of the PAN, and that *La Tribuna Nacional* was his own mouthpiece, not the PAN’s. However, a few months after entering office, internal divisions arose in the party between those loyal to Roca and those who sought to reshape party politics around the new president. Some governors quickly switched loyalties. Juárez, for his part, announced he would remain aloof from party disputes and would not intervene in provincial politics; many saw this as a sign of freedom to handle local affairs as they thought fit and proceeded to attack Roca’s allies. *Sud-América* was crucial in the antagonism that emerged between Roquistas and Juaristas and gave birth to the campaign to dislodge Roca from the presidency of the PAN and to name Juárez “the sole leader of the only party.”

The process was tactfully initiated in October 1887, the one-year anniversary of Juárez’s installation. *Sud-América* stated that, despite similarities, Juárez’s administration was not an “exact continuation of the ideas, men, and

73. “En progreso,” *SA*, Sept. 13, 1887.

74. “Notas risueñas,” *SA*, Jan. 18, 1888.

75. “Viva Mitre! . . . Viva!!!,” *SA*, Jan. 21, 1889. See also “Los hombres de ayer y los hombres de hoy,” *SA*, Mar. 7, 1888; and “Los jóvenes y los viejos,” *SA*, Feb. 8, 1888.

76. “Rol de la juventud,” *SA*, Mar. 7, 1889.

administrative criteria of General Roca's government."⁷⁷ Two months later, *Sud-América* explicitly stated the doctrine that a party's presidential candidate was also its highest leader and that, when that candidate became president, he also became the president of the party.⁷⁸ These concepts were reinforced in the pages of *Sud-América* by countless gubernatorial proclamations of loyalty to the one and only leader.⁷⁹ The "*unicato*," the term used in the public debate between 1888 and 1890 to refer to the concept of the "sole leader of the only party," was, in fact, a vision of the exercise of government and politics that had been practiced since the very start of Juárez's administration.⁸⁰ Establishing the absolute power of a leader over his party and of the president over his country was in this case achieved by antagonizing and excluding his opponents and demanding public loyalty from his supporters. *Sud-América's* celebration of the absence of political parties in Argentina was, in reality, the festive announcement of Juárez's single-party rule.

Building a system of absolute power had significant implications for the federal system—an institutional framework designed precisely to divide power and protect provincial autonomy. Juárez, however, had his own reading of federalism. *Sud-América's* editorials regularly detailed the political and economic situation of the provinces, running long articles devoted to an exaggerated inventory of growth and transformations it claimed were taking place in the country's far-flung regions. Naturally, the paper lavished praise on supportive provinces while attacking governors who hesitated to publicly express their loyalty.⁸¹ *Sud-América* also demanded payback for generosity to friendly regions; it routinely printed telegrams of support sent by the provinces to the president and reported on countless banquets allegedly held in his honor in all corners of the republic. Along with these symbolic expressions of allegiance, *Sud-América* also unfurled Juárez's definition of federalism. In the relationship between the provinces and the national government: "[G]overnors are the natural agents of the federal government, creating a national power, until recently unknown, that

77. "El primer año de la presidencia del Dr. Juárez," *SA*, Oct. 13, 1887.

78. "Jefaturas de partido," *SA*, Dec. 10, 1887.

79. "Jefaturas de partido," *SA*, Dec. 5, 1888, italics in original. See also "El partido nacional y el progreso," *SA*, Mar. 11, 1889.

80. Duncan, "La prensa política," 772–75.

81. The paper attacked the governor of Tucumán, ousted by revolutions sponsored by the national government in 1887; the governor of Córdoba, impeached in 1888 to leave the seat vacant for the president's brother, Marcos Juárez; and the governor of Mendoza, unseated by a revolt in 1889. See Duncan, "Government by Audacity."

at present is recognized and proclaimed from one extreme of the nation to the other. The provinces recognize, in turn, the benefits owing to this power and the extent of its contribution to this rapid rise to national greatness, ensuring order and peace, which has permitted the development of industry and prosperity and an increase in public wealth.”⁸²

Sud-América thus redefined the federal system of the 1853 constitution, replacing the original division and mutual control of power with a principle of provincial submission and subordination to the president. According to the paper, this fortunate transformation was possible because all the governors belonged to the National Party, guaranteeing the orderly exercise of government and the tranquil renewal of provincial authorities.⁸³ The wealth and growth attained were offered as proof of the benefits of transforming a federal regime into a de facto unitary form of government.⁸⁴

While Roca had attempted to reach consensus and to attract old opponents to his side, Juárez’s idea of the *jefe único del partido único* was unilaterally imposed by contrasting antagonistic formulas: progressive liberalism versus spiritual obscurantism, the whole of the nation versus Buenos Aires, the National Party versus a defunct opposition, young versus old, Juárez’s men against Roca’s, and Juárez against the rest. The construction of Juarismo was based on these antagonisms, as well as on the constant adulation of the country’s sole leader. At the beginning of each year, *Sud-América* ran several pages of telegrams congratulating the president on the occasion, and likewise on the president’s birthdays and on the anniversary of his inauguration. The administration’s anniversary was celebrated with long “reports” of presidential achievements; these reports were the object of further elaboration for the rest of the month. The paper wasted no opportunity to detail even the president’s private activities, emphasizing these “most agreeable hours of social life,” describing in detail the music he listened to and the entertainment he offered, a host who outshone himself with his “affability of character and the elevation of his spirit.”⁸⁵ Even after years in office, *Sud-América* continued to laud Juárez’s intelligence and other admirable qualities. The constant adulation of the sole leader was an essential aspect of Juarismo, of the legitimizing process of a president whose candidacy and post were relentlessly questioned by his opponents.

82. “La política nacional,” *SA*, May 13, 1889.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Duncan, “La prensa política,” 772–75.

85. “En la casa del presidente,” *SA*, Aug. 9, 1888.

The Voices of the Opposition

The strongest opposition to the PAN came from two traditional parties of Buenos Aires: Bartolomé Mitre’s old Liberal Party (by then known as the Nationalists), and the porteño Autonomists.⁸⁶ During most of the 1880s, these parties abstained from elections in protest of the government, voicing their opposition instead through columns in their respective newspapers, *La Nación* and *El Nacional*.

By the time Roca came to power, *La Nación*, owned by Bartolomé Mitre, was ten years old and a financial success.⁸⁷ These were exceptional characteristics at a time when newspapers were usually owned by shareholders and were short-lived business ventures usually ending in failure. Furthermore, *La Nación* was unique in successfully combining two features: it both shared many traits with the “modern” newspaper and remained a partisan instrument.⁸⁸ By 1887, it printed 18,000 copies a day, and it ran neck and neck with *La Prensa* as the most widely read and respected newspaper in Argentina. Like modern papers, its pages had an up-to-date design, it was financed through advertising, and its content focused on news information, both national and international. Nonetheless, it was publicly identified with Mitre, and the editorial line was the Nationalists’ party line. One of its main roles was to wave the party flag, exposing its general principles and its positions on everyday events. In the political realm, *La Nación* was known as “Don Bartolo’s newspaper.”

La Nación was the most important opposition paper in the 1880s. Its significance is not limited to the obvious data on press runs and its reputation. As the paper liked to remind its readers, it represented the political group that not only had the longest history in the short life of the republic but that also had remained firmly in the opposition throughout the entire decade—unlike the Autonomists, who had temporarily allied themselves with the PAN. The April 1880 presidential elections and the revolution two months later had left the Nationalist Party on the losing side, but the party suffered more from the defeat than the paper. To demonstrate its rejection of what it considered to be

86. For Mitre and his party trajectory, see David Rock, *State Building and Political Movements in Argentina, 1860–1916* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002).

87. Launched in January 1870 with an initial press run of one thousand to replace *Argentina*, *La Nación* was originally owned by a group of investors. In 1879, Mitre bought all the shares and became sole owner. See Ricardo Sidicaro, *La política mirada desde arriba: Las ideas del diario La Nación, 1909–1989* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1993), 13–19; and Ramos, *Desencuentros de la modernidad*, 95–100.

88. For an analysis of the distinction between party press and modern press, as well as a more detailed characterization of *La Nación*, see Alonso, “En la primavera de la historia.”

an illegitimate government, the Nationalist Party from then on abstained from elections as a matter of principle, a stance they would mostly uphold throughout the decade.⁸⁹ Thus, *La Nación* became the Nationalist Party's sole and exclusive instrument of opposition, with the responsibility of "keeping alive that sacred fire" and of maintaining republican fortitude against an official discourse that urged demobilization.⁹⁰

La Nación vigorously defended the right to revolution throughout the decade, openly calling on the people to rise up against an illegitimate government. The Nationalist Party had a revolutionary tradition that went back to 1874, it had been the protagonist in the revolution of 1880 against "Roca's imposition," and it would later join the coalition that organized the July Revolution of 1890 that ended Juárez's term. *La Nación* couched its defense of revolution in conservative terms: either in government or in the opposition, the Nationalist Party "has always been doctrinaire, constitutional, and conservative, like its patriotic proposals." Theirs was a fight against the party in government, "the real rebels who rose up against legality and the law, who pretend to push justice aside and to impose their own whim arbitrarily." While *La Tribuna Nacional* pursued a campaign that stressed peace and order, accusing *La Nación* and its circle of a discourse that put the very existence of the republic at risk, *La Nación* accused the government of provoking a civil war, "as it is not possible for a free country to have candidates who do not enjoy popular support forcibly imposed upon it."⁹¹

A July 1880 editorial titled "The Cause of the Evil" outlined the source of the republic's malaise: "[W]hen the people do not choose their authorities, when the authorities interfere in the election process, it is mere illusion to believe that peace has been achieved."⁹² The administrations of the 1880s were unconstitutional because they violated the principle of representative government; the cause of the evil was not the essentially bellicose nature of the country's politics (as preached by *La Tribuna Nacional*) but the absence of free suffrage.⁹³ The lack of electoral mandate justified the revolutions of 1874 and 1880, and the same

89. The exceptions were one isolated appearance at the ballot boxes in Buenos Aires Province in 1883, and as members of the *Partidos Unidos* coalition in the 1886 presidential election.

90. For the reasons behind the party's policy of electoral abstention, see "La causa del mal," *LN*, July 30, 1880; "La abstención," *LN*, Nov. 4, 1880; and "Abstención activa: Actitud del Partido Liberal," *LN*, Oct. 4, 1883.

91. "Partidos y programas," *LN*, Apr. 27, 1884.

92. *LN*, July 30, 1880.

93. *Ibid.*

argument would be used to defend the revolution of July 1890. For *La Nación*, the most significant disagreement among Argentina's political parties was not over the organization of the republic but rather over the nature of elections.⁹⁴ While the Liberal and Nationalist parties had hoisted the banner of free suffrage since 1874, the ruling PAN, which had the power to institute free suffrage, refused to do so.

La Nación also denounced the disappearance of political life due to the PAN's monopoly of power and a discourse that called for demobilization and praised the absence of party strife. *La Nación* raised a plea to shake up "all those content to live without a voice, without a vote, with no power over their daily actions, those sort of political deaf-mutes or idiots who betray their civic duties."⁹⁵ The paper claimed that Roca and Juárez based their governments on the wrong premises by equating progress with material development. Instead, it argued, the greatest conquests were institutional in character: "[O]rder, progress, work, security, and justice can only be solidly established in a country ruled by institutions based on reason and justice and under the influence of a government limited by law."⁹⁶ *La Nación* accused Roca's administration of having made no reference on any occasion to concepts like justice and freedom. Indeed, the Roca slogan of "Peace and Administration" contained no mention of justice and liberty, concepts fundamental to its achievement.⁹⁷ *La Nación* proposed instead that progress would be achieved not by the absence of party strife and the pursuit of material gains but, precisely, through the participation and clashes of the different political forces, "thus improving the ideas, the means, the institutions, and the general condition of the country."⁹⁸ These were the teachings of Edmund Burke, Thomas Macaulay, and Alexis de Tocqueville and other equally relevant sources, the paper claimed, and these teachings could also be found in Argentina's own history of political and institutional struggles.⁹⁹ "Progress is achieved through liberty, the rule of justice and law, and the influence and exercise of democratic institutions, since these considerably improve the conditions of individuals and ability of society to fulfill their goals."¹⁰⁰

La Nación also hurried to counterattack *La Tribuna Nacional's* vision of the country's past as a struggle for progress against the destructive tendencies of

94. "Criterio de los partidos," *LN*, Oct. 6, 1880.

95. "Signos de decadencia," *LN*, May 28, 1882.

96. "Doctrinas y declaraciones," *LN*, June 6, 1882.

97. "Programa de un partido," *LN*, Aug. 3 1880.

98. "Estática política," *LN*, Jan. 5, 1881.

99. "Partidos y facciones," *LN*, June 10, 1884.

100. "Mensaje presidencial," *LN*, May 4, 1883.

political passions.¹⁰¹ Instead, Argentina's was a story of a long struggle to build the republican institutions that would best guarantee the people's freedom. In its longer version, this history went back to the struggles following independence, while the shorter version placed particular emphasis on the September 1874 revolution fought "in the name of suppressed institutions" and the June 1880 revolt against the imposition of Roca as president.¹⁰² It reserved the leading role, naturally, for the Nationalist Party. While the PAN used *La Tribuna Nacional* to present itself as a new party, unconnected with the past, the Nationalist Party portrayed itself as an organization with deep roots in the country's history, traceable to Bernardino Rivadavia's Unitary Party.¹⁰³ In this heroic struggle, "The Liberal Party first fought against tyranny, spilling its own blood from Buenos Aires to Jujuy; and heroically struggled for nine years locked up inside the walls of Montevideo; it fought in Caseros and, on the 11th of September, it returned liberty to Buenos Aires and her sisters, triumphing later in Pavón, and introducing, for the first time, the united Republic, with her fourteen provinces, under the empire of a single law."¹⁰⁴

La Nación's struggle to voice this vision of Argentine history was not insignificant in the ideological battles of the 1880s. While the PAN emphasized the struggle for progress—dating its arrival precisely to 1880 and identifying Roca as singularly responsible for its achievement—*La Nación* constructed an institutional history characterized by the struggle for free institutions against tyranny. In this struggle, the Liberal (or Nationalist) Party was the sole champion. This story was also used to contrast the current civic indifference with a recent past full of lively debate where virtuous people exercised their public liberties. If the PAN's version of history were to triumph, *La Nación* feared 1880 would remain as the starting point of Modern Argentina, the beginning of a new history in which the Nationalist Party had no place. The opposition paper championed a deeper republican history that granted the Nationalist Party a leading role

101. It is beyond the scope of this work to analyze in detail the parallels between the version of national history described in *La Nación* and Bartolomé Mitre's own historical work. For the latter, see Natalio Botana, *La libertad política*, chaps. 2, 3, and esp. 8; Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Mitre y la formulación de una historia nacional para la Argentina," *Anuario IHES* 11 (1996): 57–70; Elías José Palti, "La *Historia de Belgrano* de Mitre y la problemática concepción de un pasado nacional," *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani,"* 3rd series, no. 21 (Spring 2000): 75–98.

102. "Opinión, partidos, partidarios," *LN*, Nov. 11, 1883; "Guerras electorales," *LN*, Aug. 21, 1883.

103. "Partidos y programas," *LN*, May 27, 1884. For the Liberal Party's search for its roots, see Halperin Donghi, "Una nación," 51.

104. "El partido liberal," *LN*, Oct. 13, 1880.

and that justified the party's post-1880 electoral abstention with reference to its recent republican glory.

Complaints about the current situation grew louder during the Juárez administration, under which the doctrines and realities initiated by Roca were said to become even cruder. In 1887, *La Nación* concluded that the great mistake of Roca's administration had been to believe it was impossible to "bring peace to the people and administer their interests without depriving them of their constitutional rights."¹⁰⁵ With the arrival of Juárez, it was necessary to add to the long list of evils "the enormous fortunes raised in the government's short years, openly displayed with the tranquility that comes from guaranteed impunity," deeply wounding public morale with "the ostentatious display of enormous fortunes made by certain men in office."¹⁰⁶ *La Nación* looked back nostalgically on the civic virtue and austerity of pre-1880 administrations, lost to the corruption and immorality of current times. In times gone by, the newspaper insisted, one became involved in the government "not to get rich nor satisfy bestial appetites, but to embody one's professed ideals in the government and bring the aspirations of the citizens to life. Governors and ministers left their posts in the same conditions that they had started. Electoral clubs did not rob banks. . . . Lawyers abandoned their studios and doctors left their patients to sit in the Chamber without recompense."¹⁰⁷ The paper indignantly denounced how the greatest fortunes in Buenos Aires, amassed over decades of considerable effort, were surpassed in a couple of years by public officials who shamelessly displayed their new riches. For the paper, this was a symptom of corruption in both public administration and private morals.¹⁰⁸

La Nación was not alone in campaigning against the institutional and political changes of the 1880s. *El Nacional* voiced the concerns of the porteño Autonomists, heirs to Adolfo Alsina's party.¹⁰⁹ They had opposed Roca's election in April 1880, but after the June revolution moved to support the new administration and formally join the PAN.¹¹⁰ *El Nacional* allied with the president until 1882, joining its voice to *La Tribuna Nacional's* campaign for peace and order.

105. "Libertades prometidas," *LN*, May 25, 1887.

106. "Notas de la semana," *LN*, Jan. 30, 1887.

107. "El aislamiento," *LN*, Feb. 5, 1887.

108. See also "Notas de la semana," *LN*, Jan. 30, 1887; and "Auri Saera Fames," *LN*, Mar. 13, 1887.

109. The paper was mainly run by Aristóbulo del Valle, Domingo F. Sarmiento, and Vicente Fidel López.

110. For the reorganization of the PAN to include the Autonomists, see *EN*, Aug. 3, 1880.

“Peace and liberty are the aspiration of all,” observed the paper, “but some believe that the former is the fruit of the latter, and with that conviction they do not hesitate to disturb order as soon as they see themselves hurt by some misuse of power, while others consider that turbulence leads to anarchy, and anarchy to despotism, and refuse to follow that path because they believe that it would lead to the sacrifice of peace.”¹¹¹

El Nacional publicly sided with those who upheld order, sustaining that “the present time . . . should be an era for political calm and great administrative activity, and this is the way, we believe, that real statesmen understand it.”¹¹² However, even while it supported the PAN’s campaign for peace, its discourse varied significantly from official rhetoric. It believed, for example, that order should be rooted in the principle of representation. As the cases of England, the United States, Belgium, and Switzerland showed, “the only people who enjoy the benefits of peace and freedom are those who have sincerely practiced representative government, improving public customs in good times and testing them in the bad times.”¹¹³ *El Nacional* also defended party conflict as a necessary condition for political freedom. For this reason, it publicly encouraged its political opponent, the Nationalist Party, to participate in elections in the name of the health of representative government.¹¹⁴

Thus, between mid-1880 and 1882, *El Nacional* endorsed the official rhetoric of peace, distancing itself considerably from the defense of revolution sustained by *La Nación*, but it also upheld (as did *La Nación*) the necessity of representative government and party strife to the formation of lasting peace and liberty—this last stance in marked contrast with government discourse. However, the paper’s content changed substantially by mid-1882 as the result of political realignments. By then, the contest inside the PAN for the presidential nomination of 1886 had unofficially begun. Dardo Rocha, governor of Buenos Aires Province (1880–84), had made clear his intentions for the presidency, an aspiration he shared with Juárez and Irigoyen. And although it was not yet clear which candidate the president would favor, it had become publicly obvious he would not support Rocha. Soon Rocha became Roca’s main rival, using the power of Buenos Aires Province and its bank to build his own power base.

111. “La oposición en los comicios,” *EN*, July 7, 1881.

112. “El duelo,” *EN*, Jan. 26, 1882. On the Autonomists in the 1860s and 1870s, see Roberto Cortés Conde and Ezequiel Gallo, *Argentina: La república conservadora* (Buenos Aires: Paídos, 1972).

113. “El duelo,” *EN*, Jan. 26, 1882.

114. “La oposición en los comicios,” *EN*, July 7, 1881.

El Nacional supported Rocha, joining forces with *La Nación* in a public battle against the government.¹¹⁵

Some of *El Nacional's* attacks were similar to those of *La Nación*. One recurring topic was electoral fraud. The paper defended the principle of representation as essential to peace, even when it had supported the government, and it made the violation of representative government one of the centerpieces of its campaign against the PAN. *El Nacional's* campaign for clean elections reached its peak during the 1886 presidential campaign, when federal judge Miguel Tedín annulled a series of electoral registries believed to have been fixed.¹¹⁶ The paper constantly decried the struggle of the majority (whom it naturally claimed to represent) against the imposition of official opinion.¹¹⁷ During Juárez's presidency, the paper highlighted the defects of a system where, for example, public jobs (such as with the railways and the municipalities) were exchanged for votes.¹¹⁸ It lamented election days as "shameful episodes" where all kinds of misdemeanors took place.¹¹⁹ Unlike *La Nación*, however, it never argued that these many vices justified revolution against the current administration.

El Nacional also exposed other forms of corruption: for example, the politically motivated distribution of public-sector jobs (including at universities and schools), the sale of state land to speculators instead of to settlers, "shameful little business deals" involving bribes on both sides, the arbitrary award of pensions by a congress monopolized by one party.¹²⁰ The paper even engaged in personal attacks, accusing (for example) the president's brother Atavila Roca of personally enriching himself as a result of business with the national government. When Atavila sued the newspaper for defamation, the paper countered that Roca threatened the right to freedom of the press.¹²¹

Juarismo was another recurrent target of *El Nacional*, described both as a system and a style of government—a system invented by Roca and perpetuated by Juárez with his own personal stamp. The paper denounced a government

115. *EN*, June 1, 1882.

116. For the 1886 presidential campaign, see Carlos R. Melo, "La campaña presidencial de 1885–1886," *Separata de la Revista de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba* 33, no. 2 (1946); Susana I. Rato de Sambuccetti, "El Presidente Roca y los candidatos a su sucesión presidencial," *Academia Nacional de la Historia, Cuarto Congreso Nacional y Regional de Historia Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1977), 221–42.

117. See, for example, *EN*, Mar. 25, 1885, and Apr. 29, 1886.

118. *EN*, July 24, 1883.

119. See *EN*, Jan. 6, 1888; Feb. 6, 1887; and Jan. 19, 1885.

120. See *EN*, July 24, 1883; Jan. 29, 1883; July 24, 1885; and Nov. 22, 1887.

121. *EN*, Dec. 12, 1885.

that hid behind the idea of order and that portrayed any legitimate oppositional act as a threat to the republic, solely with the intention of drowning public freedoms.¹²² Juárez had added his own imprint to this system, the paper lamented, a style of public and private life manifested in an ostentation of wealth and power that offended any trace of austere republicanism. The paper launched its attack on one of the main features of the Juárez administration: the country's rapid economic growth since 1887, which would result in the economic crisis of 1890. *El Nacional* repeatedly warned against "moneyism," the uncontrolled desire for monetary gain that had infected the country's social strata and created a climate of "public and private luxury," of "flashy ostentation," indulged in by "many individuals who have themselves dragged around in luxurious coaches," men who had become rich overnight thanks to their participation in the government.¹²³ For *El Nacional*, this was not a necessary consequence of progress but rather the result of the government's doctrine, which had reduced its agenda to material prosperity and had reduced citizens to mere producers of wealth. As a result, "the masses have abdicated their rights and aspirations . . . demanding in exchange order and development of their material interests."¹²⁴ But, "if materialism prevails," *El Nacional* sustained, "public and private morals will disappear," and the government would triumph in "converting the masses into flocks of sheep, developing their sensual tastes in exchange for the abdication of their rights."¹²⁵ The newspaper largely lamented the impact of the rapid enrichment of the powerful "not only on institutions that are long dead, but on the dignity of the Argentine citizen."¹²⁶

El Nacional waged a multifaceted attack against the impact of the 1880s administrations on the federal system, a topic barely mentioned in *La Nación*. When the paper switched from pro-Roca to opposition in mid-1882, it began to decry the federalization of Buenos Aires city, resuscitating antifederalization arguments that a minority (led by Leandro Alem) had loudly expressed in September 1880 when the legislature of Buenos Aires Province had debated the

122. "Orden nacional," *EN*, May 14, 1885; "La sonata del orden," *EN*, May 2, 1885; "Juarismo," *EN*, May 29, 1885.

123. "El dinerismo," *EN*, Oct. 10, 1883; "Cuestiones trascendentales," *EN*, May 4, 1884; "Los Relumbrones de Roca," *EN*, July 7, 1886; "Las revelaciones sobre la política electoral," *EN*, Apr. 29, 1886; "El 14 de Julio," *EN*, July 15, 1889.

124. "Vértigos de la prosperidad," *EN*, June 27, 1887.

125. "Comienzo del año," *EN*, Jan. 21, 1888.

126. "Política juarista," *EN*, Ap. 16, 1888.

topic.¹²⁷ *El Nacional* harshly declared, for example, that "by kidnapping the great capital, and beheading the Great Province without healing, all the other [provinces] will be enslaved by their own weakness, lacking the support of Buenos Aires, the old political and liberal center of this part of America." The article blamed Juarismo for the "triumphal return of barbarism," while recriminatory editorials condemned the centralization of power in the hands of the president following federalization.¹²⁸ During the 1886 presidential campaign, *El Nacional* ignited old tensions between Buenos Aires and the provinces, presenting Juárez as the enemy of the port city. While the republic was historically indebted to Buenos Aires, the paper argued that Juárez liked to slander the Porteños, "for whom he has that inexplicable hatred of a parishioner who cannot bear to see how the big city casts a shadow over his village—oh! God preserve us from his triumph!"¹²⁹ A second volley of *El Nacional's* campaign against federalism was aimed at what was then called "the situation of the provinces." Endless editorials denounced those "barbarians who despotically ruled the provinces of the Interior."¹³⁰ The PAN's system, they argued, ignored the constitutional premises of the federal government by reducing governors to mere "electoral agents" of the president.¹³¹ Roca was singled out as responsible for disciplining the provincial governors, while Juárez's actions exacerbated a system that had already rejected the federal principle.

El Nacional's opposition discourse was original not only in its institutional aspects, particularly its emphasis on federalism, but also in the style of its campaign. As was typical for the day, articles published in *El Nacional* were anonymous, often signed under pseudonyms. However, on February 1, 1887, in the thick of the campaign against Juárez, the paper launched "a true novelty in American journalism": a group of public figures—introduced as "political personalities, men of letters"—wrote regularly and exclusively for the newspaper under their own names.¹³² Among them were Vicente Fidel López, Aristóbulo

127. For the debate and Alem's position, see Ezequiel Gallo, "Liberalismo, centralismo y federalismo: Alberdi y Alem en el 80," *Investigaciones y Ensayos* (Buenos Aires) 45 (Jan.–Dec. 1995); and Alonso, *Between Revolution and the Ballot Box*.

128. *EN*, May 27, 1883; *EN*, May 12, 1884.

129. "La escuela de la injuria. ¿Quién es Juárez?" *EN*, May 29, 1885; "Juarismo," *EN*, April 28, 1885.

130. "Civilización y barbarie," *EN*, Jan. 5, 1886.

131. "¡¡AL FIN!! Una palabra decente," *EN*, Dec. 15, 1888.

132. *EN*, Feb. 1, 1887.

del Valle, Juan María Gutiérrez, Delfín Gallo, Manuel Gorostiaga, Manuel Bilbao, and Mariano Varela. These men did not just publish pieces on daily events but also contributed long and thoughtful reflections, polished perspectives on the changes of the last decade. Gorostiaga, for example, was mainly concerned with a topic he was very familiar with: politics in the provinces. He had been national deputy for Santiago del Estero during Roca's administration and had made an alliance with the president to control politics in his province, but he soon fell out with Roca.¹³³ Gorostiaga's articles exposed the current system of power in the provinces, in which the president held the reins and imposed severe punishments on those governors who defied him.¹³⁴ For his part, Manuel Bilbao—the Chilean-born journalist, historian, and, above all, polemicist—wrote on a wide range of topics, from the situation of local government, to the almost military discipline with which members of the national congress responded to the president, to the dangers of an official doctrine based on materialism.¹³⁵

Delfín Gallo, by then national deputy for Tucumán Province and an experienced journalist on constitutional issues, claimed to offer a balanced analysis of the PAN.¹³⁶ He believed the party had played a valid role during Roca's government (in which he had served in the ministry of interior), "cementing the country's organization on a long-lasting basis" and putting an end to the old hegemony of Buenos Aires over the provinces. However, once this mission had been accomplished, Gallo felt the party should have given way to a system of organic parties "with ideas, with objectives, with support from public opinion"; such a system of parties was, he argued, "the only way to rescue us from the dangers that darken the future."¹³⁷ Juan María Gutiérrez offered well-grounded reports on every area of public administration, drawing a negative balance in each. Like Gallo, he claimed that the solution to Argentina's evils lay in the organization of strong, permanent political parties that would compete against the PAN.¹³⁸

133. See Alonso, "La política y sus laberintos," 11–15.

134. See, for example, "Pueblos y gobiernos," *EN*, Feb. 4, 1887; "Política," *EN*, Aug. 2, 1887; "La cuestión de Salta," *EN*, Oct. 14, 1887; "La tarea del presente," *EN*, Oct. 31, 1887.

135. "Puntos de partida," *EN*, Feb. 3, 1887; "La bancarrota de una nación," *EN*, Mar. 23, 1887; "Vértigos de la prosperidad," *EN*, June 27, 1887.

136. Delfín Gallo was the brother of Santiago Gallo, the governor of Tucumán during the 1886 presidential election; although on good terms with Roca, he had given the votes of his province to Bernardo de Irigoyen. Local Juaristas, his greatest opponents, pressured him to resign from his post before Juárez stepped into office.

137. "Los partidos políticos," *EN*, Mar. 14, 1887.

138. "Balance político," *EN*, Feb. 11, 1887.

Conclusions

Historicizing these debates allows us to acknowledge their existence, assess their nature, and evaluate their relevance. It also permits us to reformulate our perceptions on the place of the 1880s in the ideological landscape of nineteenth-century Argentina.

The deepest political rifts of the 1880s were not over immigration and economic policies. Except for isolated voices, earlier disputes over these issues seem to have been resolved by this point, and the looming issues regarding the social question of immigration or the impact of the economic progress on society had not yet emerged.¹³⁹ The "ideological moment" of the 1880s focused on the country's institutions. While the constitution itself was not in dispute, it did generate ideological tensions over well-defined issues of interpretation, and it was around these issues that political parties formed their identities. The issues of the debate were subtle; they did not involve arguments regarding institutional change or demands for electoral reform but rather touched on a hierarchy of values and the best avenues to achieve a set of common goals. And although the ideological divide was over subtle issues, at least during the 1880s, the historical trajectories of those on the various sides ensured they would not find much common ground.

One new element of discussion was the idea of progress, a topic that became the main rallying cry of two consecutive administrations. However, we must carefully address the nature and impact of this rhetoric; insofar as government discourse changed significantly over the decade, it did not sweep away other trends of thought, and it was furiously contested by the opposition groups.

Roca's discourse portrayed progress as the fountain from which a constellation of benefits would spring: peace and tranquility, individual and social development, freedom, the gradual perfection of political institutions, the demise of old, warlike party politics, and the emergence of a more rational form of political participation. As we have seen, jointly with a campaign on the merits of progress, *La Tribuna Nacional* launched a discourse to legitimate the constitutionality of Roca's administration: it was Roca's respect for the constitution that guaranteed people's sovereignty. While Roca saw progress as a means to an end, for Juárez progress was the end in itself, a supreme value that demanded

139. Domingo F. Sarmiento's *Conflictos y armonías de las razas en América*, published in 1883 and in 1888, is one such exception. On the previous disputes over these issues, see, e.g., Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Para que la inmigración: Ideología y política inmigratoria en la Argentina (1810–1914)," in *El espejo de la historia: Problemas argentinos y perspectivas hispanoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987); and Halperin Donghi, "Una nación."

and justified the eradication of politics, the end of party strife, and a system of undisputed subordination to the president. And while Roca also deployed a constitutional argument jointly with a discourse on progress to legitimize his rule, Juárez's strategy was to build a system of absolute power justified by the country's explosive economic growth. The July 1890 revolution is a testimony to the shortcomings of Juárez's strategy, as his legitimacy plummeted with the first signs of economic downturn. These discourses were not systems of mutually complimentary ideas, nor should Juarismo be reduced to an extreme form of Roca's basic values. Although they marshaled similar concepts, they deployed them with significantly different definitions. The 1890 revolution illustrated disagreement with Juárez's ideas not only among the opposition but also within the PAN itself; eventually, even *La Tribuna Nacional* publically denounced the "jefe único del partido único."

Whether as a means or as an end, as part of a broader constitutional discourse or as a cornerstone in the justification of presidential absolutism, the concept of progress marked the new ideological climate and became part of the doctrine the two 1880s administrations attempted to impose. For the Nationalist Party, however, this ideology was based on faulty premises: representative government, and not progress, was the supreme value to be upheld, and a healthy republican political life required active citizen involvement rather than a gagging of politics in the name of progress. In *La Nación's* view, the current situation justified revolution. While *El Nacional* (like *La Tribuna Nacional*) did not feel that the times called for revolution, it agreed with the Nationalist Party that the principle of representation should be the basis of order and that liberty could only be achieved and sustained through party conflict, not through its absence.

There were, however, significant distinctions between the rhetoric of *La Nación* and *El Nacional*, each the party mouthpiece of historically rivaling groups. When *La Nación* looked to a recent past full of healthy political strife and offered its own longer historical vision to counterbalance the version printed by *La Tribuna Nacional*, it evoked a tradition of lively political struggles, public demonstrations, and mobilized citizenry rooted in Buenos Aires but barely existent in the rest of the country. Likewise, in denouncing the installation of presidents rejected by public opinion, it leveled its objections against the impositions of the political alliance that had defeated Buenos Aires, both electorally and militarily. Although contemporary readers probably were aware of porteño bias, *La Nación* avoided open critique of the provinces. Although the paper's version of Argentine history cast Buenos Aires and its leaders as the protagonists in the struggle for free institutions, *La Nación* avoided creating an antagonistic

discourse between Buenos Aires and the interior or between Buenos Aires and the national government.

El Nacional's strategy, in contrast, championed the Buenos Aires autonomist tradition and thus reopened the wounds between Buenos Aires and the interior with its publicly denunciation of the federalization of the city of Buenos Aires, renovating an old discourse of that province as the sole state capable of fighting tyranny, reviving Sarmiento's dichotomy between the "liberal center of this part of America" and the "barbarians" who despotically ruled the provinces.

The discourses of the 1880s were hardly new. On the contrary, they were intimately related to the political experiences of the 1860s and 1870s and even earlier decades. The main premises of Juan Bautista Alberdi (author of the draft upon which the constitution of 1853 was based) are easily identifiable behind the rhetoric of *La Tribuna Nacional*. Both shared the fear that political instability arises as a result of political party factionalization and not out of a danger from the masses. While they identified the same enemy, they also shared the solution: economic progress would bring only positive consequences for society and for the country's institutions. Like Alberdi, *La Tribuna Nacional* also sustained that peace and strong executive government were prerequisites for progress. The authoritarian formula that both defended was not, however, an arbitrary one. Strong government was the guarantee that the constitution and the law would be imposed and respected. And while Alberdi and *La Tribuna Nacional* shared similar expressions, they also shared the same silences. Like Alberdi, *La Tribuna Nacional* avoided making reference to the darker aspects of abrupt economic and social transformations.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, *Sud-América* also touched on nerves that had long been sensitive. While the idea of progress as an end in itself and a value to be defended above others became the paper's identifying signature, it also revived an old anti-porteño rhetoric in the second half of the 1880s. Anti-porteñismo had been one of the main banners under which provincial factions had defended themselves from President Mitre's attempt to conquer the provinces for his Liberal Party by the imposition of the national executive. This stance against Buenos Aires had given voice to Argentine federalism in the interior, interpreted as the defense of provincial autonomy against presidential intrusion. This voice barely articulated itself into a better-defined doctrine, as Mitre failed in his project of conquering the provinces from the springs of the national government.¹⁴¹ Fur-

140. For Alberdi's main premises, see Halperin Donghi, "Una nación."

141. *Ibid.*, 66.

thermore, the defense of provincial autonomy, this time that of Buenos Aires Province, became the banner of the branch that split from the Nationalist Party under the name of Autonomismo, a defection that would lethally wound Mitre's cause. *La Tribuna Nacional*, in the name of national union, avoided antagonizing Buenos Aires, and Roca had attempted to bridge the historical gap by allying himself to Porteños, inviting them to join his cabinet. *Sud-América*, however, beginning with the presidential campaign of 1886, returned to the old formula of "Porteños vs. provincials." The paper, however, flipped Sarmiento's dichotomy on its head: the provincials represented civilization, while the Porteños were the barbarians who failed to keep up with the changes of the time.

Naturally, it is not difficult to perceive the continuity between *La Nación's* editorials and the trajectory of its owner. During the 1880s, *La Nación* continued with the same history Mitre had reconstructed for his Nationalist Party, linking it in a straight line with the Unitarian Party and imbuing his organization with deep roots and a prominent place in the country's history. *La Nación* also continued to reproduce Mitre's vision of Argentina's republican history. As we have seen, while for the PAN modern history began in 1880, for *La Nación*, it began when the country embarked on the republican path after independence. Mitre's visions were reproduced in his paper almost without intermediation. Progress meant the institutional development of the country along its republican path, and problems resulted each time the country was pushed off its natural destiny.¹⁴²

Although they were opponents during the 1880s, *La Tribuna Nacional* and *La Nación* shared a few features. As we have mentioned, neither was interested in revitalizing the old rivalry between Porteños and provincials. On the contrary, *La Tribuna Nacional* was careful in seducing the Porteños, while *La Nación* skillfully avoided confrontation. Both Mitre and Roca shared the aspiration of national unification and sought to represent the nation as a whole and not just a section of it. While each fought to impose a different hierarchy of values and a different history for their country, they both claimed to speak in the name of all. This latter aspect distinguished them from *Sud-América* and *El Nacional*. In the dichotomy they reproduced between Porteños and provincials, it was clear that each represented a particular section of the nation and had no trouble in speaking for some and excluding others.

El Nacional's columns can be directly related to the origins of its Autonomist faction in a split from the Liberal Party in the 1860s. While many Autonomists had followed a zigzag path during the 1870s and early 1880s, *El Nacional's*

142. Botana and Gallo, "De la República posible."

opinions (particularly during the second half of the 1880s) had clear roots in the antifederalist stance that precipitated that split. While Autonomists shared *La Nación's* appreciation of representative government and much of the criticism of the 1880s administrations, *El Nacional's* antifederalist banner was solely his own.

Thus, *La Nación* and *El Nacional's* discourses were hardly new; on the contrary, both enjoyed a long tradition in Buenos Aires. In the 1880s, political circumstances placed these discourses as the language of opposition against a realignment of political forces that had pushed them off to the side of national politics. A republican discourse of clean elections and sound institutions had ever been the hallmarks of *La Nación*, in the same way that the defense of the autonomy of the Province of Buenos Aires had traditionally been the emblem of *El Nacional*. In the 1880s, these papers raised their banners to confront an ideology that, in their view, had mocked the principle of representation and mortally wounded the country's federal system by weakening its strongest province. Against the hopes of the governments in power, these oppositional voices did not disappear within the new climate of ideas nor accept the premises of the discourse of the new government but rather continued to defend their old values and fight against the new ones. These debates never clashed over the idea of progress—as occurred in some other countries—only the means by which to secure it. While for the PAN order and authority were prerequisites for progress and, therefore, the main values to be defended, for the opposition the main value was representative government. Republican institutions were a prerequisite for progress, not the other way around.

The main premise of this language of opposition of the 1880s was also present during the following decade, although voiced by different actors. In the 1890s, the newly organized Radical Party intertwined into a single party banner the language that both *La Nación* and *El Nacional* had reproduced during the previous decade. By then, a political realignment had taken place. Juárez was ousted from government after the revolution of July 1890. Roca, from the Ministry of Interior, began to reconstruct his own coalition within the PAN, in part by quickly forming an alliance with his old enemy, Bartolomé Mitre. Despite their differences, they both championed the cause of creating a national political force, and both sought to represent the nation as a whole. These concepts were reinforced by the acute economic crisis of 1890, which led them to believe that electoral competition for the 1892 election should be avoided, and, instead, the two factions should agree to support a single candidate. Although the alliance between Roca and Mitre did not last, during the 1890s *La Nación* experienced a significant change. While it insisted on the topics that had always been its

hallmark—republican government and the issue of representation—it dropped its 1870s and 1880s defense of revolution. It was the Radical Party, the splinter group that rejected an alliance with Roca and formed its own independent organization, which would adopt a revolutionary stance during this period.

The Radical Party wove the different threads of earlier oppositional discourse into a single tapestry. Its main innovation was to defend the concept of the political party as the key element of republican government, which prompted its efforts to re-create this institution from the bottom up. The remainder of its discourse was a familiar defense of representative government, civic virtue, and political mobilization, pertaining to the experience of Buenos Aires of the 1860s and 1870s. The Radicals defended the right to rebel against the oligarchic government of the 1890s in the same terms that the Liberal (or Nationalist) Party had done previously. The Radicals also took the Autonomist banner of the 1870s and 1880s by opposing centralization and defending provincial autonomy on the same grounds that *El Nacional* had done before. Under different political circumstances and under a different political realignment, the debates of the 1890s offered similar topics (and similar silences) as those that had been raised in the previous 30 years.¹⁴³

Seen in this way, the 1880s no longer stand as a decade of unusual homogeneity organized around a new set of widely accepted principles proposed by a fresh generation of politicians and intellectuals that had garnered consensus for a national project. Rather, they appear as years in which ideological clashes between participants were linked to preceding and subsequent debates.

The debates reconstructed here also provide a lens through which to examine the nature of liberalism and the role that ideas play in a concrete historical juncture. “Argentina is a country born Liberal,” as we know, and while this peculiarity narrowed the scope of nineteenth-century ideological debate considerably, we should not trivialize the significance of these debates.¹⁴⁴ In Argentina, as elsewhere, liberalism can easily encompass a diversity of political thought. Traces of liberalism, republicanism, conservatism, and positivism can be detected in the political debates of the 1880s. But even if we could agree on where to place the contours of each of these traditions, attempts to trace their origins, assign them to actors, and describe their tensions would constitute a

143. Alonso, *Between Revolution and the Ballot-Box*.

144. Tulio Halperin Donghi, “Argentina: Liberalism in a Country Born Liberal,” in *Guiding the Invisible Hand: Economic Liberalism and the State in Latin America*, ed. Joseph Love and Nils Jacobsen (New York: Praeger, 1988), 99–116. For the many facets of Argentine liberalism, see Halperin Donghi, “Una nación.”

fruitless exercise.¹⁴⁵ All parties involved in the debates of the 1880s spoke a variety of languages without any awareness of their theoretical implications and without attaching any particular label to their discourses. Liberalism proved here, once more, to be expansive and flexible, characteristics that at the same time allow and generate tensions not easily resolved at a theoretical level. In concrete historical settings, such as the Argentina of the 1880s, these tensions proved to be significant enough that various political actors appropriated them in order to define their identity and legitimize their actions.

145. I have elsewhere referred to the gains and limitations of the liberalism-republicanism debate for Latin America; Paula Alonso, *Entre la revolución y las urnas: Los orígenes de la Unión Cívica Radical y la política Argentina en los años noventa* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana / Universidad de San Andrés, 2000), 145–65; and Alonso "La Tribuna Nacional."

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