ensuring minority representation, unifying divergent political interests into a few parties, and providing proportional representation to a wide variety of political positions. Thomas Hare developed a system of proportional representation called the single transferable vote, which is widely viewed to be the fairest, in that every individual’s vote will count toward the electoral outcome. One puzzle that appears to outrun the ability of political scientists to illuminate, however, is why individuals vote at all. The irony of representation is that it allows the expansion of democracies over such large numbers that the likelihood of any single individual’s vote being the tie-breaker is so infinitesimal that there seems to be no instrumental reason to vote. With or without large voter turnouts, however, the representative structure continues to confer and confirm the legitimacy of most modern governments.

See also Democracy; Political Science.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


Hans von Rautenfeld

REPRODUCTION. See Biology.

REPUBLICANISM.

This entry includes two subentries:

Latin America

Republic

LATIN AMERICA

Republicanism advocates a government headed by commoners rather than a hereditary monarchy. It is similar to democracy in that it favors a representative form of government that receives its legitimacy from the people it rules, but democracy in theory also champions political, social, and economic equality. All of the Latin American countries (as well as the United States) are established as republics, while in the Caribbean some former colonies retain the British and Dutch monarchs as their heads of state. Republicanism no longer has the rhetorical appeal that it did two centuries ago, but related key constitutional
issues relevant to the concept of republicanism, including the
division of governmental power, political participation, distrib-
buton of wealth, and extension of civil and social rights, con-
tinue to be important.

During the colonial period, hereditary absolute monarchies
in Europe ruled over Latin America. In the nineteenth cen-
tury, growing resentment at centralized control designed to
benefit Europe and leave people in the colonies with little eco-
nomic or political power led many patriots in Latin America
to reject monarchy in favor of a republican system. Republi-
can rhetoric was sometimes more of an opportunistic posi-
tioning to remove the entrenched Habsburg and Bourbon rule,
which brought little benefit to the colonies, rather than seri-
ous commitment to the ideology itself. Conservative leaders,
particularly those associated with the Catholic Church and the
military, believed that a strongly centralized system was neces-
sary to retain order in the newly founded independent re-
publics. Some conservatives advocated the retention of a
monarchy as a way to prevent social disintegration.

Republicanism in Latin America is often, though some-
what mistakenly, associated with movements for indepen-
dence from Iberian colonial control during the early
nineteenth century. Political independence brought few sig-
nificant changes to the region’s social, economic, and cultural
structures. Often the new governments were as authoritarian
as, if not more so than, the absolute monarchies they replaced.
One concrete republican change that did come with inde-
pendence was the abolition of titles of nobility and fueros
(privileges extended to members of the church and military).
But while a flourishing of liberal ideals brought an end to for-
mal racial discrimination, it did not necessarily end the insti-
tution of slavery nor result in an extension of rights to women,
Indians, or peasants.

Although women were active participants in the struggles
for independence, they still remained legally subjugated to
male control. They could not vote or hold public office and
could not work or enter into legal contracts without a hus-
band’s or father’s approval. Without the crown’s paternalis-
tic protection, Indians found themselves to be worse off under
new republican regimes as creole elites preyed on their com-
munal landholdings, further narrowing the base of landhold-
ers. Republicanism witnessed the continued dominance of
elite, aristocratic values—with few economic or social ad-

cances for subalterns. This resulted in a long struggle by
Africans, Indians, women, and other marginalized popula-
tions for full and equal participation in affairs of the new
republics.

The history of Haiti, Mexico, and Brazil underscores the
difference between independence and republicanism in Latin
America. In Haiti, Jean Jacques Dessalines and Henri
Christophe briefly set themselves up as monarchs after gaining
independence from France. In Mexico, Agustín de Iturbide was
a royal general who combined forces with creole leaders in a
conservative declaration of independence to free Mexico from
a liberal-controlled Spanish government. For a brief period
of time after independence in 1821, Iturbide ruled Mexico as an
emperor (Agustín I) in a constitutional monarchy; it was not
until 1824 that Mexico became a republic. In the 1860s,
Mexico once again returned to a monarchy when the French
imposed archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Habsburg as king
after occupying the country. In 1867, Mexico once again be-
came a republic after the liberal leader Benito Juárez defeated
the French occupying forces and executed Maximilian.

The gap between independence and republicanism is even
more dramatic in the case of Brazil. In 1808, Napoleon’s oc-

cupation of Portugal had driven King João VI’s royal court
from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro. In 1821, João returned to
Lisbon, leaving his son Dom Pedro as regent of Brazil. When
Portugal attempted to curtail Brazilian autonomy, Pedro re-

fused to comply. In his famous September 1822 fico, he de-

clared that he would stay in Brazil—bringing a bloodless
independence to the colony. Nevertheless, under Pedro I and
his successor Pedro II Brazil remained a monarchy, although
they ruled in a rather enlightened manner. In 1889, the mil-
itary overthrew the monarchy, finally bringing a republican
form of government to Brazil.

According to Thomas Millington, the persistence of
monarchic rule in Brazil undermined a commitment to re-
publicanism in Latin America. Specifically, he argues that
Simón Bolívar’s refusal to challenge the monarchy in Brazil,
something that was within his reach, translated into a wider
failure to challenge European influences in the New World—
including authoritarianism and elitism. This allowed Bolívar
to replicate authoritarian aspects of the Brazilian system, in-
cluding the goals of order and progress, in the Spanish-
American republics. In a sense, Millington contends, the new
republics lacked a functioning civil society that provided
the consensus necessary for a functioning republican system.
Ironically, the Brazilian monarchy implemented a more liberal
and “enlightened” system than that existing in the Spanish
republics.

Political historians have traditionally portrayed the emer-
gence of republican ideologies at the end of the eighteenth and
beginning of the nineteenth centuries as a revolution in polit-
cultural. Popular participation in government replaced a
hereditary monarchy allied with clergy and military interests.
Social historians, however, have demonstrated just how exclu-
sive citizenship rights were, as creole elites consolidated eco-
nomic and political power in their hands. Economically,
independence represented a transfer of wealth from peninsu-
lar to creole elites. Politically, the republican constitutions es-

tablished legal equality but provided for little change in power
relations. Without a broadening of suffrage, a very small elite
continued to rule over the rest of the population. Even with
representative government, there was not more participation
in power. Ideologically, republicanism drew on positivist ide-
ologies with its emphasis on liberty, order, and progress. The
dissolution of central authority with the elimination of the
European crown left nothing in its place, leading to struggles
to determine who had the right to rule.

Deep social, economic, and geographic divisions also led
to political instability following independence. Large and di-
verse countries divided physically, culturally, ethnically, and
linguistically, in which people who lived in one area had little to do with those in another area, led to relatively small groups of powerful men using force to assert their will. Small, individual factions with differences in values and ideals fought for control, resulting in rapid changes in power and the appearance of extreme political instability. Stable centralized governments did not emerge until perceived national interests surmounted the economic interests of regional leaders.

Peter Guardino, Mark Thurner, Charles Walker, and others have stressed the importance of examining these transitions to republican forms of government from a peasant perspective. Walker, for example, examines the critical and often unacknowledged role the indigenous peasantry played in battles for independence. Far from employing mindless mob actions, these dissidents engaged in thoughtful political and legal actions and cultivated coalitions with sympathetic outsiders. Rather than being passive or disengaged, Indians were active agents who “imagined” an alternative vision of the nation that conflicted with that of the dominant culture. Walker criticizes historians who “have far too often accepted contemporary views that deemed Indians incapable of political consciousness and indifferent to the battles over the state.” Rather, he sees indigenous peoples as “key to understanding the turbulent transition from colony to republic” (p. 2).

While voicing republican rhetoric, creole elites feared a militant and mobilized indigenous population. Walker argues that despite significant indigenous participation in independence movements, elites intentionally denied them citizenship rights, with the result that republican rule did little to improve their lot in life. Guardino challenges histories of Mexico’s transition to a republican government told from the point of view of the palace, instead stressing the critical role peasants played in this process. Historians are also gaining an increasing appreciation for the previously understudied role that subalterns played in shaping emerging state structures, a role that was significant despite their marginalization within elite conceptualizations of those state structures.

As these examples illustrate, although theoretically informed by liberal ideologies that favored equality under the law, Latin American republicanism did not lead to universal citizenship by any means. Despite variations in constitutions throughout the hemisphere, almost all created exclusionary systems that limited political participation based on literacy, property, gender, and sometimes religious beliefs. Even though property and religious restrictions were generally relaxed during the nineteenth century, it was not until well into the twentieth century that some countries extended suffrage to women and Indians (who had generally been targetted with literacy restrictions). Thurner plays off this imagery in his book From Two Republics to One Divided. Colonial administration deliberately divided society into two “republics”: one for Spaniards and another for Indians. Creole elites terminated this bipartite division in the independent republics, but the goal was to abolish separate ethnic identities through assimilation of Indians into a mestizo culture rather than respecting or preserving indigenous peoples’ unique traditions. As Thurner notes, these colonial divisions “were more fictional and juridical than they were actual,” but “these imagined constructs had real historical consequences” (p. 6). They resulted in wide gaps between the liberal ideals of universal citizenship and the cold reality of highly exclusionary republican governments.

The history of Latin America since independence can be written as a story of subalterns fighting for full citizenship rights that republicanism had promised but never delivered. Women, Africans, Indians, peasants, and others subverted the language of elite rhetoric in order to demand popular sovereignty, political rights, and active citizenship so that they would also have a say in how the government was structured. Theoretically, elections form the base of a republic, as they express the will of the populace. The gap between theory and reality reveals the failure of republican systems in Latin America, but it is a failure slowly being overturned thanks to the efforts of those originally excluded from the political system. Ongoing political activism on the part of Indians, blacks, women, and the poor demonstrates that the republican ideal is still being realized for many.

See also Anticolonialism: Latin America; Authoritarianism: Latin America; Pluralism; Populism: Latin America.

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