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ARGENTINA'S RIGHT-WING UNIVERSE DURING THE DEMOCRATIC PERIOD (1983–2023)

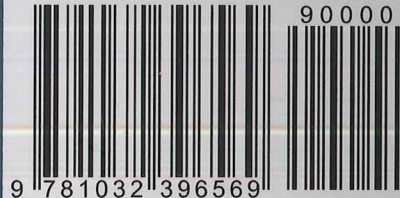
PROCESSES, ACTORS AND ISSUES

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7 Republic and Right-Wing Politics in Argentina. Republican Traditions and Democracy

From UCEDÉ to PRO

Gabriela Rodríguez Rial

I. Introduction: The Republican Mark of Argentine Right-Wing Parties in Historical Perspective

The growing importance of the republic in the legitimisation strategies of right-wing parties is a diagnosis shared by the political science literature, both in terms of the analysis of institutions and of political discourses. (Caruncho, 2020, pp. 95–96; Rodríguez Rial, 2019, pp. 62–75). The traditional populism/anti-populism axis that divides the Argentine political spectrum since the beginning of the twentieth century has been resignified. Nowadays, we find there is a populism versus Republic dichotomy. The supporters of *Juntos por el Cambio* (JxC, Together for Change), the coalition led by Mauricio Macri's (1959–) party, *Propuesta Republicana* (PRO, Republican Proposal)¹ consider themselves to be republicans, and the *Kirchneristas*, to be populists.

Now, if we consider the 1980s democratic transition to be a point of reference, this novelty seems relative. In order to run for the elections of 30 October 1983, Álvaro Alsogaray, an Argentine politician born in 1913, who was the main ideologue of vernacular conservative liberalism, founded, in November of 1982, a political party that he named *Unión Republicana* (Republican Union) (Gutiérrez, 1991, p. 22). For legal reasons, it had to be renamed *Unión de Centro Democrático*, better known as UCEDÉ—the acronym UCD had already been registered by a provincial conservative party, the *Unión Demócrata* de la provincia de Córdoba (Córdoba Province Democratic Union) (Doman y Olivera, 1989, p. 129).

Throughout his political life, Alsogaray presented himself as a figure antagonistic to Peronism. However, during the first government of the democratic transition, both the UCEDÉ and its leader were highly disapproving of the economic and human rights policies carried out by the Radical incumbent president, Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín (1983–1989). The latter promoted the prosecution of those in the Armed Forces who were responsible for the crimes against humanity committed during the last civic-military dictatorship (1976–1983), with the intention of restoring the republic lost after the 1930 military coup (Aboy Carlés, 2010, pp. 70–71). In 2005, the year of Alsogaray's passing, Macri decided to run for a seat in the House of Deputies for the City of Buenos Aires, and he changed the name of the party under which he had contested for chief of government of the capital city in

2003. *Compromiso por el Cambio* (Commitment to Change) became PRO. The PRO built its identity opposing Kirchnerism. Even though some Kirchnerist representatives indeed defend certain values of republican patriotism, the word “Kirchnerist” became equivalent to populist, progressive and centre-left (Perochena, 2022, pp. 85–104). According to Macri, his political coalition has come to save the Republic from Kirchnerist authoritarianism.

Why refer to UCEDÉ and PRO as right-wing parties? In his book, *Class and Conservative Parties. Argentina in Comparative Perspective*, Edward Gibson (1996) recognises the ideological ambiguity of the term “conservative” yet prefers it to “right-wing”: “Conservative parties are parties that draw their core constituencies from the upper strata of society” (Gibson, 1996, p. 7). This chapter adopts the class dimension in Gibson's definition because it is useful to analyse both UCEDÉ and PRO as parties that recruit the core of their militants, supporters and voters from the economically privileged sectors of Argentine society. However, in order to gain a better understanding of political identities we should adopt an approach that attaches more importance to the discourses and traditions of political thought than Gibson's. Also, the adjective “right-wing” was chosen to describe political forces that prioritise freedom, in its negative, liberal and individualistic sense, over equality as a value to uphold, and because of its relational condition with respect to other forces in the political scenario (Bobbio, 1998, pp. 135–152; Prego and Nikolajczuk, 2022, pp. 128, 152).

This chapter analyses the presence of the concept of “the republic” and of republican traditions in the legitimisation strategies followed by right-wing political-party elites in Argentina since the democratic transition that began in 1983. The first section summarises how, in Argentina, the conceptual history of the “republic” conceptual history is closely intertwined with key moments of its political history: the May Revolution of 1810, the process of national organisation between 1853 and 1880, and the emergence of national popular movements, Radicalism and Peronism, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The second section compares the cases of UCEDÉ and PRO, located in the centre-right in the ideological geometric spectrum, which held and still holds, electoral and cultural relevance in the Argentine democracy. The last section provides an answer to the following question: why have right-wing political forces made “the republic” the pillar of their critiques against Alfonsinism (1983–1989) and Kirchnerism (2003–2015), two vernacular versions of social democracy and left-wing populism?

II. The Republic: The Protective Shield of the Right-Wing Against Mass Democracy

What is republicanism? Republicanism is both a tradition of political thought and a political identity. The most historically permanent republican idea is the superiority of the rule of law over the tyrannical rule of one man. The republic is associated with an ideal of common good, with a virtuous, free and autonomous political regime, and with a citizen body that shares the same characteristics. Some other republican topics are less perennial. Hence, it is more accurate to speak of

republican traditions in the plural rather than in the singular. From a chronological point of view, classical republicanism (Greco-Roman Antiquity and civic humanism of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) emphasises civic virtue, the common good and political participation. The greatest threat to the republic is the corruption of civic commitment that leads to the loss of freedom, defined as self-government. Modern republicanism (eighteenth to twentieth century) maintains that the division of powers is the institutional embodiment of the rule of law. The latter is individualistic and assumes that there is a natural equality between all human beings. Freedom is understood as personal independence. In the twentieth century, neo-republicanism makes its appearance as a political and philosophical critique of the deficiencies of contemporary liberal democracies. It proposes a conception of freedom that entails non-domination, based upon the changes in the historiographical interpretations of the Atlantic revolutions. Unlike classical republicanism, it does not demand direct participation in public affairs, yet it is not content with the inactive citizenship characteristic of representative governments. It reclaims citizens' control over governments but only through bodies or institutions that are not popularly elected. It has been accused of elitism or aristocratism, a trait that according to some interpreters characterises the whole republican tradition, and for others only its anti-popular versions (Souroujon, 2020, pp. 85, 90, 92, 95–97; McCormick, 2003; Rinesi, 2021, pp. 111–112, 226).

Throughout Argentine history, from the May Revolution to the democratic transition, one may pinpoint different republican conceptual moments. Each of them evidences the dominance of a republican semantics in the discourse of the political and intellectual elites. Although, since the second decade of the twentieth century, it became a common belief that the republic is used by the right-wing to halt the advance of mass democracy, this was not always the case. In order to understand why the centenary of the May Revolution constitutes a turning point in the conceptual relationship between republic and democracy, it is important to reconstruct the previous history and show to what extent this tension still characterises the country's political field after the 1980s democratisation.²

Republic and democracy have not always acted as asymmetrical counter-concepts in Argentine political imagery. According to R. Koselleck (1993, pp. 205–207), two concepts are asymmetrical counter-concepts when, in the political-ideological battle, the positive value attached to one entails the rejection of the other. In the nineteenth century, republic and democracy were not necessarily synonyms for Argentine political elites. This opposition, however, was not insurmountable. Nor was the republic exclusive to right-wing parties or conservative political movements. At the turn of the nineteenth century, when the territories that comprised the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata emancipated from Spain, the *criollos* (i.e. creoles, people born in the colonies), who led the independence revolutions, regarded themselves as republicans. In that republican moment of Argentine history, the republic was understood and experienced as the revolutionary ideal of virtue that opposed the tyranny and corruption of the previous regime. The radicalism of the manifestos and speeches of the May Revolution ideologues was an expression of classical republicanism due to their heightened love for virtue (Carozzi, 2017, pp. 15–58).

Given that governability was indispensable, they even pondered the possibility of a monarchical political organisation of the former colonies that became independent in 1816. Since then, the republic as a political regime seemed insufficient to achieve the institutionalisation of political power in South America. The emotional value of the republic, however, made it difficult to give up. Being republican was what distinguished the newly independent nations from their motherland, monarchical Spain. The Generation of 1837, the elite of intellectuals and politicians who promoted the sanctioning of the Argentine Constitution of 1853, faced the following political dilemma: how to reconcile republicanism and political stability while preserving patriotism. Two significant political and intellectual articulations can be observed in this civic-institutional republican moment. On the one hand, having read Alexis de Tocqueville, the Generation of 1837 believed that democracy was the form of society characteristic of the modern world, one that reached its institutional realisation in the representative government. On the other hand, the republic is understood as a form of government which they could eventually renounce and replace with a well-ordered liberal constitutional monarchy (Rodríguez Rial, 2022, pp. 159–163).

The Generation of 1880 fulfilled the mandate of institutional stability and economic progress implementing a restrictive and conservative political order. Their opponents within the elite accused the ruling *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (PAN, National Autonomist Party) of having betrayed the democratic and republican ideals of the Constitution of 1853 and founded the *Unión Cívica Radical* (Radical Civic Union, UCR), the first modern Argentine political party in terms of its organisational structure. With the implementation of the electoral reform of 1912,³ the PAN's hegemony came to an end, and Hipólito Yrigoyen of the UCR was elected president of the nation. It was then that the former supporters of the conservative order invoked the republicanism of the nineteenth-century liberal constitution as a safeguard against the advance of barbaric, unbridled, vulgar, plebeian democracy (Devoto, 2002, pp. 124, 244). In this anti-popular republican moment, the republic was considered a shield, first, against the plebeian republicanism of Yrigoyen's Radicalism (1916–1930) and, later, against Peronism (1943–1955, 1973–1976). Between 1930 and 1983, the prevailing antinomy was that of populism versus anti-populism, and it was the anti-populists who, in spite of the fact that they supported coups d'état, proscriptions and all kinds of interruptions to governments that were legitimately elected by popular suffrage, managed to seize the adjective "republican" for themselves.

The end of the civic-military dictatorship (1976–1983) opens a new republican moment in recent Argentine history: the liberal democratic moment. Both in the electoral campaign and during the first years of his presidency, Raúl Alfonsín set out to found the third republic. The aim was to return to the republican way that had been lost when the 1930 coup d'état took place. Republic and democracy ceased to be antinomies, and together they formed a set of political beliefs, a combination of elements from three traditions, republican, liberal and democratic in a social democratic key. The first government of the democratic transition, however, faced serious economic difficulties, especially after 1988, that undermined the legitimacy of

Alfonsín's democratic-republican dream. And so the republic became the political banner of centre-right party forces.

After this brief reconstruction of the conceptual moments of the republic in Argentine history, we must focus further on the threshold period when democracy and republic become asymmetrical counter-concepts. This separation took place in the years prior to the centenary of the May Revolution and consolidated during the 1920s (McGee Deutsch, 2001, p. 92). Right-wing nationalism of the early twentieth century certainly has common elements with nineteenth-century liberal nationalism. There is, however, one important difference: it values the republic more positively. Similarly, while nineteenth-century conservative liberalism found legitimation in the motto "to govern is to populate", the increase in social conflict and the emergence of a workers' movement of migrant origin, linked to anarchism and socialism, inflamed anti-leftist sentiments. According to Sandra McGee Deutsch (2001, pp. 73–79), the latter is a distinctive feature of the right-wing since the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* (Argentine Patriotic League) was founded in 1919.

There are two noteworthy publications in this context: the *Revista Argentina de Ciencias Políticas*, directed by Rodolfo Rivarola in its early years, and *La Nueva República*, the main body of right-wing nationalism between 1927 and 1931, whose contributors helped oust Yrigoyen during his second term in 1930 (McGee Deutsch, 2001, p. 99; Devoto, 2002, pp. 178–179).⁴ On the one hand, there are a number of republican topics, mostly liberal but also classical, that both publications used to attack the popular governments. These include the defence of the republic, which according to them was equivalent to the Roman-rooted mixed government, as the ideal political government, the vindication of the 1853 Constitution as republican and liberal but not democratic, the criticism of hyper presidentialism and the recognition of the superiority of minorities and the urge to protect them against the advance of the majority populace (Roldán, 2006, pp. 53–72, 91–101; Devoto, 2002, pp. 192–219). On the other hand, despite their political differences, and their proximity either to Charles Maurras (1868–1952) or to the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, the aforementioned contributors were socially homogeneous. They all belonged to the economically and culturally privileged classes and were dissatisfied with having been excluded from political power by governments legitimised by popular majorities (McGee Deutsch, 2001, pp. 103–105).

After the 1930 coup and until 1983, the Argentine right-wing forged an alliance with authoritarianism. Nonetheless, right-wing politicians and intellectuals continued to portray themselves as the true heirs of the republican civism of the 1853 Constitution (Devoto, 2002, p. 317). At the end of the last civil-military dictatorship, the right-wing political parties competing in liberal democratic elections targeted Alfonsinism and Kirchnerism as the public enemies of the republic.

III. The Conservative Republic of Right-Wing Political Parties After 1983: The Cases of UCEDÉ and PRO

In 1956, engineer Álvaro Alsogaray, a retired military officer who was anti-Peronist, founded the *Partido Cívico Independiente* (Civic Independent Party) (Doman and

Olivera, 1989, p. 49). Between 1958 and 1983, Alsogaray was twice-appointed Minister of Economy in the constitutional government of Arturo Frondizi (1958–1962) and in the de facto government of José María Guido (1962–1963). He was also Argentine Ambassador to the United States (US) during the dictatorship of the Argentine Revolution (1966–1973). In the 1970s he ran in the electoral race with *Nueva Fuerza* (New Force), polling only 2% of the vote (Gibson, 1996, p. 122). Like most Argentine right-wing politicians, Alsogaray preferred personal contacts to the electoral route to reach power. In 1983, however, the logic of party competition changed, and UCEDÉ gained considerable electoral clout, displacing other conservative political parties and becoming the major right-wing national force. In the 1987 mid-term elections, it became the third political force at the national level.⁵ In 1989, after failing to obtain the expected support among voters who were polarised between the UCR and the *Partido Justicialista* (Justicialist Party), UCEDÉ changed its strategy and formed an alliance with Alvaro Alsogaray's historical enemy: Peronism, then led by President Carlos Saúl Menem (1989–1999). Although the party still exists and is part of the Coalition *Juntos por el Cambio*, in electoral terms, it ceased to exist in 1991 (Gibson, 1996, pp. 191, 205).

Mauricio Macri is the son of a powerful Argentine businessman who made his fortune as a public works contractor. For most of his life he worked in the family business. In the 1990s, Macri was a socialite, publicly known for his taste for beautiful women, his penchant for vacationing in paradisiacal destinations and organising glamorous parties. In 1995, the Macri family dauphin was elected president of one of Argentina's most popular football clubs: Boca Juniors. In 2003, he ran for chief of government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Despite being defeated in the run-off election,⁶ he did not quit politics and, instead, strengthened his party (Vommaro, Morresi and Bellotti, 2015, p. 75). Twelve years later, through a series of alliances with traditional parties, including the UCR, Mauricio Macri became a resident of the nation. His trajectory bears more similarities with Italian politician and tycoon, founder of *Forza Italia*, Silvio Berlusconi, than with the more traditional leader of UCEDÉ, Álvaro Alsogaray (Vommaro, Morresi and Bellotti, 2015, p. 256). This notwithstanding, UCEDÉ and PRO, as well as their respective leaders, have several elements in common.

UCEDÉ and PRO are upper-class parties in terms of the social origin of their core supporters. They faced the challenge of adding voters from other social groups without compromising the unflinching loyalty of that sector. In terms of organisational structure, both parties sought to set themselves apart from traditional parties in their recruiting modes. Moreover, their founders have such a strong influence on the decision-making process that they could be described as personalists (Doman and Olivera, 1989, p. 74; Vommaro, Morresi and Bellotti, 2015, p. 171). The PRO, however, is more institutionalised than the UCEDÉ, given the fact that it is linked to nongovernmental organizations (ONGs) and think tanks, and because it has recruited leaders trained in more traditional parties. The PRO has less difficulties in forging links with the business world, although most of the technical staff are CEOs rather than business owners or entrepreneurs. Both parties appeal to a politics of proximity to engage potential voters. As regards political marketing,

Alsogaray did not rely as much on political marketing as the PRO, except for the younger leaders of the party who did adopt more modern or disruptive⁷ campaign strategies (Doman and Olivera, 1989; Macri, 2022, p. 219).

UCEDÉ forged its identity on the basis of a clear distinction between the majority national-popular parties but also with the right-wing provincial conservative parties with whom it formed short-lived alliances. Without rejecting the right-wing label, as the PRO would years later (Vommaro, Morresi and Bellotti, 2015, p. 220), UCEDÉ members chose to describe themselves as city liberals (*porteños*, i.e. from the City of Buenos Aires), as more modern than the conservatives from the provinces. The PRO leads a party coalition that, with the addition of Radicalism, started competing in national elections. The UCEDÉ opposed classical Peronism, accusing it of being totalitarian, and social democratic Alfonsinism, yet joined Menem's Peronist government in 1989 (Alsogaray, 1989, pp. 17, 23, 84). Quite the reverse, the PRO began flirting with conservative Peronist parties and ended up rivalling Kirchnerism (Macri, 2022, pp. 139, 185). With the aim of changing Argentine politics, both parties wage a cultural battle in which republicanism plays a major role.

Out of the different strands of republicanism, modern republicanism is the more chronologically close to liberalism, an ideology that both UCEDÉ and PRO adopt as part of their identity. Yet, in the public addresses of both Álvaro Alsogaray y Mauricio Macri, it is possible to find republican themes and values from other strands or stages of this tradition. We will analyse some of these in the following sections, focusing on a specific textual corpus. In the case of Alsogaray, this selection comprises some addresses given during his term as national congressman between 1983 and 1989, quoted by Guido Rojas (2021), as well as some extracts from the book *Bases liberales para un programa de gobierno* (Liberal Foundations for a Programme of Government) (1989–1995), the UCEDÉ programme for the 1989 presidential campaign. In Macri's case, one speech rests at the centre of the discussion: "the Address by the President of the Nation at the presentation of the proposals to promote a national agreement on a set of public policies" (October 2017). Other sources include his book, *What For? Lessons on Leadership and Power to Win the Second Half* (Macri, 2022). In spite of being an autobiography, it concludes with a political programme for an eventual return to power in 2023.

III.1. *The Anti-Popular, Individualistic and Anti-State Republicanism of Álvaro Alsogaray*

Bases liberales para un programa de gobierno (1989–1995) is based on a document issued by the UCEDÉ board of directors in response to the political crisis of April 1987 when a group of military officers led by Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico rose up against the constitutional government. The party declaration states that "[p]rovided that all Argentines must defend the republic and the constitutional order, neither the government nor a particular political party can arrogate it to themselves" (Alsogaray, 1989, p. 180).⁸ Thus, for the UCEDÉ, the republic is a national heritage that no political group can claim for itself, a value whose semantics alludes to the institutionalism established by the Constitution of 1853

(Alsogaray, 1989, p. 23). Being a republican, according to their perspective, is to uphold the Constitution of 1853 against the excesses of plebiscitary democracy. When he defined the republic during the discussion of the Law of Due Obedience⁹ between May and June 1987, Alsogaray provided a canonical definition: the republic is the opposite of despotism (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 198). Both in this debate and in other parliamentary addresses, the UCEDÉ leader took a stance in favour of the authoritarian governments of the 1930–1983 period and displayed anti-leftism, to the extent of describing Alfonsín's administration's measures as proto-communist.

According to the UCEDÉ, the solution to half a century of populism and State dirigisme was a combination of economic liberalism with the recognition of the individual rights already granted by the nineteenth-century constitutional text, which were the only human rights that mattered, and not those recognised in the Universal Declaration of 1948. The only possible freedom is thus negative freedom, that is, the non-interference of public authorities in economic life. Consequently, State intervention is undesirable, even in labour conflicts, and union membership is considered an undue interference of the State in union activity, as Alsogaray stated in the session of 10 and 11 February 1984, during the debate over a union law that failed to be passed. Regarding other personal rights which are fundamental to liberalism, such as the protection of life against illegitimate State violence, the leader adopted an ambivalent stance: he defended the actions carried out by the Armed Forces in what he defined as "the war against subversion", as it transpires in the session of 21 August 1985, during the national defence law debate (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 193). In the session of 18 and 19 May 1988, the congressman for the City of Buenos Aires argues that what prevails in Argentina is institutionalised corruption, as consequence of an economic system that forces business activity to resort to bribery (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 162). The UCEDÉ leader and his followers perceived themselves as an aristocracy, not necessarily linked to knowledge.¹⁰ In their eyes, true democracy is a procedure for settling disputes, and not the unlimited power of the masses,¹¹ as the populists believed.

During the debate of a bill on the provision of universal health insurance in the session of 16–17 July 1987, Alsogaray objects to the concept of "social democracy" endorsed by Radical congressman Ricardo Cornaglia with the following antithesis:

The liberal conception gives prominence to the individual as well as individual and human rights, while socialising tendencies give prominence to the demigod of the State and bureaucracy. We are facing this quandary, and I cannot find a way to overcome it.

According to the UCEDÉ leader, there are two republican political models in dispute: one that is inspired by the individualistic Constitution of 1853 and another that is socialising. The UCEDÉ embodies the former and Alfonsinism, the latter. Alsogaray's ideas, however, are in contradiction not only with the republican notions of common good, freedom and primacy of the public over the private but also with some liberal notions (Rojas and Guido, 2021, pp. 17, 69). In order to enforce their conceptions of institutionality, democracy and freedom, they do not

hesitate and propose the elimination from the political field of the corrupt opponents, who are to blame for Argentina's downfall, that is, populism in its Peronist and Alfonsinist versions (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 166). This way, they build a political otherness that is very disruptive of the political order that departs from demo-liberal values and is closer to the tradition of warlike republicanism of Ciceronian origin.¹² Twenty years later, Mauricio Macri's PRO will embrace not only the predominant semantics of UCEDÉ but also its enunciative stance against its political adversary: Kirchnerist Peronism.

III.2. The Warlike and Anti-Liberal Republicanism of Mauricio Macri

On 30 October 2017, after two years in office, Mauricio Macri delivered a speech setting out his political programme, focused on three axes: economy, labour and republic/institutional quality. After evoking Raúl Alfonsín as the president who "launched the longest period of our democracy" (Macri, 2017), he commits to a political agenda in which the future should prevail over the past. He also states that "Argentines want to live in a republican democracy, with respected institutions that in turn respect them" (Macri, 2017). This civic-institutional definition, however, appears quickly insufficient: the defence of the republic entails a cultural change that replaces of the old corrupt political class with new honest and capable people who choose and commit to public life after a successful professional career in the private sector (Macri, 2022, pp. 137, 148, 152). In his view, republic is by nature anti-authoritarian and entails a conception of freedom understood as "choosing one's own life, being passionate and living off what one is passionate about" (Macri, 2017). The opposite of freedom is populism and union corporatism that hinders the free functioning of supply and demand in the labour market. Macri's republic is against the privileges enjoyed by unions and social movements but defends those who, because of their wealth and leadership qualities, can be economically and intellectually responsible for decision-making (Macri, 2022, pp. 25–39, 61, 120). Future elites must combine intellectual capacity—which does not necessarily mean education or academic training—with empathy (Macri, 2022, p. 193).

With his "elitism" anti-leftism (or anti-unionism), former president Macri remains faithful to the tradition of the Argentine right-wing, one that precedes the UCEDÉ. For instance, when talking about his grandfather, Giorgi Macri, who had an important role in Guglielmo Giannini's party, *Il Partito dell'Uomo Qualunque* (the Party of the Common Man), he defines him as democratic, pro-market, anti-fascist and anti-communist. This description omits that the party is considered the antecedent of current European right-wing populism (Macri, 2022, p. 157; Costabile, 2019).

The leader of the PRO defines democracy as conflict management. His model of democratic republic is different from Alfonsín's, whose motto was "consensus in dissent", and is radically opposed to the Kirchnerist aim of turning conflict into the quintessence of popular government (Morán, 2022, p. 196). Macri proposes a democracy without conflict but not necessarily as a result of consensus. If dialogue is not enough to put an end to conflict, then those who prevent the republican leader and his prestigious team from governing society must be eliminated from the political field.

According to Mauricio Macri (2022, p. 249), the Covid-19 pandemic taught Argentine citizens that freedom is something worth mobilising for. Only those who share the healthy rebelliousness that rejects populism are honest enough to hope for change. Although the former president claims to be open to dialogue and to sectoral agreements while rejecting all kinds of violence, including his very own authoritarian outbursts which he assures to have learnt to control (Macri, 2022, p. 47), he believes Kirchnerists are the public enemies of the republic.

In sum, UCEDÉ and PRO are parties whose core supporters belong to the upper classes and opt for proximity politics over mass mobilisations to reach their potential voters. Although the PRO is a more institutionalised party and has obtained more votes than the UCEDÉ ever had, neither has been able to detach themselves from the personal figures of their founding leaders. They both champion an institutionalist conception of the republic that refers, although not always explicitly, to the constitutional moment of 1853. The promotion of freedom and the honesty of its leaders, members and supporters are virtues that set them apart from other politicians. These right-wing parties follow an agenda that is liberal (anti-State) in economic terms, and neoliberal in social terms (individualism), but not necessarily liberal or republican in political terms. Their ambiguous relationship with the values of the rule of law, such as human rights or demo liberalism, is evidence of this. Both have made corruption the republican hobby horse against populist wasteful spending,¹³ one that they have used to reinforce their political identity.

IV. Conclusions: The Republican Myth and Political Identity Legitimation Strategies of UCEDÉ and PRO

From the foregoing, the following corollaries can be deduced.

First, the analysis of the history of Argentina's republican moments reveals the prevalence of a semantics according to which the republic is anti-popular and the result of a particular historical juncture: the political and social democratisation achieved during the first decades of the twentieth century. Almost a century later, right-wing parties such as UCEDÉ and PRO defend a conservative conception of the republic to limit the excesses of democracy, social-democratic State dirigisme and populism.

Second, the cases of UCEDÉ and PRO show the importance that right-wing parties in Argentina parties bestow upon the country's republican tradition. Two moments are implicitly or explicitly valued. On the one hand, the ideologues of the 1853 Constitution, the Generation of 1837, embodied the institutional civic moment. The following examples suffice. During the sessions of 28 and 29 June 1985 in the House of Deputies a tribute was paid to Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Alsogaray spoke highly of both, underlining the influence of the former on the 1853 liberal Constitution (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 203). Similarly, in the PRO's support for the figure of the entrepreneur there is a clear reference to Alberdi, who was a strong enthusiast of this role in the nineteenth century, and it was embodied in his friend the US Industrialist William Wheelwright. On the other hand, the right-wing of the 1920s upheld an anti-popular, anti-leftist and elitist republicanism,

as a response to the irruption of the masses in politics. The combination of these two moments gives way to a republicanism that, while liberal and institutional in discourse, is conservative and authoritarian when they consider that democracy threatens the privileged classes and their traditional values.¹⁴

Third, the UCEDÉ and the PRO, both in terms of the parties and their leaders, share a set of common characteristics: a loyal upper-class electorate, the conception of the voter as neighbour more than as citizen, and personalism. Nevertheless, Mauricio Macri was elected president, something Alsogaray never achieved. This may have been due to the former's use of political marketing, his greater empathy or leadership skills. The republicanism that these right-wing parties embrace is a combination, albeit not always coherent, of themes from different stages or versions of republicanism. For instance, the staunch defence of institutionality, which characterises modern republicanism, intersects with the condemnation of corruption in the name of a virtuous elite, the only ones that are capable of recognising and unveiling those who, disguised as democrats, seek to impose tyranny. These leaders, however, differ in the type of freedom they deem necessary for the republic that they aspire to. For Alsogaray, freedom means non-interference by public authority. For Macri, freedom entails doing what one wants, while defending it actively and civically. It could be said that while Alsogaray defends a negative conception of freedom, Macri adopts a different one that combines the tyranny of an individual ruled by their desires with republican active commitment (Sadin, 2022, p. 191).

As Sergio Morresi rightly states (2011, p. 8), “[w]hile populism is the negative trait that self-constitutes the Argentine liberal-conservative right-wing, the mythical and positive trait is another concept of the political field: the republic”. This myth constitutes the Argentine right-wing identity as much as its opposition to Alfonsínism and Kirchnerism. The republic is better understood on the basis of the analytical category of warlike republicanism than with the notion of populism that has been so conceptually stretched to the point of becoming an empty form applicable to very different political expressions.

What is the novelty of UCEDÉ and PRO with respect to other previous Argentine right-wing parties? One element that is usually highlighted is the participation of both parties in competitive democratic elections, unlike their predecessors that resorted to systems of controlled succession, fraud or military coups to come to power (Gibson, 1996, pp. 29–74). What is most distinctive, even in relation to other Argentine right-wing parties that during the twentieth century invoke the republic to legitimise their political identity, is that both UCEDÉ and PRO argue with their adversaries over the meaning of democracy instead of rejecting it outright. The reason behind this difference is the political process inaugurated in 1983, which, according to Gerardo Aboy Carlés (2010, p. 81), is a hybrid democracy that does not fit in the old mould of populist democracy nor in the normative ideal of demo-liberalism in spite of being closer to the latter than to the former.

At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, however, a well-known danger reappears in Argentine politics. On the grounds of the defence of the republic from those who threaten it, right-wing parties have ended up destroying the republican-liberal institutionality. The fact that a political party or coalition, such as

PRO or *Juntos*, identifies itself as the only authentically republican and democratic political force entails a risk for demo-liberalism and for the rule of law since they strip the opposition of the title of adversary and turn them into the absolute enemy of the common good. When hatred is the main political passion, this paves the way for authoritarianism, the tyrannical counterpart of republicanism, to emerge.

Notes

- 1 Kirchnerism is a political force that has hegemonised the centre-left-wing of Peronism since Néstor Kirchner's (1950–2010) arrival to the presidency in 2003. Its main figure is Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (1953–). The parties that make up *Juntos por el Cambio*, the name adopted in 2019 by *Alianza Cambiemos*, the coalition that came to power in 2015, are *Propuesta Republicana* (PRO), *Coalición Cívica ARI*, *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), *Movimiento de Integración y Desarrollo* (MIR), *Encuentro Republicano Federal*, *Unión Popular*, *Partido Demócrata Progresista*, *Partido Nacionalista Constitucional*. *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCEDÉ) belongs to this alliance in three districts: Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Catamarca and Santa Fe.
- 2 Both the political scientist Julio Pinto (2013, pp. 92–102) and the historian Fernando Devoto (2002, pp. 73, 119, 317) are two figures representative of this interpretative line, which is advocated for in this chapter.
- 3 Law 8871, known as Law Sáenz Peña, after the surname of the president who favoured its passing. This law established free, secret and mandatory suffrage for all men of legal age and favoured the representation of minorities with an electoral system that gave two-thirds of the seats to the party that won the elections and the rest to the second party.
- 4 There is no space to develop here the complex relationship of the editors of *La Nueva República* with José Evaristo Uriburu and Agustín P. Justo, nor their participation in other literary journals such as *Martín Fierro* or political ones such as the Catholic journal *Criterio*. See Devoto (2002, pp. 169–178, 230–262, 271–297). It is worthwhile remembering that the father of the engineer Álvaro Alsogaray, lieutenant colonel of the same first name, participated in meetings that led to the coup d'état, on the grounds that the military was dissatisfied with the government.
- 5 In 1987 the UCEDÉ reached 18.7% of the votes in the City of Buenos Aires (Gibson, 1996, p. 142). This is an important figure considering the weight of the two-party system (UCR-PJ) in the 1980s.
- 6 In Argentina, both the president of the nation and the chief of government of the City of Buenos Aires (CABA) are elected through a two-round or ballottage system. The difference is that in the case of the presidency, if a candidate obtains more than 45% of the votes or more than 40% with a difference of ten points with respect to the second-place candidate, there is no second round. In the case of the CABA, 50% of the votes must be obtained.
- 7 For instance, organising mass gatherings including the participation of rock bands, one of which was known as *Propiedad Privada* (Private Property) (Gutiérrez, 1991, p. 79). Among the failed election campaigns that were designed by publicists we may mention a 1989 add that depicted the republic (represented by a young and beautiful model) as a battered woman (Doman and Olivera, 1989, p. 172).
- 8 It is worth remembering that before that *coup* attempt, most of the political parties of the opposition mobilised to *Plaza de Mayo* and accompanied President Alfonsín when he addressed the crowd gathered in the square. From UCEDÉ, only Adelina Dalesio de Viola was present. Alsogaray, although critical of the economic policies of the military dictatorship, always supported the illegal repression.
- 9 The *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience Law, Law 23.521) was also enacted by Alfonsín on 4 June 1987 and established a presumption *iuris et de iure* (i.e. it did not

- allow proof to the contrary) with respect to crimes committed by members of the Armed Forces who were not punishable for having acted under the so-called due obedience, a military concept meaning that subordinates are limited to obeying the orders of their superiors. It was nullified in 2003 (Law 25.779) and declared unconstitutional in 2005.
- 10 According to Héctor Siracusano, UCEDE was like a family, in that its leader made blood ties prevail over political ties (Doman and Olivera, 1989, p. 74). Something similar happens in the PRO: several leaders or advisors are Mauricio Macri's relatives.
 - 11 In 1977, Alsogaray interviewed Friedrich von Hayek who redefined what the Argentine interviewer called "mass democracy" as "government with unlimited powers" (Rojas and Guido, 2021, p. 45). Alsogaray also admired Hayek's social market economy although his opinions are not necessarily compatible with those of the author of *The Road to Serfdom*.
 - 12 Warlike republicanism is an analytical category that entails the likening of the adversary to a public enemy. Its main republican theme is the antinomy, "virtue versus corruption", while its style is aggressive and, in terms of speech, it tends to exclude the opponent from the political community on the grounds of their lack of morality. Its inspirational discourse is Cicero's *Catilinaries* (Cicero, 2009). See Rodríguez Rial (2019).
 - 13 Alberto Albamonte, deputy for the UCEDE since 1987, led an attack on Alfonsinist corruption epitomised by the Secretary of Domestic Trade, Ricardo Mazzorín, who made a purchase of 38,000 chickens from Hungary. Twenty per cent of the imported meat failed to be sold because of being in bad condition it was in poor conditions, in spite of the fact that the government rented cold storage rooms, which led to an accusation of embezzlement of public funds for the official. PRO militants usually refer to the former Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as "*la chorra*" ("the thief" in Argentine slang), and politicians of that affiliation define Kirchnerism as a machinery for stealing, although their personal friends within that political group are exempted from that attack.
 - 14 On how US neoconservatism also employs republican virtue in its persuasive strategy against populism, statism and left-wing culture, see Kristol (2011, pp. 64–77).

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