

ABSTENTION IN ARGENTINE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 1983–1999

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Abstract: The profile of voters and nonvoters according to age, occupation, and education is described. The study is based on samples of around 30 male mesas from the city of Buenos Aires in four presidential elections—1983, 1989, 1995, and 1999—and 100 from each of two elections (1997 representatives and 1999 presidential) in the homonymous province. Data from official voter registers (padrones) are analyzed for those obligated to vote (18–69) and for those exempted (70+ years). The level of abstention increased slowly but steadily along the time span considered. Citizens obligated to vote do so more than those who are not. Logistic regression equations showed a positive effect of the lowest occupational status categories—less educated people—on the odds of nonvoting, while the opposite was true for the highest occupational status categories.

Election turnout and nonvoting are old topics in political and voting research, and have concerned Argentinean political leaders and the press since the middle of the nineteenth century. Most of them were particularly worried because those whom they called the “best people” did not vote. Joaquín V. González, former Minister of the Interior in 1911 said about compulsory voting: “It is the device which legislation and contemporary political science . . . recommend as a means to overcome absenteeism, indifference, . . . among the most important social classes, who remain distant from civic life” (quoted in Canton 1966, 12). Lijphart (1997, 1) echoes this observation by noting that “at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century” some expected that with universal suffrage the “better educated and more prosperous” would “not bother to vote,” but contrary to J. V. González he adds that “empirical studies soon showed that socio-economic status and voting were positively, not negatively, linked”.

Among those scholars who have addressed the question of political (electoral) participation, Tingsten’s (1937) work remains a fine example of statistical data gathering and interpretation. Tingsten observes that: “no investigations have been made regarding the social distribution of that category of electors who have abstained from voting in spite of the

legal obligation to vote" (189). Furthermore, until a generation ago, Lipset (1960), Bendix (1964), Rokkan (1970), and Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978)—mixing survey data with some official records—made attempts to update existing knowledge and data for large units of analysis (countries and states), to allow better international comparisons of the social background, rates and ways of citizen political participation, usually indicated by voter turnout. At the local level, and as a member of that generation of scholars, Germani (1955, 1962) studied the types and levels of political mobilization, pointing out the problems of electoral participation of foreign migrants who did not become citizens, particularly in the city of Buenos Aires, where they constituted the majority of the population and did not vote up to the middle of the twentieth century (for considerations on the occupational distribution of voters and non-voters in the city of Buenos Aires between 1904 and 1910, see also Walter 1978, 1993; Canton and Jorrot 1999b).

All of them were fully aware that voter turnout is a limited, imperfect indicator of political participation, unable to encompass the richness of a concept that so many authors have endeavored to refine. But they also knew that it was a strategic and easily available tool which enables comparisons of rates of participation between countries and periods within them.

Our task given the characteristics of the data will be more of an exploratory nature, trying to specify the profiles of male¹ voters and non-voters. However, as we have tried in the past to single out class (socio-spatial) bases of *voting* in urban Argentina, we will now be guided by a working hypothesis on the possible class bases of *nonvoting* in the Federal District and in the province of Buenos Aires.

The central question for us is: who are the non-voters? Put another way: If under non-compulsory voting "low voter turnout means unequal and socio-economically biased turnout" (Lijphart 1997, 2), could it be said that in countries with mandatory voting for people 18–69 years old, and non-mandatory voting for elders, absenteeism from the polls might also be structured by class position, i.e., be socio-economically biased? If a class or socio-economic bias is underlying nonvoting, *even under compulsory voting*, then the question would be about the relevance of such a bias: To what extent does mandatory voting promote equality of political-electoral participation, as Lijphart suggests? In his already quoted presidential address at the American

1. Age of females is, according to electoral law, secret. This limitation could be overcome, for a large number of them, through identification numbers, a costly enterprise. Furthermore, most women in the electoral register are concentrated in a few occupational categories, primarily housework and domestic service. These substantive reasons, plus our limitations of time and money, led us to work solely with male electoral registers.

Political Science Association, he concluded that compulsory voting was an adequate means to promote greater equality in contemporary democracies: “after universal suffrage, the next aim for democracy must be universal or near-universal *use* of the right to vote” (Lijphart 1997, 11; emphasis in the original).

DATA USED

We are dealing with two data sets drawn from the Federal District (the city of Buenos Aires), and from Buenos Aires province, that together represent 47.4 percent of the total male registered population in 1999. The first one is based on the last four presidential elections after the return to democracy in 1983 (1983, 1989, 1995, and 1999), and the second on two elections: 1997 (representatives) and 1999 (presidential). We study the smallest electoral units (*mesas*, or polling places, with some 300 to 400 male voters, where we can single out individual voters and nonvoters), within the context of a country with a non-complex proportional representation system and mandatory voting (on the Argentine electoral system, see works by Jackisch and Ferreira Rubio 1997; Cabrera 1996; Szusterman 1996; Cabrera and Murillo 1994).

Analyzing the nonvoting performance from an American senatorial election in 1990, Ragsdale and Rusk (1993, 727) point out that the public opinion polls they used invariably overestimated turnout by approximately 15 points. In this regard, they add: “The key question, then, is whether the turnout inflation present in the study is a general pattern of misreporting across the population or is most prevalent in certain subpopulations.” Survey data on the likelihood of turning out to vote, if voters were to be freed from that duty, would present two basic problems: (a) measurement errors, particularly those due to the effects of “social desirability,” insofar as interviewees try to adjust their answers to what they believe are expected social standards, and (b) response bias; although voting is compulsory, participation in surveys is not, and, hence, those who voluntarily answer a poll may have different “political predispositions” from those who do not (Jackman 1999a, 1999b, 36, particularly).

Our procedure, which overcomes those difficulties, is based on samples from official records. Every Argentinean citizen, regardless of sex, educational level, income, or property, is automatically included in the electoral register and required to vote between the ages of 18 and 69 (article 12 of the National Electoral Code exempts citizens from this duty when they have reached the age of 70 or when they happen to be, on the date of the ballot, more than 500 kilometers away from their home address as stated on their identification cards). They must cast their ballots at “*mesas*” located at public places (usually school buildings) near their homes, on a Sunday from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. Each *mesa* has a list of around

300 or 400 citizens of the same sex registered therein, where its authorities mark the name of the voter.²

In the analysis, we evaluate the effects of occupations (social class) on non-voting. The occupational categories considered are: (a) unskilled workers (journeymen, laborers, operatives, apprentices, etc.); (b) skilled workers (printers, metal workers, railroad workers, masons, textile workers, etc.); (c) craftsmen, self-employed workers (mechanics, piano tuners, carpenters, plasterers, shoemakers, tailors, etc.); (d) shop-owners and merchants (shop-owners, brokers, agents, traveling salesmen, etc.); (e) clerical and sales persons (clerks, white-collar employees, salespersons, shop assistants, etc.); and (f) entrepreneurs (entrepreneurs, industrialists, landowners, etc.), professionals (occupations with a university degree), young students (those 18–29 years old), and senior “students” (those 30 years and older who are still registered as students). We have not considered—in our logistic regression equations—the farm category or the sum of technicians, teachers, and others (decorators, technical draftsmen, photographers, master builders, chiropodists, elementary and high school teachers, artists, etc.). Also, we excluded the retired, the military, the clergy, and the unemployed or those with unspecified occupations.

A useful reminder refers to the electoral results. The presidency in the first election (1983) was won by the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), the usual winner before the emergence of Peronism in 1946; the second (1989) and the third (1995) were won by Peronism, while the last was won by the Alianza, an alliance led by the UCR, associated with FREPASO (Frente

2. The following data appear in the electoral register: name, address, year of birth (only for males), profession, identification card number, and order number within the *mesa* (from 1 to 300 or 400); surnames are alphabetically ordered. When the voter arrives, the *mesa* officials check that his or her name is on the list and that the card number agrees with that on the register. The voter is then provided with an envelope before entering the so-called “dark room” to choose (or not) a party’s ballot; he has to place it in the envelope (or leave the envelope empty), seal it, and put it into the ballot box under the vigilance of the *mesa* authorities and delegates from the political parties involved. Then, before leaving, the voter’s identity document is returned duly signed and sealed in order to attest that the ballot has been cast. While this procedure takes place, the *mesa* authorities, under supervision of the party delegates, write on the register list, beside the surname of the person who has just voted, in a special column, the word “cast.”

At 6:00 P.M. voting is over and the names of those who did not cast their ballot are marked in the voting register (*padrón*). Authorities then verify that the number of voters added to that of non-voters sums up to the total of registered citizens and that this total equals that of the envelopes in the ballot box. Once these preliminary steps have been successfully fulfilled, the envelopes are opened and the vote counting begins. (The number of party votes plus blank, nulled [spoiled], and challenged votes, must equal the number of envelopes). Upon completion of vote counting, a document is signed and sent to the headquarters of the Secretaría Electoral of the Federal District. There the final vote counting takes place and the documents from all electoral *mesa* are kept for a certain length of time. The city of Buenos Aires has kept its electoral records since 1983, while Buenos Aires province throws them away when a new election is held.

del País Solidario), a recent political progressive force with Peronist origins. Our data come from the Federal District, where Peronism was defeated in the four elections considered, and from Buenos Aires province, where it also lost in 1997 and won in 1999.

RESULTS

An overall description of the data (tables 1a and 1b) shows that non-voting begins to slightly increase around 60 years of age, but the noticeable increase starts around 70 years old, when citizens are exempted from their obligation to vote, and becomes even more pronounced around 75 years old. If we only consider the last four age groups (60–64, 65–69, 70–74, and 75+), it can be seen that both the absence of an obligation to vote—after citizens reach 70 years of age—and old age (75+) itself exert a strong influence on turnout.

On the occupation side, data show that manual categories abstain slightly more than the non-manual ones, irrespective of mandatory or non-mandatory ages. This picture is similar in both districts (and for each election considered, according to disaggregated data not shown here). This is so, in spite of some differences in occupational profiles of these districts: the manual categories (workers and self-employed) reach 25 percent in the Federal District and 40 percent in Buenos Aires Province, while the reverse is shown by the high non-manual group (entrepreneurs, professionals, and students), 45 percent and 26 percent in the same order.

Equations of logistic regression for each election, with the dependent variable taking value 0 for voting odds (or log-odds) and value 1 for nonvoting odds, will allow us to explore the occupational and age bases of abstention (tables 2a and 2b). For the Federal District, the most general assertion is that age has no effect on the odds of non-voting when voting is mandatory (table 2a), but the opposite holds for the elder group not required to vote (70 years and older; table 2b). Buenos Aires Province shows a similar pattern, although the coefficient of age is negative and significant for the 18–69 age group in 1999.

The analysis by occupations shows, in the general equation for the Federal District (“all years”), that only the last two non-manual categories (clerical and sales; entrepreneurs, professionals and students—referred as EPS) have a significant, negative effect on absenteeism when voting is compulsory. That is, the non-voting odds decrease, for those required to vote, when a person belongs to these occupational categories. On the contrary, a different picture is observed for those 70 years and older: the non-voting odds are higher for the manual categories. In this equation, the effect of each year is considered: they are all positive, significant, and increase systematically along the years for those required

TABLE 1a *Federal District: Percent Male Non-Voting by Age Group and Occupational Category (joint samples 1983, 1989, 1995, and 1999)*

Occupational Categories:	Age Groups:				
	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–64
Unskilled workers	18.2	19.9	17.9	18.1	25.1
Skilled workers	24.4	15.9	13.8	15.5	12.4
Self-employed crafts	19.2	15.5	15.1	13.6	18.4
Shop owners	15.7	15.4	18.4	12.9	11.1
Clerical and sales	16.8	14.4	12.7	12.5	12.5
Entrepreneurs/Professionals/Students	10.3	13.3	12.9	13.3	13.1
<i>Total</i>	12.1	14.5	13.8	13.8	14.7
<i>N</i>	7732	7705	6837	5531	2279

TABLE 1b *Buenos Aires Province: Percent Male Nonvoting by Age Group and Occupational Category (joint samples 1997 and 1999)*

Occupational Categories:	Age Groups:				
	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–64
Unskilled workers	19.7	16.2	15.0	15.9	21.6
Skilled workers	24.1	19.3	16.5	17.0	16.8
Self-employed crafts	16.9	17.5	14.2	16.4	16.8
Shop owners	14.9	15.1	11.0	12.2	12.2
Clerical and sales	17.1	15.3	12.6	11.1	13.3
Entrepreneurs/Professionals/Students	10.4	11.3	10.8	11.6	15.7
<i>Total</i>	14.0	15.2	13.5	14.1	16.0
<i>N</i>	13328	10072	8930	6748	2757

to vote. This coincides with the fact that abstention rose since 1983. Among the elders, election year shows no clear pattern.

To what extent does this general picture hold for every year? In 1983 wage workers (unskilled or skilled) are the only non-significant categories, and the significant ones show a negative sign. According to these findings, among those obligated to vote, basically nonmanuals showed lower odds of being absent from the polls in the first election after the return to democracy. Some few differences can be observed in 1989, when Peronists won their first election in the country after the coup that overthrew their government in 1976. Skilled workers seem to diminish their absenteeism while the self-employed and the shop-owners do not exhibit now significant coefficients. Clerical and sales, as well as EPS, main-

65–69	(18–69)	70–74	75+	(70+)	Total	N
23.9	19.4	30.6	61.6	48.0	22.1	3328
16.2	15.3	33.9	52.2	44.4	20.0	2453
16.5	15.6	27.7	50.7	41.2	20.6	3041
14.9	14.6	25.3	47.3	39.8	22.4	1532
14.8	13.7	23.5	46.6	36.9	17.1	9262
14.2	12.1	19.6	47.4	36.4	13.0	16142
16.0	13.7	25.5	49.2	39.6	16.4	35758
1986	32070	1503	2185	3688	35758	

65–69	(18–69)	70–74	75+	(70+)	Total	N
23.3	17.2	29.2	68.5	46.4	21.3	7751
19.3	18.4	27.6	56.7	39.4	21.3	6383
17.3	16.2	23.9	59.5	39.3	19.8	5169
13.2	12.6	23.6	49.8	34.7	16.7	3215
13.8	14.3	20.5	46.6	31.0	16.2	13129
10.5	10.8	13.5	41.6	25.5	11.2	12362
17.0	14.4	23.9	55.2	37.0	16.8	48009
966	42801	3028	2181	5209	48009	

tain their negative and significant effects on the odds of non-voting. In 1995, when Carlos Menem was re-elected after his 180 degree turnaround in economic policies with respect to traditional Peronist patterns, only clerical and sales plus EPS keep their negative impact. It should be remembered that in this election Peronism, in its “Menemist” version, was basically supported by the extremes of the social spectrum. In the last election, 1999, when Peronism was defeated, the presence of wage manual workers, self-employed, and shop owners was linked to absenteeism (they show a positive, highly significant coefficient).

In Buenos Aires Province both elections practically show a similar pattern for those required to vote: the manual categories have a positive effect on the odds of nonvoting, while only the highest non manuals

TABLE 2a *Effects of Age and Occupation on Nonvoting in Presidential Elections in the Federal District, and in the Last Two Elections in Buenos Aires Province: 1997 (representatives) and 1999 (presidential); Logistic Regression Equations, ages 18–69 (mandatory voting ages)*

	Federal District, Presidential Elections:				
	1983	1989	1995	1999	All years
Age (18-69)	0.002	-0.004	0.001	0.003	0.001
Standard error	0.003	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.001
Unskilled workers	0.054	0.001	-0.158	0.538**	0.117
Standard error	0.183	0.190	0.178	0.170	0.091
Skilled workers	-0.388	-0.420*	-0.166	0.345	-0.142
Standard error	0.201	0.204	0.192	0.191	0.099
Self-employed crafts	-0.603**	-0.362	-0.299	0.577**	-0.130
Standard error	0.200	0.200	0.189	0.178	0.096
Shop owners	-0.571*	-0.167	-0.391	0.499*	-0.167
Standard error	0.231	0.224	0.238	0.248	0.117
Clerical and sales	-0.438*	-0.400*	-0.598**	0.256	-0.279**
Standard error	0.169	0.172	0.166	0.162	0.085
Entrep., prof., stud.	-0.522**	-0.514**	-0.766**	-0.041	-0.460**
Standard error	0.171	0.171	0.162	0.149	0.083
Constant	-1.693**	-1.401**	-1.259**	-1.945**	-1.818**
Standard error	0.204	0.204	0.196	0.187	0.103
X1989	—	—	—	—	0.107*
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.050
X1995	—	—	—	—	0.316**
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.048
X1999	—	—	—	—	0.429**
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.047
-2 log likelihood	5286.704	5898.920	6824.216	8361.393	26425.51
Goodness of fit	7382.069	7855.654	8269.212	9606.161	33144.71
Chi square	34.594	24.248	71.267	84.799	242.828
% Correct	88.3	87.5	85.3	84.0	86.1
Cox and Snell pseudo R ²	0.005	0.003	0.009	0.009	0.007
N	7381	7854	8270	9613	33118

* p significant < .05; ** p significant < .01

(EPS) exhibit a significant negative presence. Finally, when the odds of non-voting in 1999 are considered for both districts as a whole, such odds tend to be higher for the manual categories, among those required to vote. The same holds for the elders' occupations, but in this case only the wage workers exhibit a positive impact (table 2b).

<i>Buenos Aires Province:</i>		<i>Both Districts</i>
1997 (R)	1999 (P)	1999
-0.002	-0.004**	0.001
0.001	0.002	0.001
0.238*	0.314**	0.401**
0.101	0.112	0.094
0.312**	0.382**	0.384**
0.103	0.113	0.097
0.170	0.258*	0.366**
0.107	0.117	0.098
-0.196	0.118	0.155
0.123	0.128	0.112
-0.005	0.074	0.169
0.099	0.108	0.091
-0.392**	-0.243*	-0.046
0.103	0.112	0.088
-1.604**	-1.808**	-2.003**
0.112	0.123	0.102
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
19615.62	18008.98	26474.05
22865.59	23114.79	32721.57
173.478	113.242	173.770
84.4	86.7	85.9
0.008	0.005	0.004
22862	23111	32.724

A dichotomous, simplified perspective can be obtained from table 3. For all years in the Federal District, age is positively linked to absenteeism only for those not required to vote. This is so in Buenos Aires Province, where age is negative and significant for those 70 years and older. Wage workers (unskilled and skilled) in the two districts and for

TABLE 2b *Effects of Age and Occupation on Nonvoting in Presidential Elections in the Federal District, and in the Last Two Elections in Buenos Aires Province: 1997 (representatives) and 1999 (presidential); Logistic Regression Equations, ages 70 and over (non-mandatory voting ages)*

	<i>Federal District, Presidential Elections:</i>				
	1983	1989	1995	1999	<i>All years</i>
Age (70 and over)	0.126**	0.166**	0.131	0.109	0.127**
Standard error	0.016	0.016	0.012	0.009	0.006
Unskilled workers	0.428	0.921*	0.813*	0.355	0.598**
Standard error	0.449	0.433	0.341	0.303	0.182
Skilled workers	0.067	0.808*	0.553	0.246	0.430*
Standard error	0.410	0.397	0.323	0.302	0.174
Self-employed crafts	0.284	0.088	0.107	0.262	0.212
Standard error	0.378	0.383	0.298	0.282	0.162
Shop owners	-0.115	0.494	0.284	-0.400	0.048
Standard error	0.395	0.380	0.311	0.301	0.169
Clerical and sales	-0.428	0.179	0.203	0.101	0.067
Standard error	0.354	0.339	0.269	0.257	0.147
Entrep., Prof., Stud.	-0.327	0.202	-0.168	0.135	-0.008
Standard error	0.437	0.385	0.292	0.279	0.164
Constant	-10.275**	-14.002**	-10.493**	-8.930**	-10.587**
Standard error	1.228	1.254	0.925	0.784	0.491
X1989	—	—	—	—	-0.230*
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.118
X1995	—	—	—	—	0.449**
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.110
X1999	—	—	—	—	0.178
Standard error	—	—	—	—	0.108
-2 log likelihood	748.902	939.614	1324.620	1642.412	4690.305
Goodness of fit	88.041	176.110	177.642	158.472	631.122
Chi square	34.594	24.248	71.267	84.799	242.828
% Correct	73.2	75.7	64.9	66.4	69.0
Cox and Snell pseudo R ²	0.126	0.177	0.151	0.113	0.147
N	656	904	1087	1326	3973

* p significant < .05; ** p significant < .01

all age groups have a positive impact on the non-voting odds, while the opposite holds for EPS, although it is not statistically significant among the elderly of the Federal District.

According to these results, absenteeism seems linked to occupational status (or class), irrespective of the requirement to vote. While workers

<i>Buenos Aires Province:</i>		<i>Both Districts</i>
1997 (R)	1999 (P)	1999
0.100	0.143**	0.128**
0.007	0.009	0.006
0.863**	0.456*	0.424*
0.207	0.206	0.168
0.520*	0.424*	0.362*
0.212	0.214	0.173
0.234	0.327	0.294
0.213	0.220	0.173
-0.141	0.234	-0.040
0.228	0.233	0.184
-0.007	0.030	0.056
0.198	0.203	0.158
-0.195	-0.565*	-0.102
0.262	0.281	0.186
-8.214**	-11.592**	-10.415**
0.603	0.696	0.515
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
—	—	
2611.217	2424.141	4089.457
2170.923	2069.469	3391.519
281.574	395.287	530.868
65.9	69.7	68.4
0.126	0.173	0.144
2099	2078	3404

show a positive impact on the odds of nonvoting, the EPS group shows a negative one. The high educational level of this non-manual category should be taken into account, since it includes professionals and students.³

3. Research by the authors on occupation and voting in Argentine elections, based on electoral registers which go back to 1973, has consistently shown that those who

TABLE 3 *Effects of Age and Extreme Occupational Categories on Nonvoting*

	<i>Federal District. All samples, 18–69 years</i>		<i>Buenos Aires. All samples, 18–69 years</i>		<i>Both Districts 1999</i>	
	18–69	70 +	18–69	70 +	18–69	70 +
Age	0.001	0.127**	-0.003**	0.120**	0.001	0.127**
Standard error	0.001	0.006	0.001	0.006	0.001	0.006
Wage workers	0.230**	0.416**	0.246**	0.492**	0.197**	0.307**
Standard error	0.045	0.093	0.030	0.072	0.039	0.084
Entrep., prof., stud.	-0.254**	-0.097	-0.379**	-0.462**	-0.235**	-0.191
Standard error	0.038	0.103	0.038	0.151	0.040	0.131
X1989	0.104*	-0.233*	—	—	—	—
Standard error	0.050	0.118	—	—	—	—
X1995	0.318**	0.449**	—	—	—	—
Standard error	0.048	0.110	—	—	—	—
X1999	0.430**	0.181	-0.172**	-0.164*	—	—
Standard error	0.047	0.107	0.027	0.068	—	—
Constant	-2.025**	-10.493**	-1.563**	-9.639**	-1.814**	-10.302**
Standard error	0.071	0.476	0.050	0.434	0.060	0.491
-2 log likelihood	26450.770	4693.872	37652.56	5071.315	26491.88	4095.685
Goodness of fit	33148.396	3940.543	45991.82	4312.355	32722.82	3385.944
Chi square	217.565	627.555	307.499	647.923	115.947	524.640
% Correct	86.1	68.8	85.6	67.8	85.9	68.0
Cox and Snell pseudo R ²	0.007	0.146	0.007	0.144	0.004	0.143
N	33118	3973	45973	4177	32724	3404

* p significant < .05; ** p significant < .01

When commenting on the American electorate, Flanigan and Zingale (1998, 40) point out that “length of education is one of the best predictors of an individual’s likelihood of voting.” Although this seems to be so at the local level for the period under consideration, it has not always been that way. In spite of the fact that comparable data are lacking, ecological correlations between occupational categories and turnout in elections from 1904 to 1910 in the city of Buenos Aires suggest the opposite tendency (Canton and Jorrat, 1999b). The same is true, more markedly, not only in the Federal District but in the country as a whole, during Juan D.

appeared as students (which divided by age give rise to our young and senior students) and the ones we labelled professionals (lawyers, architects, engineers, medical doctors, and the like, all with no less than five years of university studies) exhibit a similar voting pattern according to ecological correlations and regressions (see Canton and Jorrat 1980, table 10, 90). That finding was valid for urban areas from four different districts and is still valid for the city of Buenos Aires.

Perón's political life cycle from 1943 up to his death in 1974. (Correlation coefficients not presented here show mostly positive, non-significant values between *all* occupational categories and turnout from 1946 to 1954. Even more so, sometimes the lowest manual category—daily workers—exhibited significant coefficients at $p < .10$).

Those were times of high government-induced political-electoral mobilizations, when turnout was around 90 percent. Also, those were times of a higher weight of the working class in the occupational structure. If we only take into account the weight of manual wage workers within the male electoral register at two points in time, 1934 and 1996, it declined from 39 percent to 13 percent (these percentages are lower than those of the National Census, where occupational categories are referred for people 14 years and older within the economically active population). Also, when compliance with the obligation to vote was enforced (people had to prove that they voted in order to get paid or, for example, when they had to obtain a driver's license; cf., for fines imposed in Australia, another country with compulsory voting, Mackerras and McAllister 1999, 223–24).

The period under analysis, 1983–99, offers a different view. Peronism, at least in the city of Buenos Aires, is on the wane; its old ideology and tenets of confrontation have been left aside, notably by its "Menemist" version; the old industrial working class, originally called the backbone of Peronism, has constantly shrunk since the end of the first Peronist governments (around 1960), a tendency which deepened since globalization and the opening of the local economy to the world market; finally, compulsory voting is not particularly enforced any more—even President Menem (1989–99) declared himself in favor of eliminating the obligation to vote (see de Riz 1998; Onaindia 1998; in addition, comments appeared in a *La Nación* editorial, 2 November 1997, 26; and in *Clarín*, 3 November, 1997, 16.)

The relative decline of the working class is not a specific Argentine process. As Clark (2001) notes, the size of the manual labor force has been in decline in most advanced countries, where the blue-collar workers "as a proportion of the electorate dropped by about half from the 1960s to the 1990s" (p. 24). On the other hand, the considerations on the loosening of the workers' support to Peronism are in line with observations pointed out by Weakliem and Heath (1999, 100–101) for the most advanced countries, with respect to the working class weakening its ties with left parties and/or unions.

It is no surprise, then, we think, that the Argentine citizens show a similar nonvoting pattern to that of the most industrialized countries, where voting is, mostly, not compulsory. This is more so for local citizens not required to vote (70 years and older), although such observations are "contaminated" by the problem of aging itself.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of uncommon data in any country and rarely analyzed in Argentina (for an exception see Canton 1986, 240)—information on occupation and age of voters and nonvoters among those obligated and not obligated to vote—we found that nonvoting increased slowly but steadily for all occupational categories since 1983. Abstention, though rather generalized, is more outstanding among non-mandatory voters (70+ years), particularly for the oldest age group within them (75+ years).

Both for those males under mandatory and non-mandatory voting, a pattern of class-oriented nonvoting clearly emerges when a simplified equation is considered: in a consistent way, the manual wage occupations have a positive impact on nonvoting, the nonmanuals, a negative one. As pointed out earlier, it was not always so; there have been times of high mobilization by populist regimes when the lower classes tended to vote more.

Argentina, its Federal District and its largest province, in spite of mandatory laws, shows a similar pattern of class bias to that of the industrialized countries although less marked. This tendency, however, does not question compulsory voting as a mechanism to promote “universal or near universal use of the right to vote,” as Lijphart claims.

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