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Abstention and Politicization in Nineteenth Century Spain: The Catalan Case

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Abstract: The present text analyses abstention in nineteenth century Spain, with the Catalan case as the object of study, as an evidence to express political opinion in contexts where the government had a great influence in the electoral results and liberty of opinion was not entirely guaranteed. With this perspective, the text aims to show that the electorate was not apathetic or indifferent, but self-conscious and politically mobilised. In consequence, and far from sustaining the dominance of patronage within elections, it thus contributes to the recent researches, which have renewed the interpretations on nineteenth-century politicisation from exploring different possibilities of being part of the political sphere. That is, taking abstention as an example which expressed electorate's political opinion, the author sustains this phenomenon can be read as an evidence of political mobilization and social and political engagement.

Keywords: Abstention – Politicization – Nineteenth century - Spain – Liberal Catalan districts

Introduction

In Spain, as in other European countries –mainly Mediterranean-, the historiographical analysis of the liberal politics of the nineteenth century has traditionally been associated to *clientelist* practices, especially during the Restoration period (1875–1923), but also to the preceding Isabel II's reign (1833-68). This phenomenon, when talking about its electoral dimension, can be defined as “the trade of votes and other types of partisan support in exchange for public divisible benefits”. (Piattoni 2001, 4). Thus, the political system has been characterised by the dominance of patrons, outstanding local elites or governments, which displayed a net of patronage, influences and favours. As a result, the electoral processes were an expression of these circumstances and they revealed the ascendancy of such actors. Therefore, a venal conception of the electorate was assumed: they were supposed to have no active role and to obey the indications received by those collectives.

This is the main explanation which had absorbed the traditional vision of the Spanish political model of the nineteenth century. Such perception was yet rooted by some contemporaries of the late nineteenth century, who also denounced its permanence as an obstacle to Europeanise or modernise Spain (Moreno Luzón 2007). Moreover, this model had been sustained by the most relevant Spanish historiographical works of the 1960s and 1970s and partially nuanced for later scholars' studies of the XX century. It has not yet been until the last decades when those interpretations have been renewed from the development of new investigation lines. For instance, other insights have come from the new perspectives applied in studying the electorate's politicization and political citizenship.

This article has the aim to deepen in such lines of research, focusing on the new outlooks of the electorate's politicization from analysing Catalans voters' behaviour during the nineteenth century. More specifically, the text will concentrate on the chronology, which include the consolidation of the liberal system in Spain during Isabel II's reign (1843-68). Methodologically, it will examine the general elections' dynamics in order to address abstention as an element which will evidence the politicization of the electorate. Far from being indifferent, in a context dominated by government, voters used abstention to express their political opinion. Catalan electorate had indeed an active role during electoral campaigns and such behaviour was comparable to other European countries of the epoch with liberal political systems.

First of all, the article will describe the main theoretical basis which had accompanied the traditional vision of the Spanish –and other European Mediterranean countries- political model of the nineteenth century, at least with permanence during the last decades of the twentieth century. This description contrasted with a European continental model, which was supposed to be identified with a politicized electorate and fairly political processes. Secondly, the article is going to proceed with the Spanish historiographical advances of the last decades in studying politics of the epoch. Finally, the behaviour of the Catalan electorate will be inspected, concentrating on abstention during Isabel II's reign. Those observances will be compared with other contemporary Spanish cases as well as with other European patterns of the time.

A Mediterranean Distinction in Nineteenth Century Politics?

One of the most influential authors of the 1960s and 1970s Spanish political historiography was Manuel Tuñón de Lara (1961, 1971). With his vision of the Restoration as a system identified by a homogenous oligarchical block of power, he

unified the differences between economic and political elites and offered as well a unique vision of the inner Spanish territorial and economic differences. From this perspective, he drew an inward-looking leading class, which sustained the dominant agricultural economic sector and avoided economic transformations. These sectors controlled both the political and the economic system. With this authority, Spain could not be political and economically modernised as other European countries did at that time.

Later on, especially along the 1970s, some other authors, such as Javier Tusell (1976) and José Varela Ortega (1977) among others, offered an alternative interpretation of the Spanish politics of the nineteenth century. On overall, they pleaded for a revision of Tuñón's positions, as they rejected the existence of a homogenous oligarchical block of power. Contrastingly, they differentiated the economic elites from the political ones and what was more important for the current argumentation, they advocated for a system in which the administration centralised the power. With other words, with such organisation governments controlled not only the executive, but also all Spanish political power, even in the local life. Therefore, they raised a system totally ruled by their desires with almost unnoticed dissidence. Accordingly, they neglected the role of local political elites as well as the impact of electors.

It is essential to bear in mind Varela's description of the political power, as he still sustains this point of view with a non-negligible influence on currently Spanish historiography. Some of the recently José Varela Ortega's works still assume a strong concentration of power in executive authority and a centralized and hierarchical public administration as the main characterisation of Spanish political nineteenth century life (Varela 1997; Varela and Medina 2000, 17-21). This organization, he sustains, enabled in countries such as Spain, Portugal or indeed France, political systems which had raised

little debates around the extension of the suffrage and paid more attention to the franchise's operations within electors and votes.

Although their contributions were also crucial to reject the uniqueness of the Spanish patronage relations' vision and therefore this phenomenon was seen as a more widespread and universal practice, these interpretations had indeed allowed during the last decades of the last century the emergence of a Mediterranean model in studying European political liberalism. Such organisation concerned the electoral model of the long nineteenth century, and particularly the last decades of this period. This liberal Mediterranean model could be identified in countries such as Spain, Portugal, Greece or Italy and was characterised by the dominance of bribery, relations of patronage and a clear interference of the governments in the elections, which presumed passive electorate (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984, 50-81). In other words, those were electoral systems, which had modernised late. They had to wait until the beginning of the twentieth century for diminishing these relations of government's dominance and welcomed mass politics, which supposed greater evidence in politicization of the population. It was then, when more social sectors were progressively involved in politics and the electorate partially challenged the government's meddling (Farelo Lopes 2011; Rubí 2013).

In opposition, it was described a European continental model, despite including as well the British case, likewise other countries such as France. In this case, those countries were progressively less dominated by those relations of clientele as the nineteenth century was ending. They revealed a modern electoral system which not only left increasingly aside the interference of the governments in the results, but also let to a much wider and earlier politicization of the population.

This distinction could also find approval from the basis of the theory of political modernization, developed mainly from the electoral studies. Such perspective has

associated the emergence of the franchise with the progressive evolution to democracy. In this way, the circumstances of every historical context were explained on condition that this future was inevitable. For this reason, it was achieved after some steps: the extension of census suffrage, the gradual standardization of franchise norms, the intensification of universal and equal citizenship rights, the achievement of the suffrage among all the population and the accomplishment of proportional representation (Romanelli 1998; Rokkan 1970).

In short, with this perspective of modernization universal suffrage was a sign of political modernization *per se*. Such perception has been encouraged by the linearity some countries showed in achieving universal manhood suffrage. On the one hand, that was the case of France, where the most important political debates around 1848 were already about the problems concerning universal suffrage, that is the way by which to extend or reduce the suffrage, whether with universal suffrage or modifying the circumscriptions. On the other hand, in England the electoral reforms of 1832, 1867 and 1887 offered an evolutionary model which extended the suffrage progressively and reformed the representative system. This model has supported the vision that democracy would be inevitable as the franchise was progressively expanded.

Dissimilarly, Mediterranean countries were supposed to show a less active path to democracy, delayed by the dominance of patronage relations and the alteration of the electoral results. Thus, when in Mediterranean countries the electorate was supposed to be unconcerned, in continental ones it was more politicised and mobilised. This perspective was built from the conception that patronage relations let political elites, and especially governments, control the electorate and, in consequence, the electoral results.

Such perspectives were boosted mainly during the 1970s and 1980s and persisted with nuances until the 1990s, but the essential fundamentals of this model have been revised

throughout the last decades. More details of the nuances arisen in response to these standpoints will be offered down below. All in all, it is relevant to highlight that this general overview, particularly concerning the supremacy of governments in controlling the results and assuming an indifferent role of the electorate, has not yet been definitively refused and it still has influence on not a few historiographical studies. Some Spanish authors accept the influence of the government as a superlative power which did not let any participation of the electorate, whose capacity to intervene in the process of election was inexistent (Núñez 2007). In this article it is sustained a more active role of the electorate, through revising other elements of political participation, such as the abstention. Although it is assumed governments displayed a strong net of resources to have an influence on the elections, it is believed there were possibilities to challenge its dominance.

New Perspectives of Approach to Nineteenth Century Politics

After all, such Mediterranean – Continental classification was a general model, which has been nuanced in the last decades in some different ways. First of all, the historiography has made notorious advances along the last decades in the study of citizenship, conceiving this area of research beyond the path to universal suffrage. Thus, assuming that not only the extension of the suffrage was a valid way towards political modernisation and a resource which facilitated people's mobilisation, but also highlighting citizenship as an opportunity to examine the different possibilities of being (an active) part of the political sphere. For instance, some authors have concentrated on the existent means to be involved in the social and political world despite not being capable of voting. An example of the fruitfulness of this approach would be Mark Knights' (2009) investigation on petitions

and addresses in early modern Britain or Diego Palacio's (2014) analysis of the petition right in nineteenth century Spanish Parliament.

From this standpoint, the recent scientific approaches to the condition of political citizenship have widened its perspectives of analysis showing that political activity did not end with the vote. Electors and non-electors struggled for the condition of citizens from other resources, such as taking part in local political committees or using the mentioned right of petition. Those approaches have been formulated thanks to some new research. As an example, a new line of investigation, which have thought about the condition of citizen on history and has defined its access from a civic liberty, which proportionated different ways of entrance. In other words, citizenship was not only a legal status which established the active citizens –electors- and the passive ones –non-electors-, but also a continued negotiation through which everyone could be citizen from an active participation in social and political environment (Pocock 1998; Skinner 2003; Pettit 2012; Tully 2009).

Therefore, it cannot be clearly differentiated a precocious model, which lead with determination towards democracy. Most recent investigations have shown the route to democracy was not so lineal and predetermined. It was a more complex process, not precisely straight forward. As an example, Robert Saunders (2011) argues that most of the MPs who took part of the British electoral reform of 1867 did not value the regulation as a way to achieve democracy. In other words, the objective to enlarge the franchise was not to achieve a more democratic system, but a way by which the electoral system was more popularised through the extension of the suffrage as well as maintaining the basis of the English representative system. That is, it was conceived as an instrument of prevention from a more democratised law and also as a way to reinforce the social system of property.

Secondly, it has to bear in mind that in mid-nineteenth century, while such debates of enlarging the suffrage were arose in France or Germany, where universal suffrage was conceded in 1848, within those countries a strict respect for the laws during the electoral processes had not yet rooted. Like Spain or Portugal, manipulations of the electoral processes were still wider used. Even Britain and France revealed at that time great indexes of bribery, corruption and relations of patronage. Not to mention the complex strategies of electoral agents who bought votes promising presents, loans or any kind of rewards (Gash 1977; Tudesq 1985).

For instance, the French governments took profit from different mechanisms to have an influence on the electoral results. The mobilisation of public servants, especially the prefects, was a key issue to facilitate the election of deputies who were loyal to the government (Price 2001, 95-103). Those public servants put pressure on the mayors of their departments through visits, promises of promotion or jobs, to facilitate the election of the official candidates. All in all, not all the prefects participated so decidedly in the electoral campaign and they did not always follow the instructions of the governments (Collingham 1988, 76). It was definitively from the French Third Republic (1870-1940) onwards that the prefects were consolidated as professional and qualified public servants, although they could also keep their activity as political agents (Voilliot 2005). Governments therefore still used different strategies to favour their candidates, in spite of the refusal of some public servants to cooperate with them (Anceau 2002).

Thirdly, phenomena such as patronage relations have been considered not only as a unidirectional action. In other words, such connections were not only an imposition of elites. They were in fact a much more complex reality, which implied negotiation between the central governments and the local elites (Carasa 1997, 14). Within the Spanish historiography, for instance, from the 1990s onwards local studies have increased

substantially, first focusing mainly on a descriptive analysis of the elections, but in the last centuries giving nuances to the relations between local elites and central governments (Calatayud, Millán, and Romeo 2009; Inarejos 2008). They have showed how local politicians took also advantage from such relations with a partial autonomous position. That is, they did not always obey the instructions received from the government. Of course, they could do it and they made it, but at the same time they played their own role in relation to the local particularities and sometimes challenged the governments' will.

Political mobilisation existed beyond the control of the governments, which had to negotiate with local elites. Thus, it emerged a space of political negotiation between actors in different levels of power and consequently politics at that time must be seen as a multidirectional terrain with different actors meddled (Zurita 2009). In this sense, another renewed line of research comes mainly from the agrarian history, in terms of finishing with the vision of a demobilized electorate within rural districts. Not only relevant advances have been done in Spain in this direction, but also the historiography in comparative transnational studies have shown how rural areas could be as political mobilized as other urban zones (Stockinger 2012).

For all these reasons, it is still currently difficult to sustain a clear differentiation in liberal politics of the nineteenth century between a Mediterranean model and a Continental one. Boundaries between those schemes have progressively diminished and divisions have increasingly been inadequate when analysing electoral behaviour at that time. Patronage and bribery were widespread practices among countries traditionally seen as politically differentiated during the liberal epoch. At the same time, with the nuances the concept of political citizenship has acquired the last decades after revising a lineal model towards democracy, the attitude of the electorate has also been reread.

In other words, resources and behaviours of the electorate within different liberal countries have emerged as (possible) shared patterns of politicization despite its obvious differences according to every country and period. For instance, an element considered as an evidence of this political engagement is the study of the way the electorate used the vote. A new interdisciplinary line of research has put emphasis on the vote as a social ritual, which was built from a conscious and compromised attitude (Ihl 2000; Déloye and Ihl 2008).

In this regard, this article is going to focus on abstention as another possible element of study, which can reveal electoral mobilization. Beyond the vote, other authors have previously understood abstention as another possible resource for the electorate to show their opinion, especially in contexts where liberty of expression was not entirely guaranteed. For instance, Frank O’Gorman (1989, 112), analysing the uncontested elections in liberal Britain, affirms that rejection was showed in uncontested elections, where governments used to control the situation, through abstention. Also agree with him other authors who analyse elections in liberal Spain. As an example, Pedro Díaz (1998, 159-160) sees in abstention a form of protest or disenchantment towards the centralized system imposed by liberal moderates.

Here we also understand abstention as a way to express political opinion in contexts of lack of a total liberty. Concretely, the article will focus on the general elections within Catalan circumscriptions during Isabel II’s reign (1843-68). The main aim is to analyse abstention along this period as an element of electoral mobilization, comparing its use with other Spanish circumscriptions of that time as well as with other international cases of the epoch.

General elections during Isabel II’s Reign

During the major part of Isabel II's reign general elections were ruled by the 1846 electoral law, which was elaborated after the arrival of Moderate Party in the government (1843-44). Then it began a decade regarded for repression and exclusiveness of that formation. This context was propitiated by the Constitution of 1845 –not renewed until 1869- and the electoral law of 1846 –revoked momentarily between 1854 and 1856, when the progressive liberals were in power, and renewed with a new law in 1865. With 1846's law less than 100,000 people could vote, a very prominent reduction as the last electoral census gave the right to vote to over 600,000 electors. Only the 0.8% of the Spanish population had the capacity to elect.

Moreover, with this law the vote was formally private, but public in the end, as electors had to write the name of the candidate chosen at sight of the president and the members of the polling station. At the same time, mayors of the major cities of every electoral district were the presidents of the polling stations and they were designated by civil governors, who were as well accountable to the minister of the interior. In other words, the candidates of the government had more facilities to get elected rather than the opposition, as their agents monitored the polling stations. It is true that political parties at that time did not have stable organizations. They implied alliances with similar political positions, sometimes divided by personalities. In any case, one can identify dissimilar ideological tendencies.

So, if the Moderate Party ruled the power, the Progressive Party excluded itself from the political competition during the first years of the Moderate Decade and when their political supporters decided to take part again in the elections -from 1846 on- the majority found serious difficulties to get elected, as moderate governments obstructed their candidacies. Besides, part of them were exiled or confined, especially the radical ones. In fact, the republicans and the democrats –at the end of the decade appeared as a

political party, the Democratic Party- suffered from the same ostracism. Therefore, moderate governments and later on Liberal Union ones at the last years of Isabel II's reign (between 1858 and 1863 and between 1865 and 1866) obtained broadly parliamentary majorities.

As a result of this dominance, general elections of 1850 had more than 300 out of 349 deputies identified as moderate ministerial, who supported the government (Cánovas 1982, 135; Araque 2008, 404). That was so usual that most moderate governments of the time had almost hegemonic dominions within the parliament. More than 60% of the deputies of the lower house usually supported them. The same dynamics occurred during Liberal Union's governments. More than two thirds of the Parliamentary chairs were in favour of that party. For instance, in 1858's general elections more than 250 out of 349 deputies could have supported the government of Leopoldo O'Donnell (Araque 2008, 540).

Along Isabel II's reign such trends only changed partially during the Progressive Biennium (1854-56), when general elections were fairer and such governmental hegemonies did not occur.

Consequently, during those decades it was not unusual, but frequent, that most districts had only a candidacy. That is, elections were uncontested. As Raffaele Romanelli states, uncontested elections were very common in the first years of nineteenth century's liberal Europe. Following his explanation, in traditional societies elections were a way to make evident the social asymmetries. For this reason, most of electoral laws of the epoch did not regulate the presentation of candidacies in the electoral campaigns (Romanelli 1997, 38). Elections were then understood as an expression of the social

structure and they validated such organization, which gave social supremacy to propriety. In fact, candidates hoped to be proposed by electors as recognition of their outstanding position within society (Zurita 2007).

In Spain, uncontested elections were not infrequent during Isabel II's reign. In the province of Alacant, the general elections of the Moderate Decade –the ones between 1846 and 1853- were developed with a third of uncontested elections (Díaz 1997, 220, 223, 230 and 238). Uncontested elections were even more significant in the province of Córdoba (Andalucía). All general elections developed with the electoral law of 1846 (in 1846, 1850, 1851, 1853, 1857, 1858 and 1863) nearly half of the districts (about 46%) had uncontested elections (Aguilar 1991, 209-210, 228-229, 243-244, 261-262, 300-301, 320 and 339-340). Another similar example can be found in Castilla-La Mancha provinces, where the general elections between 1857 and 1864 nearly half of the districts had uncontested elections: from the 30% of 1857 to the maximum of 70% in 1864 (Inarejos 2008, 118-121, 132-135, 145-148 and 152-155).

These circumstances were not of the exclusivity of Spain. For instance, in English and Welsh constituencies of the first third of the nineteenth century contested elections did not achieve the majority in general elections. Such indexes raised in mid-nineteenth century, in a similar way as in Spain. Contested seats in general elections raised to 60% in 1852, did not achieve 50% in 1857 and 1859, returned to 53% in 1865 and arrived at 70% in 1868. Thereafter, they never dropped below 70% (O'Gorman 1989, 108-117).

This context introduces the political context in which some Spanish historiography has tended to neglect the influence of the electorate and leave all the control of the electoral decisions to the governments. Was there not any possibility for the electorate to express their opinion?

Abstention and modernisation: two sides of the same coin?

Assuming the prevalence of the government, this situation of electorates' meaningless can be nuanced. As it has been explained, in the opinion of Frank O'Gorman (1989, 112), uncontested elections meant conformity from the electorate, but this situation did not necessarily implied apathy. On the contrary, the author sustains disdained in a situation of government's dominance appeared especially through abstention. He stands contested elections emerged with modernisation of politics when people were not reluctant to push their political differences to the point of formally contesting an election. The idea of difference was yet a consequence of politicization; with a progressive strengthen of parties' structures.

On the one hand, it seems to be true that a strengthen of parties' structures facilitated higher politicization and, thus, also abstention. For instance, in Spain Progressive Party decided not to take part of general elections in 1863, as their politicians considered elections were not fair enough and progressive liberal founded serious difficulties to be elected. Moreover, the queen Isabel II did not trust with them to lead the government during her reign. So, they abstained from that moment on and progressive electors followed these instructions despite some of them wanted to vote. For instance, the electors of Figueres (Girona) were keen to participate and they were persuaded to win the elections, but they preferred to obey the mandate of the party as "today, the policy of withdrawal is the one that has been agreed upon by our leaders, and this policy is the one that [...] we recommend to follow our colleagues, all the liberals of this district" (*El Clamor Público* October 1 1863, 1). So, progressives tended to use abstention as a way to protest against the exclusivity of the Political System, and during the last years of Isabel II's reign a significant part of them conspired and organised themselves in order to carry out coup attempts. In 1868 they succeeded.

On the other hand, we can find abstention in modern societies such as the Catalan districts during Isabel II's reign. It was not only that uncontested elections were uncommon among its electoral circumscriptions –between 1846 and 1853, on average more than 92% of the districts had contested elections-, but also that abstention always raised the most important indexes within the whole state (Luján 2018, 142-143). The Catalan districts had traditionally showed a wide and diverse range of political sensibilities. Along the Triennium between 1840 and 1843 radical and advanced liberalism expressed their strength, especially in the surroundings of Barcelona. Such tendencies had a non-negligent weight within the Catalan districts, achieving some representatives in the lower house. Furthermore, from the decade of the 1830s on, the Catalan region experienced the outset of the first industrial revolution until becoming a powerful economic cluster and one of the eight major European industrial regions (Pounds 1985), especially in the surroundings of Barcelona.

With the repression of the Moderate Party, those radical and advanced sectors of liberalism could neither express with liberty nor hardly obtained representation in the parliamentary chambers, particularly between 1844 and 1846 and now again during the last years of Isabel II's reign, when Progressive Party rejected again to take part in general elections, as we have seen. Therefore, one possibility the electorate had to express disagreement with this situation was through abstention. Taking into account this context, it was not unusual a significant part of the Catalan electorate abstained in general elections. The following statistical tables show it perfectly:

[Tables 1 and 2 near here]

These tables show a tendency, by which the participation in general elections within the Catalan districts was almost always underneath the Spanish average. Those low percentages, for instance in 1844, were only found in Balearic Islands (almost 36%) and within the Basque provinces, where only Bizkaia reached 48%, whereas Araba and Gipuzkoa did not reached 22% (Araque 2008, 355-357). However, despite this constant trend, the distance between those levels tended to be progressively reduced, especially after 1846's general election and between 1857 and 1858. During those periods, the distance diminished significantly or even in 1857's general election Catalan voters participated more than the Spanish average. Maybe these circumstances could be explained by the possibilities different political sensibilities had to obtain representation. We will return to this immediately.

Before it, we will finish with the analysis of the tables. From 1846 onwards, progressive candidatures took part of the elections and in Catalan districts obtained 10 out of 30 deputies. Indeed in 1851 three democrats were elected in the Catalan districts, when only seven were chosen in the whole of Spain. The general elections of 1854, with the Progressive Party in the government after the revolution of June and July have been considered the fairest elections during Isabel II's reign (Burdíel 2010, 353). Thus, if abstention increased in Catalan districts, one explanation could be found in the fact that the electorate more identified with the Moderate Party did not trust with the project of the government of the Liberal Union and the moderate sectors of the Progressive Party (Fuster 2013).

Between 1857 and 1858 participation augmented at the highest rates, probably because of the renewed project of the Liberal Union, with which important moderate and progressive Catalan sectors could be identified, as these cabinets initially assumed legislative reforms in municipal and provincial laws with decentralised policies. As these

promises were not accomplished (De Riquer 2001, 139-147), moderate Catalan sectors were progressively detached from those governments, as well as Progressive and advanced and radical sectors, which realised they were constantly disregarded as governmental options. For these reasons abstention increased again especially after 1864's elections.

Yet, these evidences are strong enough to link abstention only with modern societies with strong political parties? Or even, did abstention not emerge as a consequence of dominant governments' constrictions so as to prevent the opposition to vote?

In fact, it was not strange in 19th century Spanish elections that died electors voted or that attendance was deliberately manipulated, so the turnout was not in a few occasions higher than it really should be. For example, the candidate Abella marquis wrote to his colleague Ignasi Maria Sullà after the general elections of 1844 to highlight the falsehood of the results in the province of Lleida, and particularly at some polling stations: "But what you should not forget whatsoever is this scale of votes received by Alos [another candidate elected] is nothing but a farce. The polling stations of Balaguer and Lleida have given him more than a thousand votes which have not been issued". (Letter from Abella marquis to Ignasi Maria Sullà, Lleida, September 15 1844, letter 72, Documentation Ignasi María Sullà, Former House Sullà from Tremp' Fond, Comarcal Archive of Pallars Jussà, Tremp).

Moreover, abstention could indeed appear because of governments' threats to electors of the opposition. For instance, ministerial supporters of the Moderate Party blocked the polling station in Berja (Almería) in 1857 so as to avoid other electors to vote (Araque 2008, 504). Similar examples can be found in the Catalan districts. For instance, in 1847's elections in the fourth section of Barcelona, as the designated persons who had

to constitute the polling station of the first section did not appear, before other members were designated, the authorities decided to close it (*Diario de Barcelona* May 15 1847) and, thus, to force the electors not to vote and probably favoured its candidate.

If we fix the look to these acts, an apathetic electorate can be drawn, but only from a paternalistic perspective. As it has been reasoned in the introduction of this text, the electorate was not always manipulated and so electoral processes cannot be seen only from a unidirectional perspective. That is, they cannot only be seen from government's decision, but also it has to take into account the relevance of the electorate, as well as local elites decisions. The liberal general elections were a social construction, a social process where different actors were involved and decisions were also negotiated.

Let us have a look to the general elections of 1845 in the province of Barcelona. The government send a delegate, the military Félix María Messina, who had to organise a ministerial candidature with him leading it. The government wanted to add to the list the also military Carles Llauder, who had been deputy since 1844 and until then. However, the political head of the province of Barcelona dissuaded Messina, because of the "antipathy" created by Llauder among supporters of the government (Letter from Félix María Messina to Ramón María Narvaéz, Barcelona, November 13 1845, Volume 2 65 – 9/8126 – Piece 23, Ramón María Narvaéz Fond, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid). Therefore, other candidates were searched and found by Messina, who thus had negotiated with local elites this list.

Consequently, it seems general elections were much more complex than a unidirectional process leaded by the government. At the same time, abstention was possibly not only a political expression, which just appeared with the modernization of the society, but also a multifaceted means with dissimilar expressions according to the political context and especially according to its nature. In other words, abstention as an

imposition of the government might have neglected political opinions, but abstention used by electors could imply a political will. We sustain it immediately, focusing on this active role of the electorate through abstention.

Abstention as a way to express electorate's political opinion

In analysing the turnout of the English electorate in the previous elections of 1832's reform, and following with Frank O'Gorman (1989, 186-191), he concludes participation were not higher when elections turned out to be excitingly partisan, in comparison with others during quiet years. But at the same time, he assumes abstention could be regarded in many cases as an act of political will within a progressively partisan electorate. In this regard, not only Catalan electorate, but in most Spanish electoral districts of mid-nineteenth century, abstention was used against uncontested elections, contexts of excessive legislative control or processes dominated by a single ideological candidate, which excluded other political sensibilities to be emerged (Cases 1984). In other words, in non-inclusive political systems, which were not capable of incorporate different ideological sensibilities, abstention appeared as an instrument of protest within a progressively politicised society and not necessarily in industrialised regions.

For instance, Pedro Díaz (1998, 159-160) understands abstention as a way to protest. The author detects abstention in some municipal elections in the province of Alacant during the Moderated Decade and he concludes it was an instrument of protest or disenchantment with the centralized system imposed by the moderates, including among them moderates of the province of Alacant. For this reason, although moderate governments attempted to repress abstention and promote turnout, they were not always successful as this example suggest as well as others in the Catalan districts.

The Spanish general elections of 1844 were developed in a context of repression against progressive and advanced liberal. Moderates repressed them and avoid them to be elected. In fact, only around 5 out of 248 deputies were not moderate (Cánovas 1982, 42). That was the reason why not only some electors abstained, but also some polling stations were not constituted. For instance, that was the case of Reus (Tarragona), traditionally linked to progressives. In fact, only 22 from 32 polling stations were constituted in the province of Tarragona at that time. Certain journalists assigned such behaviour to “apathy”, as electors were tired of “repeated elections” -three in a year and a half-, “the same vices or defects” in the elections remained and people found no “hope of a quick improvement” of their everyday lives (*Diario de Barcelona* September 9 1844). Reviewing this opinion, more than talking of apathy of the electorate, one think of a way to show disagreement with the situation.

In general, abstention probably appeared as a response of the electorate to the electoral manoeuvres of the government. The electorate did not participate when the elections had already been decided before they took place. This political resistance can be illustrated with some examples, following with the mentioned partial election of 1847 in the district of Saint Paul (Barcelona). The moderate Félix María Messina had the support of the government and its authorities in the territory. As we have seen, the political chief closed the polling station of the first section, despite the objections of the electorate (*Diario de Barcelona* May 15 1847). Because of this discouraging situation, the electorate abstained from voting and some candidacies were dismantled. It was the case of Jerónimo Mereño, which had the support of the industrial corporations (*Diario de Barcelona* May 13 1847), and other candidates who did not obtain any vote, such as Esteban Sayró, Jacint Fèlix Domènech or Joaquín de Loresecha (Ollé 2007, 330; *Diario de Barcelona* May 10 1847). The participation spoke by itself: 60 voters from 797 electors

and 47 suffrages were for Messina. The rest of the candidates only obtained from one to four votes (Archive of the Parliament of Spain, Electoral Fond, Madrid).

Thus, abstention appeared as a consequence of electorate's dissatisfaction; as an instrument of complaint and to express political opinion in the end. Let us have a look at the French Second Empire (1852-1870). The first legislative elections showed weakness in competition because of the executive's interference (Anceau 2002), but the absence of electoral struggle did not mean voters' apathy. Contrarily it showed their objection. Roger Price (2001, 107-108) indicates large-scale abstention could act with so damage to the French regime's legitimacy as political opposition. Indeed, denunciations against electoral fraud gained visibility among the years. In the end, abstention as denunciations as well acted as resources of opposition to governments' intervention in elections.

On the contrary, when candidates of different political tendencies could fight with guarantees for a chair in the parliament, the turnout tended to rise. An example of these circumstances can be found in the general elections of 1851. At the four districts of the city of Barcelona a coalition between the Progressive Party and the Democratic Party was arranged and competed with moderates, and indeed won them. At the four districts the participation was over 40 per cent, the higher index in general elections between 1843 and 1856 (Fuster 2006, 251). With more evidence, this reality is revealed at the second district of the city, traditionally dominated by moderates. The moderate Tomàs Illa was elected in 1846 with 68 votes (18.2% of participation) and in 1850 for 81 votes (12.6% of participation). In contrast, in 1851 he only obtained one vote and the other moderate candidate of the district, Joaquim Maria de Gispert, 122. The democate Ildefons Cerdà won with 145 votes, with a participation of the 45% of the electorate.

Another example can be found in the previous case of Reus (Tarragona), where the turnout raised when electoral dispute appeared. If in 1846 general elections the chair

was participated between a progressive liberal -Pere Sardà- and a moderate liberal -Pere Martí-, with a turnout over 60%, in 1851 it dropped below 29% as only the same progressive attended the elections (See Electoral Acts of Reus, 1846 and 1851, Archive of the Parliament of Spain, Electoral Fond, Madrid). According to these examples, it may be possible that with a struggle between different ideological politicians, the turnout increased. Enrique Aguilar (1991: 209), for instance, reach the same conclusion when analyzing 1846 general elections in Cordoba. He detects higher turnout where different candidates fought for a chair.

In brief, these examples have indicated low participation appeared in Catalan districts when the electorate did not have the opportunity to choose candidates from different ideological tendencies, and therefore, elections did not reveal the diverse ideological profile of the Catalan society. When the electorate did not use to have guarantees to express with liberty, a not negligent part of the voters abstained. Therefore, when these different tendencies could compete, the electorate was more mobilised and the participation increased. Thus, low turnout should be understood not as an evidence of apathy of the electorate, but as an indication of dissatisfaction and political mobilization in liberal political contexts of repression and with lack of liberty.

Conclusions

The present article has analysed politicisation in liberal nineteenth century Spain, and more concretely within the Catalan districts. Firstly, the text has showed how until recently a venal conception of the electorate was assumed. The dominance of a line of research, which presumed strong central governments and passive electorate enabled and in a certain way still allows such perspective, especially but not only in Spain. Indeed, from this perspective some authors sustained a Mediterranean model on politics, by which

Mediterranean countries modernised late and thus presented during the nineteenth century indifferent voters. On the contrary, a Continental model was supposed to include countries, which displayed earlier compromised electorate.

More recently, new literature on politicisation has nuanced these perspectives, showing that differences between countries were not so pronounced, likewise the way towards democracy was not so straightforward as some authors had previously assumed. According to this, boundaries have progressively diminished and divisions have increasingly been inadequate when analysing electoral behaviour at that time. Therefore, it is possible to analyse some elements as possible shared patterns of politicization, despite the inner differences. This article has focused on abstention.

The text has tried to challenge O’Gorman’s theory, by which acts of contesting an election, such as abstention, are understood as a consequence of the modernisation of politics and a progressive strengthen of parties’ structures. The examples given of the Catalan districts have support this theory, but at the same time comparisons made with other Spanish examples, not necessarily industrialised -as Castilla La Mancha provinces or Alacant-, revealed the same trend. That is, abstention was used as an expression of political opinion by the electorate -as acts of protest or disenchantment- in politicised contexts where liberty was not guaranteed and governments tried to impose its will independently of the modernisation of society. It may be possible that the political context, I think, could have been more relevant to explain this politicised use of abstention rather than the extent a society was or not modernised.

At the same time, abstention was used by the electorate to show disconformity against the influence of the government in the elections or processes dominated by a single ideological candidate, which excluded other political sensibilities to be emerged. If the vote was then mostly not understood as a right, but as a trust in liberal political

contexts (Kahan 2003), abstention enabled voters to have a right: the right not to vote, which implied in the end to challenge the vision of politics which understood the vote as a trust and not as a right. Future investigations should give more emphasis to this line of research, not sufficiently studied, in order to revise the formulation of the vote as a trust, as this vision emerges as a result of the opinion of political elites and political parties, but it does not take into account electors and non-electors vision of liberal politics (Luján 2018).

On the contrary, when diverse ideological trends could emerge to dispute an election, the turnout tended to raise. These circumstances, as has been indicated, can be detected not only within the Catalan districts, but also throughout Spain too and in other European liberal countries. So, it was not a circumstance only linked to the Catalan political circumstances. These conditions support an interpretation which also challenges the theory by which modernisation of the Catalan economy and its political complexity enabled these circumstances. It may be possible that this circumstances facilitated the emergence, but they do not explain politicisation per se, as we have seen it in other rural contexts.

In brief, the use of abstention as a resource to show political opinion in nineteenth century liberal elections reveal a mobilised electorate, which was far from being neither apathetic nor passive. Voters used abstention to challenge governments, when they tried to control the results. For this reason, abstention it is seen in these political contexts as an expression of political opinion. With this behaviour electors in the end vindicated its right to have the liberty to choose a candidate, to vote.

Acknowledgements

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Tables

Table 1: Electoral participation in the general elections during the Moderate Decade (1843-54)

	1843	1844	1846	1850	1851	1853
Catalan average	30'2%	37'6%	48'1%	50%	56'3%	56'5%
Spanish average	56'9%	65'7%	65'2%	67%	69'5%	68'5%
Difference	-26'7%	-28'1%	-17'1%	-17%	-13'2%	-12%

Source: Luján, O. 2018. *Ni tan apáticos ni tan desmovilizados: La politización electoral en la Década Moderada (1843-1854). El caso de los distritos catalanes*. Valencia: PUV

Table 2: Electoral participation in the general elections during the last years of Isabel II's reign

	1854	1857	1858	1863	1864	1865	1867
Catalan average	44'87%	62'7%	63'9%	48'77%	49%	26'2%	34%
Spanish average	69'6%	61'1%	68'8%	60'4%	62'1%	53'4%	51'6%
Difference	-24'73%	+1,6%	-4,9%	-11,63%	-13'1%	-27'2%	-17'6%

Source: Araque, Natividad. 2008. *Las elecciones en el reinado de Isabel II: La Cámara Baja*.

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