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Review of Roberto Villa García, *La República en las urnas: el despertar de la democracia en España*

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Roberto Villa García. *La República en las urnas: el despertar de la democracia en España*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2011. 530 pp.

Roberto Villa García's *La república en las urnas* is a detailed study of (in his words) the first appearance of "mass democracy" in Spain: the elections of November 1933. The book is an exhaustively researched work on the background, campaign, and electoral process of a critical election in the history of the Spanish Second Republic, combining research from archives, official publications, newspapers, and personal memoirs and publications. In his analysis of the 1933 general elections, he particularly focuses on the structure of the electoral system and the development of propaganda techniques by the various political parties to attempt to best take advantage of it. 1933 represented a critical juncture point in Spanish electoral history, both because of the victory by the parties of the right (helping to accelerate the process of political polarization), but also because the election itself involved a massive expansion of the electorate, mostly due to the lowering of the voting age from 25 to 23 years of age and, more importantly, the concession of suffrage to Spanish women.

Throughout the book, but particularly during the early chapters, Villa García makes a central argument that Spanish democratic practice, rather than first arising after the abdication of Alfonso XIII, represented one of the "longest and most dense electoral traditions in the world" (495). Thus, it is implied, the collapse of the Second Republic was not due to any inherent unfamiliarity with democracy in the Spanish system, but to "exclusively political factors" (37). To the author, the history of the Second Republic (and Spanish electoral politics in general) is not one characterized by constant ruptures with the past but rather represents a long evolutionary process dating to the early nineteenth century. He argues that, in 1933, "the continuities with previous electoral campaigns were more common than the changes" (189).

La república en las urnas is at its strongest when it focuses on the machinery of the political process. Villa García explains, in detail, how changes in the voting regulations (such as the Ley Maura of 1907 or the Reform Law of 1933) subsequently changed the behavior of political parties. After 1933, with a system based on the totality of votes in a given district rather than proportional representation, Villa García argues that medium-sized parties were forced to seek pacts with extremists on the fringe in order to get enough votes to win seats in the Cortes (96-7). In each district, the first place party was to be allocated a large majority of the seats, even if it received only one more vote than the second place party, which would be given the rest as a small minority share, even if only one vote more was cast for it than the third place party, which would get nothing.

Thus, there was a heavy incentive for parties to concentrate their electoral effort on both districts which were contestable and to run in coalitions large enough to secure at least second place at the polls. Chapter 5, focused on the 1933 campaign itself, is of particular interest because of the detailed analysis of each of the major parties' propaganda strategies and methods: meetings, pamphlets, loudspeakers, posters, political banquets, mobile propaganda platforms on automobiles, and the like. It discusses at length each party's central campaign slogan, which groups it saw as its principal rivals, and how each party sought to alter its strategy to account for the participation of women in the election.

Villa García's study also, however, brings with it a narrowness of focus as a necessary consequence of the depth and detail of its analysis of the 1933 elections. While he cites the lack of a general political history of Spain during the Second Republic as the motivation behind his project, his narrow focus almost exclusively on the activities of parties and votes for one particular election (important though it was) tends to ignore factors that influenced the process, acceptance, and resistance to democracy that did not originate or manifest themselves in the realm of party politics. His charting of where votes were allocated is exhaustive, but his narrow focus on the results themselves at times is followed up by less thorough or convincing arguments as to *why* women (for example) voted the way they did.

In summation, Roberto Villa García's *La república en las urnas* represents a study worth reading for any scholar interested in the politics of the Second Republic. As a quantitative study, it also serves as a handy reference guide with its numerous tables and annexes that break down voting results by party, political affiliation, province, and candidate. In particular, his grasp of political structure and his clear analysis of the effect of legislative reform on political practice and behavior make the book a worthwhile read.

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