

Unidad de Políticas Comparadas (CSIC)

Working Paper 05-04

Screening before sanctioning. Elections and the republican tradition

Francisco Herreros

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)
Unidad de Políticas Comparadas

May 2005

Screening before sanctioning.
Elections and the republican tradition*

Francisco Herreros

(forthcoming *European Journal of Political Theory*)

Abstract. In modern political science, repeated elections are considered as the main mechanism of electoral accountability in democracies. More rarely, elections are considered as ways to select “good types” of politicians. In this article it is argued that historical republican authors interpreted elections in this last sense. They view elections as a means to select what they often called the “natural aristocracy”, virtuous political leaders that would pursue the common good. This argument is presented in three steps. First, it is claimed that republican authors did not consider retrospective accountability as one of the goals of electoral processes. Second, I present some evidence concerning the distinction in republican authors between two types of politicians, “good” and “bad”. And, finally, I present some republican arguments about how elections could serve as a device for selecting the “good” politicians.

* I wish to thank Henar Criado, the participants in the panel “The (In) Compatibility of Democracy and Republicanism”, APSA 100th Annual Meeting (Chicago, September 4, 2004) and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments.

Screening before sanctioning. Elections and the republican tradition

1. Introduction.

In democratic theory, elections have traditionally been considered as a mechanism of accountability, a sanctioning device to induce politicians to do what voters want.¹ This view of elections as instruments of accountability faces some important problems. Perhaps the most cited in the literature is the asymmetries in information between voters and politicians. It is a well-proven fact in political science that most voters do not pay much attention to politics.² Given that voters do not have enough information about the government's performance, they cannot make a retrospective evaluation of that performance at the end of the term and, therefore, the government lacks the adequate incentive to act in the interest of the voters.

An alternative to considering elections as instruments of accountability is to consider them as a mechanism to select "good types", that is, politicians that will pursue the interests of their constituents. This conceptualization of elections as a selection process has been advanced by Fearon.³ In this paper, I will argue that republican authors portrayed elections precisely in this way, as a mechanism for the selection of good types, whom they usually called "natural aristocracy". His view of representation was a combination of screening devices in order to identify virtuous politicians that will pursue the common good of the Republic, and sanctioning devices to maintain the politician virtuous while in office. But they did not consider, except in rare occasions, elections as mechanisms of retrospective accountability of the politicians' performance.

I will structure the paper as follows. In section two, I will present the two models of elections: as mechanisms of accountability and as mechanisms to select good types.

¹ John Ferejohn (1986) "Incumbent Performance and Electoral Control", *Public Choice* 50: 5-25; Morris P. Fiorina (1981) *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Bernard Manin (1997) *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

² P. E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" in D. E. Apter (ed) (1964) *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press; Robert C. Luskin (1987) "Measuring Political Sophistication", *American Journal of Political Science* 31: 856-99

³ James D. Fearon, "Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance" in Przeworski, Manin and Stokes (eds) (1999) *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In section three, I will argue that republican authors did not consider elections as mechanisms of accountability. In sections four and five, I will present the argument that republicans considered elections as a way to select good types of politicians.

2. The limits of electoral accountability

The relation between representatives and constituents can be pictured using an agency model. In this agency model, the citizens are the principal and the representatives are their agents. As in all agency models, there are information asymmetries between principal and agent. Specifically, the agent has private information about the level of effort he has invested in the implementation of the policies, or about the foreseeable consequences of different courses of policies, or both. The principal wants to make his agent accountable for his behavior and, according to most political scientists, the main mechanism of accountability is repeated elections. In elections, the principal makes a retrospective evaluation of his agent's behavior. If elections are repeated and politicians have an interest in remaining in power, they will fulfill the voters' interests.⁴ The problem with this mechanism of accountability is that the threat of an unfavorable evaluation is an adequate incentive for the contract between agent and principal only if the principal has enough information about the behavior of his agent and it is mostly assumed that voters do not have enough information about the policy process.⁵ Among other things, it has been claimed that citizens do not have a consistent understanding of ideological abstractions⁶, that they are incapable of recognizing the names of their elected representatives⁷ or even that they are incapable of organizing political beliefs within a coherent framework.⁸ Although there are probably huge differences between the levels of political information of different groups of

⁴ V. O. Key (1966) *The Responsible Electorate*. New York: Vintage Books; Ferejohn (n. 1); Manin (n. 1)

⁵ Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski and Susan Stokes, "Elections and Representation" in Przeworski, Manin and Stokes (eds) (1999) *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; John Ferejohn, "Accountability and Authority: Toward a Theory of Political Accountability", in Przeworski, Manin and Stokes (eds) (1999) *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁶ Converse (n. 2)

⁷ G. C. Jacobson (1992) *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: HarperCollins.

⁸ Luskin (n. 2)

individuals, it is consistently demonstrated that only a small minority of the public pays attention to politics and is reasonably well informed about politicians and political issues.⁹ In fact, it is often assumed that this lack of information is, to a great extent, rational: the investment in gathering and processing political information is costly and the payoffs of this investment are uncertain (given the low probability that the formation of well-founded political opinions by the citizen will have any impact in real policies).¹⁰ Besides this problem of asymmetric information between representatives and constituents, there are another two limits to electoral accountability: electoral heterogeneity makes it possible for officials to play off some voters against others to undermine their accountability to anyone and, given that electoral accountability operates periodically, officials can also avoid electoral responsibility for particular actions by grouping unpopular actions with popular ones.¹¹

We have, then, an agent model where the principal apparently has no incentives to invest in information about his agent's behavior and, as a consequence, the agent has no incentives to fulfill the interests of the principal.

Given the problems of elections as tools to make politicians accountable, Fearon has proposed to see elections, instead, as a means to select "good types".¹² As Fearon puts it "there is no logical reason why elections must be understood as a part of a relationship of accountability or agency."¹³ For example, a group of people may understand elections as a means of selecting or conferring honor on the best or most distinguished person". This theory is based on assumptions about electors' behavior completely different from the assumptions of the retrospective theory of elections as

⁹ John R. Zaller (1992) *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 16

¹⁰ Samuel Popkin (1991) *The Reasoning Voter. Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 10

¹¹ Ferejohn (n. 5), p. 132

¹² Fearon (n. 3). Fearon's model of elections as a selection device has been related by Jane Mansbridge ((2003) "Rethinking Representation", *American Political Science Review* 97 (4): 515-528, p. 521) to what she calls "gyroscopic representation", a model of representation in which voters select representatives who can be expected to perform in ways the voter approves, as, for example, a person of integrity with a commitment to the public good. It seems that the standard interpretation of elections as a device for retrospective accountability is more accurately associated with what Mansbridge calls "promissory representation". This would be another difference between Fearon's model and the standard accountability model of elections. While this is interesting, in this paper I will not deal explicitly with the model of representation associated to each interpretation of elections.

¹³ Fearon (n. 3), p. 57

mechanisms of accountability. First, accountability theories implicitly assume that there are no differences in the competence and integrity of politicians. However, politicians do differ in their competence or integrity. On the one hand, a great part of the debate in a campaign is referred neither to the content of the future policies nor to the performance of the government but to the personal attributes of the candidates. The parties spend many efforts in devaluating with ethical accusations of corruption or dishonesty the candidate of the competing party. On the other hand, the electors put a high value on candidates' honesty and principles. Second, accountability models also assume that citizens believe that they can evaluate the government for its performance, that is, that citizens can interpret whether government policies are implemented in their behalf. These two assumptions, as we have said, are not very realistic. If we take into account the information problems of citizens to interpret the consequences of government's policies and the differences in the politicians' types, it is more probable that citizens understand the vote as a means of selecting good politicians rather than of punishing governments for a bad past performance.

According to Fearon "good types" are those politicians who share electors' interests, have moral integrity and are competent.¹⁴ To distinguish "good types" from "bad types" citizens can use a variety of signals. For instance, citizens' welfare could be a relevant signal for electors of the competence of the government they have. Non policy cues about the character of the politicians are also relevant pieces of information for the selection model. In this sense, it could be argued that the fulfillment of electoral promises can be an informative signal of politicians' credibility. In the theories based on the prospective behavior of electors, promises were a source of information for the future policies of the government. In Fearon's view, the fulfillment of promises is also important but as a signal of government honesty. Credibility is one of the variables that citizens use to select their governments. For this reason, a switch, for example, from popular catch-all policies during campaign to hard economic adjustment when in office can damage governments.

In the rest of this paper, I will argue that republican authors considered elections as a form of selecting "good types", much in line with Fearon's arguments, instead of as a way to make government accountable. By republican authors, I mean a tradition in political theory that ranges from Cicero in the Roman Republic, the civic humanist of

¹⁴ Fearon (n. 3), p. 59

the Renaissance in Italy (especially Machiavelli), James Harrington and his *Commonwealth of Oceana* in the seventeenth century to some other authors in the eighteenth century, including most prominently Montesquieu in France, the radical Whigs in England and the American revolutionaries.¹⁵ These authors had in common a similar idea of freedom, most famously depicted by Pettit as “freedom as non-domination”, and a similar concern for the common good as the main goal of the political process. Nevertheless, there are important differences among them in issues related to the role of government or the extent of citizen’s participation in the polity. These differences had often led to distinguish between two strands of republicanism, labeled as conservative and democratic, or, probably more accurately, a tradition that emphasizes participation in self-government and a second tradition focused in the rule of law as the basis of individual freedom.¹⁶ As we will see in the next sections, the existence of at least these two strands in the classical republican thought is also reflected in differences in the interpretation of elections. Authors of the, say, “conservative” strand, like Cicero, Guicciardini or Hamilton differed from authors of the “democratic” or “participatory” strand in their views about the capacity of the people to select good politicians or about the probability of virtue among political representatives. However, the idea that I will try to develop in this paper is that all of them considered elections as a selection device instead than a mechanism for retrospective accountability. And, although elections in Republican Rome were different in many important points from elections in the American Republic or even the Italian city-republics of the Renaissance, I think that some aspects of elections, specifically their function as selection device or as mechanism of accountability, are sufficiently general to made intelligible a discussion, say, between Cicero’s and Guicciardini’s views about these specific aspects of elections.

I will present the idea that these authors viewed elections mainly as a mechanism to select “good types” in three steps. First, I will sustain that republican authors rarely considered elections as a mechanism of accountability. Instead, they considered other ways to control the government. Second, I will show that these authors considered elections as a way of selecting good types, or, as they usually said, to select the “natural

¹⁵ Philip Pettit (1997) *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 5-6

¹⁶ Iseult Honohan (2002) *Civic Republicanism*. New York: Routledge, p.40.

aristocracy”. Third, I will present some of the mechanisms presented by these authors in order to explain how this “natural aristocracy” could be selected by the people.

3. Republicanism, accountability and the selection of good types

Republican authors, from Cicero to the Founders of the American Republic, were obsessed with the problem of how to assure that governments would respect the common good of the *res publica*, how to avoid arbitrary power. They advanced various solutions to this problem. Nearly none of them were related with the view of repeated elections as mechanisms of accountability. This was not because elections were not a feature of the political communities theorized by these authors. As Bernard Manin has shown, selection by lot of political representatives was very common in democratic Athens, the Roman Republic and the Italian city-republics, but elections were by no means absent in the political process.¹⁷ In Athens, selection by lot was widespread, but, nonetheless, some magistracies were filled by election. In *Politics*, Aristotle considered selection by lot as a feature of democratic government, but conceded that certain magistracies, those that required special capabilities, could be elective.¹⁸ Actually, around 100 magistracies were elective in Athens, while the remaining 600, plus the Council of Five Hundred, were selected by lot.¹⁹ In Rome most magistracies were elective.²⁰ In the Italian city-republics, the members of the City Council and other magistracies were selected both by lot and by election.²¹ In Florence, for example, the selection of the highest offices, including membership in the *Signoria* after the Revolution of 1494, and, especially, after the law of 31 May of 1499, was a two-stages process that combined lot and a final vote in the Great Council.²² Some minor offices

¹⁷ Manin (n. 1)

¹⁸ Aristotle (1997) *Política*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 1317b. Translators: Julián Marías and María Araújo

¹⁹ Mogens Herman Hansen (1999) *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, pp. 152, 160, 233

²⁰ Andrew Lintott (1999) *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 95

²¹ Daniel. Waley (1988) *The Italian City-Republics*. London and New York: Longman, p. 37

²² H. C. Butters (1985) *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence. 1502-1519*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 34

were filled by majority vote in the Great Council.²³ The writers of what Skinner²⁴ calls the “neo roman” tradition in sixteenth-century England, including most prominently James Harrington, explicitly excluded lot as a means to select public officials, considering instead elections. Finally, the American revolutionaries never considered selection by lot, but elections, as the means to select the government. Nevertheless, elections were not generally considered mechanisms to make politicians accountable. There are only a few examples of this in the republican tradition. In his *Discorso di Logrogno*, Guicciardini says that if politicians know that the people reward those incumbents that have behaved correctly, this would be an incentive for good politicians and a restraint for bad ones.²⁵ Actually, it is not clear whether the rewards that Guicciardini had in mind were reelection or rather good reputation among the people, and there is not a further elaboration of this topic in Guicciardini’s *Discorso*. The clearest example among the republican tradition of the understanding of elections as mechanisms of accountability, to my knowledge, is James Madison.²⁶ In *Federalist* number 57 he explicitly considers repeated elections as a mechanism of accountability: “the House of Representatives is so constituted as to support in the members an habitual recollection of their dependence on the people (...) they will be compelled to anticipate the moment when their power is to cease, when their exercise of it is to be renewed, and when they must descend to the level from which they were raised”.²⁷ This idea was advanced also in *Federalist* number 52.²⁸

Actually, the republican tradition is usually associated to other mechanisms rather than to elections in order to avoid the danger of arbitrary power, factionalism or corruption. The theory of mixed government, the separation of powers and the theory of checks and balances are probably the most well-known institutional devices

²³ Felix Gilbert (1965) *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 18

²⁴ Quentin Skinner (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

²⁵ Francesco Guicciardini (1970) *Discorso di Logrogno* in *Opere di Francesco Guicciardini, Volume Primo*. Torino: Editrice Torinese, p. 262

²⁶ See David R. Weaver (1997) “Leadership, Locke and the Federalist”, *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (2): 420-446, p. 438

²⁷ James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay (1987) *The Federalist Papers*. London: Penguin, pp. 344-345

²⁸ Madison (n. 27), pp. 323-324

advanced by republican authors to control government. The theory of mixed government, in some ways the basis of the other two, was first elaborated in Athens to avoid the dangers of democracy, considered by Plato and Aristotle as the tyranny of the poor against the rich.²⁹ The distribution of functions among social orders (the one, the few and the many) would compel them to put aside their sectional interests and rule with an eye to the common good. The doctrine of checks and balances retained the idea of the mixed government that, in order to prevent abuses of power, the various governmental bodies should be capable of actively resisting and counterbalancing each other. It lost the principle of the mixed government concerning the representation of different social forces in the different branches of the government. Finally, the doctrine of separation of powers, most famously advanced by Montesquieu but that can be traced at least to Guicciardini and Gianotti³⁰, prohibited any influence of one of the functionally defined departments over another.³¹ Other mechanisms of control defended by republican authors included, for example, the rotation in office and the mandate limits. In republican Rome, consuls and tribunes, together with most of the minor offices, were usually elected for a year, and they could not run for a second term (making electoral accountability impossible).³² In republican Florence, for example, the members of the *Signoria* were replaced every two months.³³ Harrington advocated a term limit of three years for each magistracy and renovation of the Senate each year.³⁴ Before Harrington, rotation was also advocated by Marchamont Nedham.³⁵ This idea was also mentioned by Madison in *The Federalist*.³⁶ Some countermajoritarian

²⁹ Carl J. Richards (1994) *The Founders and the Classics. Greece, Rome and the American Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 124, 125

³⁰ J. G. A. Pocock (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 128, 288

³¹ Bernard Manin, "Checks, Balances and Boundaries: The Separation of Powers in the Constitutional Debate of 1787" in Biancamaria Fontana (ed) (1994) *The Invention of the Modern Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 30-31

³² John P. McCormick (2001) "Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism", *American Political Science Review* 95 (2): 297-313, pp. 300-301

³³ Manin (n. 1), pp. 55-56

³⁴ James Harrington (1992) *The Commonwealth of Oceana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 278-281

³⁵ Pocock (n. 30), pp. 381-382

³⁶ Madison (n. 27), p. 343

measures, like the bill of rights demanded by the Antifederalists, or the judicial review demanded by Hamilton in *Federalist* number 78 were also designated to control the government.³⁷ Finally, in the history of the ancient republics and the Italian city-republics of the Renaissance, we can find some mechanisms of accountability of public officials, like *euthynai* and *eisangelia*, two forms of scrutiny of magistrates at the end of their term in democratic Athens³⁸, or the establishment of special committees to control magistrates at the end of their term in the Italian city-republics.³⁹

Therefore, republicans rarely considered elections as mechanisms of accountability. In fact, the retrospective evaluation of the policies of the government at the end of each term, either through competitive elections or through the appointment of special committees to control magistrates, was very uncommon in the republican thought, apart from the institutional practice in ancient Athens and some of the Italian city republics of the Renaissance. Some of the measures recommended by republicans to control the government were, indeed, incompatible with an interpretation of elections as mechanisms of accountability. Term limits is the most obvious example. If the incumbent cannot run for office in the next election, she has no incentives to anticipate the sanction of the electorate for her policies and, therefore, the election cannot fulfill its role as a mechanism of accountability.

Why did not republican authors consider elections as mechanisms of accountability? There are at least two possibilities: either they considered elections as imperfect mechanisms to make politicians accountable or they considered retrospective evaluations of the incumbent's performance, in general, unnecessary. I do not think that the first one was the case. As we have seen, there was not much room in the republican thought to the view of elections as mechanisms of accountability and, therefore, neither to the problems associated to it. Some of these problems, as I mentioned before, have to do with information asymmetries between representatives and constituents. There were indeed some intuitions in various republican authors about the presence of this asymmetric information. For example, Machiavelli considered that the governors had a wide capacity to mimic signals associated to what Bacharach and Gambetta would call

³⁷ Hamilton (n. 27), pp. 437-440

³⁸ Jon Elster, 1999 "Accountability in Athenian Politics" in Przeworski, Manin and Stokes (eds) *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 266-270; Hansen (n. 19), pp. 213-218, 222

³⁹ Maurizio Viroli (1999) *Repubblicanesimo*. Rome: Editori Laterza, p. 37

“trust-warranting properties”, that is, properties of a trustworthy person.⁴⁰ Those in power, Machiavelli says, can easily imitate the classical virtues. The princes can pretend to be honest, or liberal, when they are not.⁴¹ The Antifederalist Brutus also thought that it was most unlikely that people would know enough about their representatives. In his Essay number IV, he considered that “A great part of the people will probably not know the characters of their own members, much less that of a majority of those who will compose the federal assembly”.⁴² There was, therefore, certain recognition of the existence of these information asymmetries in some of the authors. But the information asymmetries mentioned by Machiavelli and Brutus were related to the character of the representatives, not to their policies. In fact, both authors were pointing to the problems of elections as mechanisms to select good types, not as mechanisms of accountability.

Therefore, it does not seem that the reason to exclude elections as mechanisms of accountability was the problem of asymmetric information between representatives and constituents. Consider now the second explanation advanced above: that they viewed retrospective evaluation of the incumbent’s performance irrelevant. Obviously, control of the government was a key issue for republican authors. We have seen the various institutional mechanisms advanced by them in order to control the government: dispersion of power, bill of rights, judicial review and scrutiny of the politician’s performance at the end of the term. Only the last one resembles clearly a mechanism of accountability through a retrospective evaluation of the performance in office of the incumbent. As we have seen, this mechanism was extensively used in the cases of ancient Athens and the Italian city-republics of the Renaissance. My idea here is that republicans did not thought in elections as mechanisms of accountability because they considered that elections as mechanisms of selecting “good types”, what they sometimes called (since Harrington’s *Oceana*) the “natural aristocracy”, would be enough to achieve a virtuous government. If citizens select good types in the elections, they will achieve, at least in theory, the same result as if elections worked as pure

⁴⁰ Michael Bacharach and Diego Gambetta, “Trust in Signs” in Karen Cook (ed) (2001) *Trust in Society*. New York: Russell Sage; Niccolò Machiavelli (1992) *El príncipe*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, pp. 85, 91-92; Niccolò Machiavelli (1996) *Discursos sobre la primera década de Tito Livio*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, pp. 70-71, 217

⁴¹ Machiavelli (1992) (n. 40), pp. 85, 91-92

⁴² W. B. Allen and Gordon Lloyd (2002) *The Essential Antifederalist*. Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 181

mechanisms of accountability: the politicians will fulfill the voters' interests or, in republican terms, the "common good".⁴³ When Guicciardini proposed in his *Discorso di Logrognò* the instauration in Florence of a *gonfaloniere a vita*, he thought that, if the election was made adequately, only men of virtue would fill that office, and, therefore, there was not a great danger of tyranny.⁴⁴ Then, why did republican authors introduce the various institutional mechanisms of control mentioned above? Why Guicciardini, for example, proposed the establishment of a Senate to check the behavior of the *gonfaloniere a vita*? They probably thought that elections were, at best, imperfect ways to select good types, mainly due to lack of wisdom in the people (a recurrent topic in many of the republican authors, especially the more anti-democratic ones). Probably, they also considered those institutional mechanisms as separation of powers and checks and balances imperfect controls. Indeed, the presence of a third-part to enforce the contract between the principal and his agent (for example, a judicial system) certainly improves this enforcement, even if the third-part only intervenes randomly, but does not exclude the possibility of being cheated by the agent.⁴⁵ Republican authors were aware of this: not even the most perfect institutional design excludes a certain degree of discretion by the representative.⁴⁶ Given that both elections as mechanisms to select the natural aristocracy and institutional devices like separation of powers and checks and balances were imperfect considered separately, they advocated for a combination of both measures in order to avoid arbitrary power.

It is interesting to notice that the presence of ulterior mechanisms of retrospective evaluation of the incumbent's performance while in office were only judged necessary when elections as mechanisms for selecting good types were not available. As we have mentioned, the appointment of special committees to scrutinize the behavior of the

⁴³ Fearon (n. 3). This is an important difference between Fearon's conception of what constituted "good types" of politicians and the republican conception. For Fearon, good types are those that shared the voters' interests. However, for most of the republicans, voting was not a means of combining divergent interests or, as Arrow claimed, a means of preference aggregation. For them it is a process that searches the common good of the community. This can coincide (or not) with majority vote. Therefore, in order to be a "good type" of politician in republican terms sharing the interest of the constituents is not enough. It would be necessary for those interests to coincide with the common good of the republic.

⁴⁴ Guicciardini (n. 25), p. 274

⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Laffont and David Martimort (2002) *The Theory of Incentives. The Principal-Agent Model*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 364

⁴⁶ Philip Pettit, "Republican Theory and Political Trust" in Valerie Braithwaite and Margaret Levi (eds) (1998) *Trust and Governance*. New York: Russell Sage, p. 301

magistrates at the end of their term was common in ancient Athens and the Italian city-republics. In both cases, lot was the privileged way of selecting public officials. Given that public officials were selected randomly, there was no way to know in advance if those selected were virtuous or not. That is, selection by lot is not a good way to differentiate between “good” and “bad” types of politicians. This was adequately perceived by Harrington in *Oceana*: in ancient Athens, as the magistrates were selected by lot, they did not include the “natural aristocracy”.⁴⁷ Given that selection by lot is incapable of screening to differentiate between types, an *ex post* mechanism of accountability –the scrutiny by especial committees- was more necessary in Athens and the Italian city republics than in a polity where elections were designed precisely to select good types.

It could be convenient to sum up the ideas presented so far. I have claimed that republican authors did not consider elections as mechanisms of accountability. Although I am not sure which is the explanation for this, one possibility is that they considered enough, in order to avoid arbitrary power, a previous mechanism of screening, to select *ex ante* good types for the public offices, combined with various institutional controls to the politicians while in office, like separation of powers and checks and balances. My idea is that elections, for republicans, were that mechanism of screening. This is what I will try to demonstrate next.

To demonstrate that republicans considered elections as mechanisms for selecting good types of politicians, I will present an argument in two steps. First, I will show that republicans thought that politicians could be two types: good or bad. This is necessary, because if politicians belonged just to one type (if all of them are good or all of them are bad), the selection of good types is trivial. Second, I will present some republican arguments about how elections can serve as mechanisms for selecting good types.

4. The virtue of representatives

For many republican authors, the representatives of the people could indeed be virtuous and, consequently, trustworthy. The trustworthiness of virtuous people was certainly obvious for republican authors like Cicero. According to Cicero, the virtuous

⁴⁷ Harrington (n. 34), pp. 33, 38

man was gifted with the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and moderation. Cicero mentioned also another set of virtues: honesty, magnanimity and liberality. Some of these characteristics of the virtuous man seem clearly related to trustworthiness. For example, justice is for Cicero the “defense of human society” and the “observance of the fidelity to the contracts”.⁴⁸ This is clearly a characteristic related to trustworthiness. As Cicero himself said, justice is enough for trust: good people, fair and loyal, are never suspicious of fraud or injustice.⁴⁹ Another feature of the virtuous man that is related to trustworthiness is prudence. We trust, Cicero says, in people that are more intelligent than we are. Nevertheless, justice is for Cicero a more important characteristic for trustworthiness. Justice is what Bacharach and Gambetta would call a “trust-warranting property”.⁵⁰ I think that all republican authors would agree with Cicero in considering that virtue, and the characteristics associated to it, is a “trust-warranting property”. Did the republicans think that there were “good” and virtuous politicians ready to be selected by the people? Cicero indeed thought so. He recognized that many politicians were not trustworthy: for him, the highest injustice is from those that pretend to be honest when they are cheating you and these injustices are more often found in politics.⁵¹ Nevertheless, he considered that there were virtuous politicians. In *pro Sestio* he explicitly mentioned two types of politicians: “optimates”, who sought to please all the best men, and “populares”, demagogues who sought to please the masses.⁵² These two types corresponded to his ideas of “good” and “bad” types of politicians, respectively. Although he does not explicitly mention the notion of “natural aristocracy”, he considered that these “good” types of politicians, people superior in virtue and in spirit, have been provided by nature.⁵³ Some of the earlier Italian humanists, like Campagni and Latini, also recognized the possibility of trustworthy

⁴⁸ Cicero (2001) *Sobre los deberes [De Officiis]*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, I, 15. Translator: José Guillén Cabañero.

⁴⁹ Cicero (n. 48), II: 32-35

⁵⁰ Bacharach and Gambetta (n. 40)

⁵¹ Cicero (n. 48), I: 41

⁵² Lintott (n. 20), p. 173

⁵³ Neal Wood (1991) *Cicero's Social and Political Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 92

leaders, providing that they had been selected adequately.⁵⁴ Guicciardini considered that the political leaders, the *optimates*, had intelligence and prudence.⁵⁵ The second one, at least, is a trust-warranting property. He even thought (as, actually, Cicero did) that the *optimates*, the few, were the only ones capable of virtue.⁵⁶ This is not to say that he considered that all potential politicians were trustworthy or, in our terminology, “good types”. His defense of the mixed government and other controls was based, among other things, on his fear of the corruption of the *ottimati* if they had a monopoly of power. He considered that all the *ottimati* had two virtues especially adequate for government: practical experience and the pursuit of honor, but his fear against warranting to the aristocracy a monopoly of power reflected the view that much of the aristocrats were not virtuous enough.⁵⁷

The most famous characterization of the virtue of representatives is captured in the notion of “natural aristocracy”. It was a contribution of James Harrington in his *Commonwealth of Oceana*.⁵⁸ It implied that, in any polity, certain men would possess greater talent than others. This percentage of “wiser men”, always present in all human societies, is the natural aristocracy, “diffused by God throughout the whole body of mankind”.⁵⁹ The idea of a representative assembly of the more virtuous was shared by the other authors of the “neo roman” British tradition.⁶⁰ The concept of natural aristocracy was also extensively used by the American revolutionaries. They generally considered the Senate as the adequate place for this “natural aristocracy”.⁶¹ Jefferson mentioned the term frequently, and viewed his proposal for educative reform as a way to open the society’s “natural aristocracy” to all talents.⁶² He considered that this

⁵⁴ Quentin Skinner (1978) *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume One. The Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 45-47

⁵⁵ Skinner (n. 54), p. 161

⁵⁶ Pocock (n. 30), pp. 230-231

⁵⁷ Guicciardini (n. 25), p. 274; Pocock (n. 30), p. 219

⁵⁸ Richards (n. 29), pp. 129-130

⁵⁹ Harrington (n. 34), p. 23

⁶⁰ Skinner (n. 24), p. 32

⁶¹ Richards (n. 29), p. 131

⁶² Garrett Ward Sheldon (1993) *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson*. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 74, 144; Joseph J. Ellis (1998) *American Sphinx. The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 79

“natural aristocracy” was grounded in virtue and talents and that it was “the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts and government of society”.⁶³ In this, he agreed with John Adams, who also frequently mentioned the notion of “natural aristocrats”.⁶⁴ In *The Federalist Papers* there are also frequent references to the virtue of representatives. Against some interpretations that consider Federalist number 10 as a rejection of classical republicanism and the idea of civic virtue, it seems that the representatives’ virtue was at the heart of Madison’s defense of the Constitution.⁶⁵ He considered that representatives were “citizens whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country and whose patriotism and love of country will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations”.⁶⁶ In all republics, Madison said, there is always a given percentage of virtuous men fit for the role of representatives. Hamilton also considered in *Federalist* number 76 that “the institution of delegated power implies that there is a portion of virtue and honor among mankind”.⁶⁷ All the, say, optimistic views about the presence of “good types” agreed, then, that there is a certain number of virtuous people in the republic and that these virtuous people have some trust-warranting properties that make them trustworthy. A more pessimistic view can be found, for example, in the English radical Whigs, the writings of Thomas Paine or the works of some Antifederalist writers. According to all of them, political leaders are generally not trustworthy. Thomas Gordon, one of the most conspicuous representatives of the radical Whig tradition in XVIII century England, considered that “What is good for the people is bad for the government, and what is good for the government, is bad for the people”.⁶⁸ Thomas Paine had a somewhat similar position.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it could be said that the radical Whigs and Thomas Paine were not talking about government in general, but about a certain government, in this case the British

⁶³ Thomas Jefferson (1984) *Writings*. New York: The Library of America, p. 1306

⁶⁴ David McCullough (2002) *John Adams*. New York: Touchstone, p. 67

⁶⁵ See Emery Lee III (1997) “Representation, Virtue, and Political Jealousy in the Brutus-Publius Dialogue”, *The Journal of Politics* 59 (4): 1073-1095, p. 1074

⁶⁶ Madison (n. 27), pp. 126-127

⁶⁷ Hamilton (n. 27), p. 431

⁶⁸ Gordon S. Wood (1987) *The Creation of the American Republic. 1776-1787*. Virginia: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 18

⁶⁹ Wood (n. 68), p. 62

one. In authors like Machiavelli or the American Antifederalists the arguments about the government's trustworthiness are somewhat more general. As we have seen before, Machiavelli considered that the governors can easily imitate the classical virtues. The Antifederalists, most notably Brutus, thought that government by representatives was a necessity in big republics (as opposed to "pure democracies", where there is no representation). In general, the Antifederalists thought that men could not be trusted to respect the rights of others when governing. Take, for example, the following statement by Richard Henry Lee: "the most expressed declarations and reservations are necessary to protect the just rights and liberty of mankind from the silent powerful and ever acting conspiracy of those who govern".⁷⁰ Only if the representatives resemble the people closely enough to possess the same sentiments and interest as the people, there is a possibility that people can trust their representatives.⁷¹ As Richard Henry Lee said "a full and equal representation is that which possesses the same interest, feelings, opinions and views the people themselves would were they all assembled".⁷² Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that these authors excluded the possibility of virtuous politicians. In his work *Arte della Guerra*, Machiavelli compared the merits of republics and monarchies, concluding that republics produce more virtuous leaders than monarchies.⁷³ It seems that Harrington's notion of "natural aristocracy" influenced even the radical Whigs, who sometimes recognized the existence of such group of men.⁷⁴ What differentiated authors like Harrington or Jefferson from Machiavelli and the Antifederalists was probably the probability of "natural aristocrats" in a polity. If the virtue of representatives were a random variable, Harrington would probably consider that the probability of virtue was closer to 1 and Machiavelli would consider it closer to 0, but both of them would agree that politicians could be, nonetheless, of two types. This is the idea captured in Agrippa's Letter XV, when it says that in government there will probably be more bad men than good ones.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Allen and Lloyd (n. 42), p. 22

⁷¹ Lee (n. 65), p. 1078

⁷² Allen and Lloyd (n. 42), p. 149

⁷³ Niccolò Machiavelli (1995) *Del arte de la guerra*. Madrid: Tecnos, p. 76

⁷⁴ Wood (n. 68), p. 209

⁷⁵ Allen and Lloyd (n. 42), p. 53

It seems, then, that republican authors indeed considered the existence of two types of politicians: good and bad. I go next to the second step of my argument: how they considered that the people could differentiate between the two types.

5. The selection of good types

In the previous section I have presented the idea that republican authors generally saw elections not as mechanisms of accountability, but of selecting what they termed “natural aristocrats”: wise and virtuous politicians that equated their interest with the interest of the people. Indeed, if the people could discriminate between good and bad types, the election as a selection of good types could reach, at least theoretically, the same outcome as the election as accountability: the government would fulfill the interests of the voters: in elections as accountability, because politicians anticipate the voters’ sanction, and in elections as selection of good types, because the interests of the government and the interests of the people are the same. But, can the people really differentiate between types? What were the republicans’ ideas about this topic?

Republicans vary in their confidence in the capacity of the people to select good leaders. In this case, the more conservative authors usually considered the people incapable of virtue but capable of selecting good leaders. Cicero, for example, thought that the common people (the “many poor”) were ignorant and ready to be governed by their passions.⁷⁶ Guicciardini easily agreed with this: the members of Florence’s Great Council were “poor and ignorant”, and they had “little capacity”.⁷⁷ However, both also agreed that, despite these preferences, the people tend to elect good representatives, probably because they know that their interests are best served by the few virtuous (although this did not mean that the people’s capacity to select good leaders was perfect). Cicero thought that the popular assembly could easily distinguish between serious politicians and demagogues.⁷⁸ For Guicciardini, the many are differentiated from the few by their capacity to judge of others’ fitness for offices they do not

⁷⁶ Cicero (2000) *Sobre la república [De Re publica]*. Madrid: Gredos, I: 28-29. Translator: Álvaro D’Ors.

⁷⁷ Gilbert (n. 23), p. 27; Skinner (n. 54), p. 161

⁷⁸ Cicero (2002) *La amistad [De amicitia]*. Madrid: Trotta, XXV: 95. Translator: José Guillén Cabañero.

themselves seek.⁷⁹ The people, Guicciardini said, know wise and prudent politicians by their reputation and fame, and this is enough for them to distribute wisely most of the magistracies (although sometimes he was not so confident about the capacity of the people to select good leaders for the highest magistracies, like Florence's *gonfaloniere*).⁸⁰ According to Montesquieu, numerous examples in Greece and Rome showed that in elections the people are capable of discerning the merit of the most capable.⁸¹ Madison shared Cicero and Guicciardini's rather conservative view that common people were not capable of virtue, and so were ready to constitute factions in order to pursue their selfish interests against the common good of the Republic.⁸² According to him, the problem lies in the fact that certain kinds of information cannot be acquired by private means, but only by "actual service in the legislature".⁸³ That is, he thought that some information was intrinsically politicians' private information so people cannot rule by themselves and cannot even judge the political proposals of politicians adequately. Madison and some of the Founders had some doubts about the capacity of the people to select good representatives. Although Madison said in *Federalist* number 55 that the genius of the American people would prevent the election of tyrants,⁸⁴ he usually considered the people apt to be dominated by their passions.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, his view about the capacity of the people is not as pessimistic as Hamilton's, who advocated for a much less passive role for the people in the Republic.⁸⁶ Hamilton considered that demagogues, who misuse the public trust placed on them, often govern the Republic's will, and usually portrayed the common people as

⁷⁹ Gilbert (n. 23), p. 85; Pocock (n. 30), p. 133; Manin (n. 1), p. 62

⁸⁰ Guicciardini (n. 25), p. 275

⁸¹ Montesquieu (1987) *Del espíritu de las leyes*. Madrid: Tecnos, pp. 12-13; see also Manin (n. 1), pp. 73-74

⁸² Madison (n. 27), p. 122

⁸³ Madison (n. 27), p. 330; see also Jay (n. 27), pp. 376-377

⁸⁴ Madison (n. 27), p. 337; see also Jay (n. 27), p. 94

⁸⁵ Madison (n. 27), pp. 122, 127; see also Roberto Gargarella (1996) *La justicia frente al gobierno. Sobre el carácter contramayoritario del poder judicial*. Barcelona: Ariel, pp. 28-29

⁸⁹ Colleen Sheehan (2004) "Madison v. Hamilton: The Battle Over Republicanism and the Role of Public Opinion", *American Political Science Review* 98 (3): 405-424

⁹⁰ Hamilton (n. 27), p. 104; However, there are also some references in Madison about the pernicious effects of demagogues on the opinions of the people: see Madison (n. 27), pp. 351, 366, 371

governed by their passions.⁸⁷ Other Federalist, like Jonathan Jackson, considered that the people were incapable not just of governing but of selecting good representatives.⁸⁸ The more democratic republican writers rejected this conservative and anti-democratic view of the people's preferences. Machiavelli is a good example of this. He considered the people generally prudent and wise (actually wiser and more prudent than princes).⁸⁹ Some of the commonwealthmen of sixteenth-century England shared Machiavelli's view. Algernon Sidney, for example, considered that a popular assembly could be capable of some passions and be deceived, but they are not so easily deceived as one man.⁹⁰ Thomas Paine also considered the people wise and prudent, and added that the better guarantee for individual rights (including the property right) was indeed a popular government.⁹¹ Jefferson's model of agrarian democracy was very optimistic about the probability of the attainment of an enlightened citizenship through public education and the autonomy given by the possession of land. In general terms, he believed in the "integrity and good sense" of the common man.⁹² The more optimistic of the American revolutionaries, like Jefferson, actually stressed the capacity of the common people to elect those who had integrity and merit.⁹³ In Jefferson words: "leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the *aristoi* from the *pseudo-aristoi*, of the wheat from the chaff. In general they will elect the real good and wise".⁹⁴

Therefore, some republicans doubted the capacity of the people to select good leaders while some of them held a much more optimistic position about it but, how did people actually elect good types of politicians? How could they differentiate good types from bad ones? The republicans' responses to these questions were, in my opinion, a combination of institutional measures related to electoral rules and the use by the electorate of various types of cues and heuristics.

⁹¹ Wood (n. 68), p. 509

⁸⁹ Machiavelli (1996) (n. 40), p. 169

⁹⁰ Algernon Sidney (1996) *Court Maxims*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-28

⁹¹ Wood (n. 68), p. 62

⁹² Garrett Ward Sheldon, "Mr Jefferson's Political Theory" in Kenneth W. Thompson (ed) (1990) *The Political Theory of the Constitution*. New York: University of Virginia Press, pp. 120-121

⁹³ Gordon S. Wood (2003) *The American Revolution. A History*. New York: The Modern Library, p. 100

⁹⁴ Jefferson (n. 63), p. 1306

The measures related to the electoral rules stressed the frequency of the elections, the size of the electoral districts and the requisite of property for representatives.

The aim of the advocates of maximum frequency of elections was to assure that the interests of the representatives and the interest of the people were the same. Thomas Paine, the Antifederalists and authors like John Adams considered that the best way for the representatives to have the same interests as the people is that the assembly was an exact portrait of the people at large.⁹⁵ The dissenters in the Convention of Pennsylvania, for example, thought that without a representation possessing the same interests, feelings and views “which the people themselves would possess, were they all assembled”, the outcome would be lack of confidence of the people in their representatives.⁹⁶ As Melancton Smith would say, the representatives “should be a true picture of the people”.⁹⁷ This same idea is advanced by Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*.⁹⁸ If elections were very frequent, the representatives could not separate themselves from the people. Applying this principle, all the States of revolutionary America but South Carolina, established annual elections for their representatives.⁹⁹ Notice that the frequency of the elections was not seen as a mechanism of accountability but as a way of selecting “good types” of representatives: politicians that shared the people’s interests.

The size of the electoral districts was also a measure to select good types of representatives. Here the positions were very different, from those that advocated small districts to those that defended districts as big as possible. Those that thought that the representatives should be a true picture of the people were in favor of small districts. This was the position of the Antifederalists. For example, Brutus considered that the smaller the district, the more probable that the representatives resembled the people.¹⁰⁰ The reason is that in small districts it is easier to know the character of the potential representatives. At the other extreme we find Madison, the advocate of big districts.

⁹⁵ Thomas Paine (1995) *Common Sense*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 7; Wood (n. 68), pp. 165-166

⁹⁶ Allen and Lloyd (n. 42), pp. 40, 44-45

⁹⁷ Manin (n. 1), p. 110

⁹⁸ Paine (n. 95), p. 7

⁹⁹ Wood (n. 68), p. 167

¹⁰⁰ Lee (n. 65), pp. 1080-1081

Madison did not think that representatives should resemble the people as much as possible. In fact, he thought that the virtue of the representatives meant precisely that they had to be different from the people: they would have more prudence, wisdom and experience than the people. Big districts would mean a great distance between the representatives and the people and, therefore, more difference between them.¹⁰¹ In the words of the Federalist James Wilson, large electoral districts were a protection against both “petty demagogues and parochialism”.¹⁰²

The other electoral rule occasionally advocated by republicans was a requisite of property for representatives. The idea that property could be correlated to the possession of virtue, that is, that property is a proxy of natural aristocracy, is a constant in republican thought. Although not all republicans agreed with that, many of them discussed this topic. Cicero, for example, considered that people sometimes use erroneous signals to judge the politicians’ personal characteristics. Wealth is clearly this type of signal: occasionally (although not always) people confuse virtue with opulence and wealth. Nevertheless, although he did not necessarily identify wealth with virtue, in practice he usually considered the members of the Senate, the wealthiest families of Rome, as the most virtuous: those that accumulate great possessions show more industry, skills and even rationality than the impoverished.¹⁰³ The scholastic authors of the beginnings of the Renaissance thought that property was a good signal to select virtuous leaders.¹⁰⁴ In the eighteenth century, property was also considered a signal of virtue but this did not necessarily mean wealth. However, during the American Revolution it seems that personal wealth was considered by some of the Founders as a proxy of virtue, given that it was thought that wealth generally was correlated to wisdom and education.¹⁰⁵ Ten of the thirteen States established a Senate and property qualifications for Senate candidates (all of them established property qualifications, although lower, for the lower House).¹⁰⁶ In the Convention of Philadelphia, the requisite

¹⁰¹ Madison (n. 27)

¹⁰² Manin (n. 1), p. 122

¹⁰³ Wood (n. 53), pp. 96, 112

¹⁰⁴ Skinner (n. 54), p. 59

¹⁰⁵ Wood (n. 68), p. 217

¹⁰⁶ Richards (n. 29), p. 131

of property was considered essential both to protect the natural right itself and to select virtuous representatives.¹⁰⁷

The idea that property was a signal of virtue leads us to the other way, besides the electoral rules, republicans took into account to explain how elections served to select good types. The people could use external signals to differentiate between types. That is, they could use certain heuristics or cues to select good types. As Machiavelli said in the *Discorsi* “the people judge in the elections according to the surest signals about the men’s character”.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, their ideas are quite similar to the modern characterization of elections as a way of selecting good types. Fearon also thinks that, to distinguish “good types” from “bad types”, citizens can use a variety of signals. He considers that non policy cues about the character of the politicians are relevant pieces of information for the selection model. In recent years, a series of authors have advanced two claims regarding these cues and heuristics: first, low informed citizens use a variety of shortcuts, heuristics or cues when forming their political opinions. Second, the use of these shortcuts does not necessarily lead to mistaken political opinions. Instead, it is claimed that, by using these shortcuts, citizens can reach political decisions as rational as those they could have reached if they had all the relevant pieces of information.¹⁰⁹ Republican authors usually assumed that the people lack adequate information about politics. As we have seen, Cicero, for example, thought that people were ignorant and incapable of virtue. The most conservatives among the civic humanists, most notably Guicciardini, agreed with this.¹¹⁰ And, according to Madison, much political information was politician’s private information.¹¹¹ However, they thought that the people could use a variety of signals to discern the politicians’ type. We have seen their opinion about property. For some of them, it was a clear signal correlated to virtue. For Cicero, being a good orator could also be considered a signal of

¹⁰⁷ Manin (n. 1), p. 105

¹⁰⁸ Machiavelli (1996) (n. 40), p. 396

¹⁰⁹ Samuel L. Popkin and Michael A. Dimock, “Knowledge, Trust, and International Reasoning” in Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin (eds) (2000) *Elements of Reason. Cognition, Choice and the Bounds of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; a second version of this idea is that public opinion is rational in the aggregate, because individual errors cancel out in the process of aggregation: see B. I. Page and R. Y. Shapiro (1992) *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American’s Political Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹¹⁰ Pocock (n. 30), p. 230

virtue and the people generally distinguish the good orators that are really virtuous.¹¹² He thought that the people could always select good politicians using as a signal their quality as orators, although sometimes he considered that the people were deceived by demagogues, like the Gracci. We can interpret that Cicero thought that the people could select real good types but sometimes selected bad types that mimicked the behavior of good types. Nevertheless, he also considered that, in the long run, virtue could not be imitated successfully.¹¹³ Montesquieu considered frugality a good signal of virtue.¹¹⁴ Finally, as we have seen, the Antifederalist writers, and other American revolutionaries, like John Adams, considered likeness to the people as the surest signal of the representative sharing the interests of his constituents.

However, not all authors agreed about the capacity to select good politicians by the use of cues and heuristics about the politicians' personal characteristics. We have seen that Machiavelli thought that, in the elections, the people used the surest signals about the politicians' personal characteristics, and he even concedes that these pieces of information about personal characteristics are a reasonable shortcut to select good agents.¹¹⁵ However, as we have also seen, in various passages of *The Prince* and the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli considered that the governors had a wide capacity of mimicking signals associated to "trust-warranting properties".¹¹⁶ Contrary to Cicero, he thought that the imitation of virtue was not only possible but indefinitely successful, because men are candid and prone to self-deceit.¹¹⁷ If bad types can mimic the behavior of good types, the use of heuristics is a precarious base for political judgment.¹¹⁸ Therefore,

¹¹¹ Madison (n. 27), p. 330; see also Jay (n. 27), pp. 376-377

¹¹² Cicero (2000) *Bruto [Brutus]*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, XLIX: 184-186. Translator: Manuel Mañas

¹¹³ Marcia L. Colish (1978) "Cicero's *De Officiis* and Machiavelli's *Prince*", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (4): 80-93, p. 89

¹¹⁴ Montesquieu (n. 81), pp. 13, 33

¹¹⁵ Machiavelli (1996) (n. 40), p. 393

¹¹⁶ Machiavelli (1992) (n. 40), pp. 85, 91-92; (1996) (n. 40), pp. 70-71, 217

¹¹⁷ Quentin Skinner (1995) *Maquiavelo*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, p. 59

¹¹⁸ In modern political science, the use of heuristics and cues in forming political opinions has also been questioned. Kuklinski and Quirk ("Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics and Mass Opinion" in Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin (eds) (2000) *Elements of Reason. Cognition, Choice and the Bounds of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169-179) consider, using findings from experimental survey research, that people make systematic mistakes in their political judgements when using information shortcuts: they tend to employ systematically biased political

Machiavelli's counsel to the people was that in order to establish a free republic, it is necessary to think that all men are bad and untrustworthy.¹¹⁹ We can interpret the proposals of those authors that advocated for an educational reform to enhance the enlightenment of the people in this light. Take Jefferson for example. In a letter to John Adams, Jefferson discusses the issue of how to differentiate the natural aristocracy from what he calls "artificial aristocracy", not based on merit. He discusses some external characteristics naturally associated to the *aristoi*, the most talented as ground for distinction. Specifically, he cites beauty, good humor and politeness but considers these attributes as mere auxiliaries of distinction.¹²⁰ Given that external characteristics are precarious signals of merit, Jefferson defended the creation of a school system for the education of the people, both to open the natural aristocracy to all classes in society and to enhance the political sophistication of the people, for them to better differentiate good types from bad types.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have defended the idea that republican authors did not interpret elections as mechanisms of accountability but as a way of selecting "good types", politicians that would pursue the common good, instead of their factional interests. I have tried to demonstrate that republicans envisaged a combination of elections to select the "natural aristocracy" of society and controls for governors while in office to keep the public officials free from corruption. I have presented my argument in two steps. First, I have demonstrated that republican authors considered that politicians could be two types, good and bad. Second, I have presented some republican ideas about how the elections could serve to select the good types. Some of these ideas are, curiously, quite similar to a recent stream of literature in political science about the use of cues and

stereotypes, have pronounced overconfidence in their political opinions, they are extremely resistant to incorporate new information, are readily influenced by "easy arguments" that do not provide much information and, finally, they usually employ untrustworthy signals to judge political messages. Bartels ((1996) "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections", *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1): 194-230), has also questioned the rationality of the use of heuristics in political choices. His conclusion is that political ignorance has systematic and significant consequences on political choices. He also claims that, in the aggregate, individual errors most probably do not cancel out, because they are not random, but are systematically biased in the same direction.

¹¹⁹ Machiavelli (1996) (n. 40), p. 37

¹²⁰ Jefferson (n. 63), pp. 1305-1306

heuristics in order to make low informed political judgments. These ideas fall short, however, from Jefferson's ideal of an enlightened and autonomous citizenry capable of judging the character of politicians without the help of precarious cues about those politicians' personal characteristics.

Contemporary debates about republicanism have tended to ignore the contribution of republican authors to the understanding of elections. This is to some extent understandable, given that the advocacy of widespread participation is one of the distinctive features of modern republicanism against the liberal view of participation circumscribed to voting in periodical elections. The arguments presented in this paper can be seen as a reminder that periodical elections is not a democratic institution confined to the liberal tradition, but one theorized previously by classical republicans. Given what we know about the problems of elections as mechanisms of retrospective accountability, as well as about the public's interpretation of elections, it could even be said that republicans' view was somewhat more accurate than the usual liberal account of elections. Are these classical republican ideas useful to contemporary debates in political science about elections? Indeed, as I have pointed out occasionally, there are some common ideas between classical republicans and some contemporary views about elections. The consideration of elections as a selection device, defended by Fearon, was in fact anticipated, as I have tried to demonstrate, by classical republicans. Some cues and heuristic presented by modern political scientists as means to select "good" politicians by low-informed citizens remind similar ideas advanced by the historical republicans. However, it is doubtful that classical republicans have something to teach contemporary political science about elections, apart from the (not irrelevant) fact that some ideas considered "new" by modern political scientists are not really that "new".