

**Electoral Fraud and Political Distrust: Entanglements and new
Perspectives of Study in Modern Europe (c. 1750 – c. 1950)**

January 2024

Venue: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 29 and 30 January 2025

Electoral studies and studies on electoral fraud have long received the attention of scholars, particularly from history, political science and sociology, among other disciplines. Until the last decades of the 20th century studies addressing elections mostly focused on the agency of political elites, neglecting the experiences of other actors, such as electors and non-electors. Some trends projected on electorate an image of apathy and demobilization, particularly before universal suffrage. As a result, electoral fraud was mainly understood as a governmental form of dominance.

This conference has not the aim to challenge the existence of electoral fraud promoted by governments. It has been widely substantiated among Europe, America and other contexts, with contributions proving the irregular intervention of governments in elections (Araque, 2008; Voilliot, 2005; Ruderer, 2016). This situation was not at odds with contesting speeches (Fernández Peña, 2023; Rubí, 2020).

This approach on electoral fraud easily connects with social perceptions of distrust towards political elites and governments. Relations of trust and distrust between governed and governments have been explored since the origins of modern times considering the meaning on governance and sovereignty (Knights, 2021; Rosanvallon, 2010). Yet, entanglements between distrust and electoral fraud have been hardly studied and when addressed they easily revolve around the idea of apathy from

electors who would keep on a guided role. This conference aims to pay attention to electoral fraud as a matter of political distrust from citizens towards politics in general and politicians in particular, but from an active and non-necessarily submitted position of the electorate.

We understand electoral fraud as a tool whose main aim is to have an influence on free conditions of voting to obtain a favorable result. We acknowledge as well the underpinning contributions coming from social history of the politics, which have renewed electoral studies in the last decades and contributed to the understanding of the electorate with rising independence (O’Gorman, 1989; Lawrence, 2009; Garrigou, 2002). Electors are no longer considered from a submissive position (Luján, 2023a). Other subjects are as well examined and new perspectives of study have also been explored. For this reason, we consider of scientific interest to examine the role of both electors and non-electors and their relation with political power.

This conference aims to contribute to recent debates and approaches concerning electoral fraud, such as the ones offered by the new history of political corruption, gender studies, popular politicization or cultural political history, among the main ones. Entanglements between electoral fraud and political distrust may provide the theoretical basis of papers when addressing the topic from these different methodologies.

We particularly suggest considering gender studies whose contributions have often been linked with a cultural perspective when addressing electoral studies. The interpretations coming from these studies have modernized the topic with meaningful explanations considering masculinity roles in politics (McCormack, 2007 and 2012) and the shaping of political cultures from women intervention (Lauwers, 2022; Gleadle, 2009). Even an analysis within intersectionality parameters would offer inedited perspectives. Contributions recently published have shown how social issues such as ethnic, class, or gender contributed (and contribute) to generate inequality considering political participation. They have also enabled to rethink processes of electoral participation and democratization (Baudot, 2023).

We aim to connect these enriching perspectives with electoral fraud and political distrust in such a way that new contributions can shed light either on the role of subjects usually neglected in relation to electoral fraud or on renewed views of subjects already

explored. Papers should shed more light on the relationship between these collectives and governments. The history of popular politicization can also contribute to the advancement of the research, reviewing the role and agency of ordinary subjects in relation to electoral fraud. In fact, these groups have already begun to be considered as actors with an impact on politics and clientelism (Monier, 2023; Crook and Crook, 2023).

Another perspective that seems essential is that of the new history of political corruption, which has allowed to renew the understanding of this phenomenon by combining methods from the history of ideas and the analysis of discourses, together with social history. That is, analyzing discourses and practices together to interpret the moral values associated with certain behaviors. We understand that, both from a cultural and social perspective, the new history of political corruption has contributed to renew electoral studies from different perspectives. We find valuable those publications that have considered the meaning of electoral malpractices (Villette, 2015), and that can inspire works revisiting practices such as extortion, false rumors, bribery, etc.

We finally detect the need to pay more attention to primary sources long neglected or overlooked, such as electoral protests, resources to the census/electoral board to include or exclude potential voters, discussions in the committee rooms (Rix, 2022), etc. These sources can shed more light on the understanding of electoral fraud from some of the aforementioned approaches. There are few works that have approached the analysis of these sources and they constitute enriching contributions (Luján, 2023b; Rubí, 2019; Ricci and Porto Zulini, 2016).

These guidelines do not exclude other innovative proposals that may have been forgotten by the organization, but may also contribute to discussions on electoral fraud and its relationship with political distrust.

The conference will take place at the Autonomous University of Barcelona on January 29 and 30, 2025. It is expected that the conference participants will provide first draft versions of their papers by December 2024 to encourage discussion during the event.

Proposals' guidelines

This conference aims to bring together proposals addressing electoral fraud cases from the second half of the 18th century to the first decades of the 20th century. Proposals that address any geographical setting in Europe will be considered (a comparative or transnational approach is expected). Although English may be the common language of the conference, proposals can be written in English, Spanish or Catalan.

Paper proposals must include:

- A provisional title
- A summary of about 300-400 words (approximately 1 page)

Proposals must be sent to the organizing committee throughout the month of March 2024, with **April 15, 2024** being the deadline for receiving proposals.

Organization and contact

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