

Translated by John Bell

A REPLY TO EUGENIO TIRONI AND FELIPE AGÜERO
**REFLECTIONS ON BOTH THE PRESENT AND THE
FUTURE OF THE CHILEAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN
THE LIGHT OF THE PAST**

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This article discusses the thesis presented by Eugenio Tironi and Felipe Aguero “Will the new political landscape in Chile survive?” in *Estudios Públicos* Nº 74, of Autumn 1999, according to which the actual bipolarity in Chilean party politics is the product of a new and lasting “generative cleavage in the parties”, which they call “authoritarianism/democracy”. Although Samuel Valenzuela agrees that the bipolarity which exists today originated after the military regime and the plebiscite campaign of “yes” and “no”, he insists that the division produced by these does not constitute a new “generative cleavage” in the sense used by Lipset and Rokkan, i.e. a socio-historical break.

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On the contrary, it is one of those purely political divisions that create party alignments and re-alignments. The difference between these two concepts —Valenzuela indicates— is not only semantic. A “socio-historical generative cleavage” is much more profound and lasting than a political division of the type mentioned above. For the same reason —he adds— in contrast to what Tironi and Aguero maintain, political tendencies generated by the socio-historical ruptures that purged Chilean politics still maintain their validity, albeit latently, today, something which can be seen partly in the continuity of electoral options. Both types of fissures have combined over time to create concrete political systems. The actual party system, the fifth in Chile since the end of Manuel Montt’s government (1856-1861), does not have to be more enduring than the others. Valenzuela finally argues that a necessary (but not the only) condition for the actual party system to be substituted would be the full consolidation of democracy in Chile.

In their suggestive article with the arresting title “Will the new political landscape in Chile survive?”, Eugenio Tironi and Felipe Aguero argue that there has been a great lack of continuity between the present and the pre-authoritarian past of the Chilean political system.¹ They point out that this lack of continuity can be explained by the fact that during the military government a “new generative cleavage” in party divisions emerged, which they call “authoritarianism/democracy”, and which took shape for the first time during the plebiscite of 1988 when the “no” vote triumphed over Pinochet. The party alignments that emerged have continued restructuring the party system in the ten years that have passed since the transition to democracy, because of which it now has an essentially bipolar morphology, relegating the “3 thirds” of the Right, Centre and Left that characterised the system up to 1973, to the past. Tironi and Aguero respond in the affirmative to the question they pose in their title: the new party system is solidly implanted, due to the existence, among other factors, of the new electoral system and the recreation of the conflict “authoritarianism/democracy” revolving around the criticisms and discussions of the constitutional changes vetoed by the Right. Only the growing personalisation of politics —which is shown for example in the fact that the candidates run their electoral campaigns without mentioning their party tickets— and the increase in abstentions and null votes can threaten the new

¹ Tironi and Aguero (1999).

political scenario: however a return to the tripartism of previous years is impossible.

Tironi and Agüero's thesis invites comment. There is no doubt that the present party system is different from those prior to the 70's. As regards this we are totally in agreement, as can be shown in a study that I have written to which they make no reference.² Nevertheless I do not believe that they can say, as I will explain here, that the "authoritarianism/democracy" polar axis is a "generative cleavage in the parties", in the sense of Lipset and Rokkan, although this is precisely Tironi and Agüero's idea. While the fundamental element in this phase of the development of the Chilean party system that articulates the political alliances is the position of acceptance or rejection of the authoritarian regime, expressed in the "yes" or "no" coalitions, this is a division created by a particular Chilean event and not by the great socio-historical ruptures referred to by Lipset and Rokkan. The difference between these two characterisations is not just a semantic one, as I hope will be made clear by what follows. The framework of historical reference used by Tironi and Agüero is, moreover, much shorter than mine, which explains, to a certain extent, the different focus that we have when approaching a study of the present party system.

Tironi and Agüero are kind enough to recall that the metaphor "political landscape" was used for the first time when referring to the configuration of Chilean political divisions in an article that I wrote with Arturo Valenzuela nineteen years ago.³ At that time it was normal to read, both in academic publications and in the official line taken by the authoritarian regime, that the almost total political demobilisation that existed in Chile (in 1980 there were three years to go before the beginning of the "protest" marches and demonstrations and the political and economic situation very much favoured the military regime) was the product of—or would eventually lead to—a profound depoliticization of the electorate and that, as a result, the

² Valenzuela (1995), pages 65-66, where I also refer to Sartori. See Tironi and Agüero (1999), pages 155-156.

³ Tironi and Agüero quote the final version in English of Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1986). We presented this study, whose first version I wrote with all with all its basic arguments in April 1980, at a conference in Washington's Wilson Centre in May the same year. Translated into Spanish without our knowledge, the article appeared for the first time with the title "Partidos de oposicion bajo el regimen autoritario chileno" in the *Revista Mexicana de Sociologia* (*Mexican Sociology Review*), no. 44, 2 (April-June 1982), pages 599-648, and the following year it was reproduced in a book published by FLACSO in Chile. The final version of 1986 was finished in April 1984 and makes references to the changes that began in 1983.

parties prior to 1973 would not re-emerge to recreate a democracy based on new institutions within the framework of a country that had been completely transformed by privatisations and the reduction of the size of the state.⁴ Our thesis contradicted this notion, pointing out that Chilean political tendencies had deep roots in both national history and society, and so a relatively short period of authoritarian rule—even if it lasted a generation— would not alter its basic physiognomy. Having already been shaped around two “generative cleavages” in the parties, that is to say the polarities of State versus Church (or attachment to Christian beliefs versus free thinking secularism) and class divisions (or the proposal of socio-economic policies that favoured either capital or work, the employers or the employed, the owners or the tenants, etc) it would be very difficult for this to change. The presence of a political past converted into a “landscape” of references and landmarks meant that political events and personalities would continue to be categorised and analysed during the authoritarian regime. Even more, although the parties were in an “enforced” recess, their supporters would transfer their militancy to social organisations and, in any case, the network of contacts between party leaders would not be extinguished. The closing down of this political space was leading to a freezing of “the landscape” that included the public images of the most relevant figures so that, paradoxically, the intent to depoliticize the population through closing the space would be counter productive. Whatever opening would favour the return of the previous political parties and their leaders, with the possible exception of those on the Right, which would in all probability, suffer more changes precisely for being generally in agreement with the military government and accepting their auto-dissolution. To sum up, the proclaimed death or future death of Chilean political divisions and their respective political parties would not happen.⁵

Tironi and Aguero correctly summarised our central thesis in their own contribution, confirming that it has been “apparently” verified by the Chilean transition in the sense that the previous parties and their leaders re-emerged, generally speaking, to direct it and that the Chilean electorate continues identifying itself easily enough in the opinion polls as either Left or Right. Nevertheless to say that this continuity is only “apparent” and in emphasising that a new split “authoritarianism/democracy” has emerged that is

⁴ In the academic sphere the person who most insisted on the notion that demobilization and depoliticization were total in Chile was Karen Remmer (1980). The key text for the official line was that of Jaime Guzman (1981).

⁵ Karen Remmer (1989), Chapter 3, insisted on asserting that there would be a notable political discontinuity in Chile, explicitly rejecting the thesis proposed by Valenzuela and Valenzuela.

restructuring the Chilean “political landscape”, the others having disappeared, Tironi and Aguero leave the impression that the predictions made in 1980 by Valenzuela and Valenzuela were, basically, incorrect. This has led me to make several clarifications in this respect, and to comment on the contributions of the authors who are both colleagues and friends. I will show that, once several points have been clarified, there is no fundamental contradiction between what has been expressed in both articles. The Chilean party system contains both continuities and discontinuities, although some or others refer to different dimensions of the same and of the Chilean political “landscape”. In the 1980 article what interested us was why these continuities were produced and in later publications I have also referred to the changes as well as documenting the continuities that took place. In this commentary I shall amplify the observations that I have made in previous articles.⁶

“Generative cleavages” in parties or merely political divisions and conflicts?

As Tironi and Aguero well remember, the idea of generative cleavages in parties was put forward by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) to explain the variations in European party systems. These cleavages arose from important social conflicts or divisions which produced an alignment of sections of a national population with one or another of different positions taken, thus generating collective political identities. It is possible that the historical development of a country generates more than one divisive axis of this type, and, if this is the case, that these are more important for certain groups of the population than for others. At the same time the cleavages do not maintain the same importance or intensity as time goes by. In spite of this, even those whose force is diminishing form part of the historical tradition of a country, and they continue generating party divisions and political identities for a long time after the events that produced them. This occurs because they form national sub-cultures, with symbols and organisations, and systems of socializing new generations who have different feelings when confronting new events and distinct collective identities.

This generates a certain organisational and politico-cultural inertia which is maintained for a time. In the democracies that had been established at

⁶ See Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1995), Scully and Valenzuela (1993) and Valenzuela and Scully (1997)

the beginning of the 19th century, parties arose on the basis of political identities generated by the (sometimes already old) divisions in society. In any case, it has to be pointed out that the contribution of Lipset and Rokkan refers to major political tendencies rather than to concrete party ones. There can even exist elements, under the same party banner, derived from more than one generative cleavage in the parties, as is the case when dealing with so called *catch-all* parties.

The fact that specific parties spring up or not on the basis of generative cleavages depends on organisational resources—including the availability of capable leaders—, on the fact that they have different sectors of the population available to do this and on the political and institutional opportunities defined by the political regime in which they find themselves.⁷ However, the intensity of a conflict does not necessarily mean that any concrete parties will come out of it. At the same time, concrete parties and party alliances can arise for reasons that have nothing to do with generative fissures. Their creation can be explained, quite simply in many cases, as a consequence of political events, or even, as happens frequently, of divisions that are related to personal disagreements between political leaders. Remember that in the Chilean elections between the two Alessandris there were various parties, Socialist, Radical, Liberal, Conservative etc, each one with a qualifying adjective such as “doctrinaire”, “united”, “of the Left”, “Socialist”, “authentic”, “traditionalist” and so on, and that in the municipal or parliamentary elections sometimes more than a hundred different lists were presented, including some trade union ones. On doing an analysis of the elections, in terms of observers as well as political actors, we added up the votes from different points of view within the same family to know who supported whom, and it is a fact that sometimes the angriest disputes were precisely between the leaders of each side, who often supported different presidential candidates. Obviously, electoral systems and legislation regarding the registration of candidates and parties has a lot to do with the facility with which party tendencies arose. It would be absurd to say that the thirty or so parties that existed in Chile up to the 50’s were the direct result of historical generative cleavages. The electoral law of 1962 which prevented electoral pacts had the effect of reducing this number, which, given what happened later, might not have been such a good idea as it seemed then...

Coming back to Tironi and Aguero’s contribution, the fundamental question is whether the new “generative cleavage” that they identify is of the same type or not as the one presented by Lipset and Rokkan, i.e. based on a

⁷ In this respect see Valenzuela (1995), pages 11-12.

socio-historic cleavage. If the “authoritarianism/democracy” conflict is not a socio-historical split but that one that comes exclusively from political events, as has happened many times before in Chile, then this means that Tironi and Aguero are analysing a type of discontinuity in the Chilean party system that is clearly distinct to that referred to in our 1980 article, the basis of our prediction being that there would be a continuity in political and party divisions beyond the dictatorial regime. And if this were so, there would not be a fundamental clash between Tironi and Aguero’s contribution and our own, although it would be necessary to define some things more precisely. On the other hand if the break indicated by Tironi and Aguero is of the same socio-historical order as those to which we made reference, then there would be a contradiction between both studies and Tironi and Aguero’s would be showing that, to a certain extent, we were mistaken in our predictions.

It is not difficult to guess that I am inclined towards the first and not the second. The break indicated by Tironi and Aguero is not comparable to the socio-historical ones of Lipset and Rokkan or, therefore, to those used as a basis for our prediction. The proof of this is in the following: a socio-historical fissure divides itself in forming a whole series of social institutions that provide a substrate which, in turn, becomes a collective subculture and identity. It is easy to identify, in the Chilean past and present, organisations linked to ruptures fundamental to those we ourselves referred to. The religious pole of the axis corresponding to this, for example, has been very rich in organisations since the 19th century. The expressions of its social vitality are innumerable, from the parishes and congregations of the Church itself, to pious associations, fraternities, workers societies, charitable organisations, Catholic schools, student associations etc. Who could write the history of the Conservative Party with talking about the efforts of Abdon Cifuentes to create a whole series of associations, starting with the “Society for Friends of our Country”, or the Christian Democrats without referring to the priest Oscar Larson and the National Association of Catholic Students? The secular pole of this division of the Chilean population has also had a multiplicity of associations: Masonic lodges, radical social clubs, numerous sports clubs, literary societies (especially among women), a decent amount of fire stations, associations of University professionals, and also many educational institutions, including the University of Chile and the University of Concepcion. The class axis has also been rich in social organisations, several of which have been superimposed on those mentioned above. Is it necessary to mention the many unions, community groups, mothers clubs, trades, managers and employers associations that can be linked to this?. The Chilean

party system has been nourished since the end of the 19th century by militants, pressures and proposals for programmes that have come out these association networks. To a large extent, this is the reason why Chilean parties have been relatively strong: they have not been merely the expression of ambitious political cliques, like the analysts tied to the military government think, but have had organic links to society. It is because of this, at bottom, that authoritarian wilfulness from the State cannot change the basic physiognomy of the “political landscape” of a country, whether it is Santiago or Budapest. In fact it can change much more in a politically democratic regime, given the freedom and the political institutions necessary for new leaders and associations to emerge.

Returning to the split that Tironi and Aguero talk about, what are the social organisations that are linked to this authoritarian/democracy dimension? And especially, which are the associations that have declared themselves explicitly to be in favour of an authoritarian regime? It remains clear, I hope, that this differentiating axis is certainly distinct to the socio-historical one. One could object, for example, that the union organisations are pro-democratic and the employers pro-authoritarian. It is true that, beginning with the “Pliego de Chile” (A Chilean Petition) presented by the union leaders of the Group of Ten, the Trades Unions were pressuring for a return to democracy and they played an important role in the initial creation of what came to be the Grouping of Parties for Democracy. It is also certain that the managerial associations grouped around the major Chilean businesses generally supported the authoritarian government and were linked, through preference, to those parties who lined themselves up behind the “Yes” vote. Nevertheless, some like others concentrated on defending the labour and economic interests of their members. In the Chilean political context after the failed “Chilean transition to Socialism” there was no need for a new explanatory dimension to account for the different attitudes of the managerial and trades union associations when faced with an authoritarian regime. It is enough to say it was either one of class or one of socio-economic politics. The military government applied a “Rightist” economic policy that eventually was supported by the principal employers associations and condemned by the unions. But it cannot be said that these associations were the social base for a political division that led some to fight for the creation of an authoritarian regime and others for a democratic one. This is not the purpose of these associations or the basis of the conflict of interests between them.

Moreover, I do not believe that one can say that the 43% of the voters who came out for a “Yes” vote in 1998 were all in favour of an authoritarian regime. You have to discount from this vote a minority percentage who

expressed themselves in the affirmative, especially in the provinces and in small towns, simply because they did not dare to vote “No”. I know this from informal interviews that I have made. The parties on the Right that supported the “Yes” campaign have not equalled the votes that were obtained by Pinochet, either in the later parliamentary elections or the municipal ones, and presidential elections and plebiscites are not the indicators, in any case, to measure the electoral strength of parties or political tendencies. The greater part of the rest of the “Yes” vote in the plebiscite corresponds to an electorate of the Right that is not necessarily pro authoritarian. It could not express itself as being in favour of the “No” campaign precisely because of the historic strength of Chilean electoral alignments, since to do so would be to equivalent to voting for the parties that made up the Concertación. Being an electorate of the Right, it preferred that, out of all the possible ways that had been announced for a transition to democracy —expressed, as they understood it, by applying the 1980 Constitution— it should be undertaken under the direction of Pinochet and the parties that supported the “Yes” vote. That particular sector of the Chilean electorate just could not believe that a transition would be carried out correctly under the direction of the parties of the Centre and the Left.

There is no doubt at all that there is a minority of the Chilean electorate which is not exactly fond of democracy. But this is not new in Chile. We must not forget that one of the causes of the breakdown in democracy in 1973 was just that attitude of semi-loyalty, in the terminology of Linz (1978), which many of the protagonists, both on the Right and the Left, had towards democracy. Actually, in replies to the key question on the legitimacy of democracy used as a barometer for opinions in Europe and Latin America, Chile appears as one of the countries with the least amount of unconditional support. Those who took part in the poll were asked to opt for one of three statements, the first being that “democracy is always preferable”, the second being that “in some circumstances” an authoritarian government might be preferable, and the third being that for “people like us” it would be the same whatever the government was: around 54% of Chileans chose the first option, 18% or 19% the second and 24% the third.⁸

The problem with this is that the person interviewed, in spite of the fact that the question is being put in an abstract way, replies to it through his perception of his own country’s experience. As a result, given the recent

⁸ These statistics can be seen, together with other sources, in Montero, Gunther and Torcal (1999), page 14.

history of Chile, with its traumatic crisis of democracy followed by an authoritarian regime that did not end up in total failure like those of Greece and Argentina, the question induces Chileans to answer it in a manner in which they appear to be less convinced about the virtues of democracy than the citizens of other countries. The statement that apparently indicates a pro-authoritarian attitude is conditioned by the fact that several of those interviewed, especially given the Chilean context, could have answered it not as a judgement of abstract opinion but as a something real —thinking precisely about the circumstances that they lived through in Chile in 1973.⁹ (The statement could be understood as “in the circumstances that Chile was living under in 1973, it was impossible for democracy to continue under Allende’s presidency”). Even so, and here we come back to Tironi and Agüero, the interesting thing is that those who opted for the conditionally pro-authoritarian alternative are something less than a fifth. That is to say, even in terms of attitudes of population the authoritarian pole of the political split “authoritarianism/democracy” is not as exaggerated as was indicated in the 43% “yes” vote.

To sum up, the actual division between the two great coalitions that emerged from the positions taken by their parties in the 1988 plebiscite is not a “generative cleavage” comparable to those that historically shape the Chilean party system, but one that is the result of political positions taken up by political events. The effect of military rule has been to produce a new transformation in the Chilean party system, the fifth since permanent parties emerged from the controversial politics at the end of Manuel Montt’s government.¹⁰ The majority of these transformations have been due to political circumstances, not to the emergence of new socio-historical splits. In each phase the profound political tendencies produced by socio-historical divisions in the country have manifested themselves in a different way, sometimes more sometimes less.¹¹ The different Chilean party systems have each lasted between twenty and forty years. Their party alliances have frequently been due to the political legacy of personalities or governments which have had a strong impact on the history of the country, a point which is true today. Such was the case with Manuel Montt, Balmaceda and Ibañez.

⁹ For the same historical reasons, the Greeks are among those who most strongly support the idea of democratic legitimacy. Aside from Montero, Gunther and Torcal (1999), see also a discussion on the Greek replies in Morlino and Montero (1995). The question is also used in Linz and Stepan (1996), pages 222-223.

¹⁰ The enumeration comes from Valenzuela (1995).

¹¹ See Valenzuela (1995).

As an example, let us recall the Chilean party system at the beginning of the 20th century. It began after the Civil War of 1891 and ended in the 20's with the first government of Alessandri. Its origin was due to the emergence of the Liberal Democratic Party which came out of Balmaceda's political legacy and favoured a return to a fully presidential government. There is nothing more fallacious, but at the same time considered acceptable, than to add the Liberal Democratic votes to those of the Liberals and doctrinaire liberals of that time in order to have a measure of the total Liberal vote, since one of the keys to party alliances then was that the Liberal Democrats could not be in the same combination as the Liberals. This was a purely political division without any great differences in its social base, even though the Liberal Democrats attracted a more popular vote than their fellow liberals. The second key to the alliances of the era was that the Conservatives and the Radicals could also not be in the same coalition, which was a reflection of the Catholic v Secular/Free Thinker split that figures among the two fundamental socio-historical divisions in Chilean politics.¹² The Radicals were always the constant component in the "Liberal Alliance" while the Conservatives were always in the "Coalition". The principal workers party of the time, the Democratic Party, would be one coalition or the other. It is only after the 20's that the parties of the Left began to have some significant weight in the party system.

From "three thirds" to two blocs?

Tiróni and Aguero insist several times in their article that the "three thirds" of the Chilean system are something of the past and that now there are only two coalitions. They point out that even specific party differences and loyalties have disappeared, transferring themselves to much broader coalitions. This is accompanied by a reduction in the identification and loyalty of the population in general towards the parties. Once again, all this shows that the generative cleavages in parties before have lost their force and have been substituted by a new divisive axis. In particular, they argue that the religious/secular divide now has absolutely no effect on party divisions, since there is a secular consensus in the Concertación in spite of the fact that it is composed basically of parties —the Christian Democrats on one side and the Socialists and Radicals on the other— that were, historically speaking, on opposite sides of that divide.

¹² For more details see Valenzuela (1995), pages 21-36.

To say that the Chilean electoral politics used to show a division of “three thirds” never appeared to me to be accurate and so I feel that it is a good thing that the expression has finally been abandoned. It was not accurate because, in the first place, the Right, the Centre and the Left were never one third each of the electorate: the Left pole was the weaker. Because of this it was more correct to talk of sectors when summarising the political divisions in Chile. In the second place, and more profoundly, the problem with the expression was that there was never really only three sectors because when one adds the religious dimension, you have, in principle, two viewpoints in each sector from Right to Left. In the sector on the Left, for reasons that are too long to explain here, the Christian section was much weaker than in the others, but it was not negligible, especially given the importance of Clotario Blest in union history, and therefore in the Chilean Left. In the sector of the Centre, the division between the Christian Democrats and the Radicals, that so affected Chilean politics in its time, shows the importance of this dimension. And in the Right and Centre Right the conflicts between Liberals and Conservatives owed their origin, in a great part, to these differences.

Have all these things that so disturbed the country in the past, then disappeared? There can be no doubt that the religious element does not play such an important role as before. Nevertheless, why is Chile the only country in the world where there is no divorce law? Isn't this perhaps because there is a much greater sensitivity to confront themes that could bring back the differences of the past? What would happen if proposals emerged from within the Concertación to reduce the financing of Catholic colleges? Or even more, what would happen if certain leaders of the Concertación insisted on legalising abortion, giving women the possibility to abort of their own free will and without conditions as is actually happening in some European countries (including nominally Catholic ones) or in the United States? It is not as if this kind of measure has not been on the agenda of free thinking and Leftist women, tied to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Chilean Women (MEMCh) at the end of the 30's. Would not the religious/ secular free thinking split re-emerge in Chilean politics, perhaps, if these last measures were proposed?. Certainly, as far as I know, nobody in the Concertación is proposing to suggest seriously that they be adopted. But it one thing to say that there are no more religious/secular divisions in Chilean politics and another to say (which I think is more appropriate) that the configuration of the present Chilean party system is such that it tends not to touch on political discussions related to themes like the above that produce such great controversies today (especially abortion). And even if there is a more or less general consensus as far as the need of passing a divorce law in Chile is

concerned, the problem lies in the conditions that would make this possible. A divorce law could in fact limit the number of divorces produced in Chile using the procedures made possible under the law of civil marriage passed during the anti-clerical government of Domingo Santa Maria.

Moreover, discounting the religious factor and staying only with the differences that articulate the positions of the Right, Centre and Left, I do not see the possibility in the future that Renovacion Nacional, supposing that it were directed without major internal difficulties by Andres Allamand or other Centre Right but clearly democratic leaders, would make a coalition with the Socialist Party, however moderate the president of that party might be. On the other hand, such an alliance is not impossible with the Christian Democrats. At present it is in fact inconceivable because Chilean politics is at a phase where it still feels the effects of the military regime, with tasks for the transition to democracy still pending. The legislators of the parties on the Right have opted to maintain aspects tied to the authoritarian regime which will give them certain benefits in the short term, but the consequence of this has been to help to freeze the actual pattern of alliances. Nevertheless, the fact that an RN-CD may not be impossible in the future, once democracy has been consolidated, shows that the previous sectors persist, albeit latently, in spite of the actual bi-polar structure. Once again this demonstrates that the basis for the present divisions can be found in political considerations and not in a new generative cleavage in the parties.

Loyalty to political tendencies and party lines

Tironi and Aguero exaggerate when they indicate that parties actually lose their individual profile due to the bi-polar framework, an electoral law that forces much of the electorate to vote for candidates who are not necessarily from the party they prefer even though they belong to the same coalition, the lack of visibility of party emblems due to the personalisation of candidates during electoral campaigns and abstentions and null and void votes. The names of the parties appear practically every day in the news.

Even though the candidates have learned, and learned very well, to carry out their campaigns using modern techniques that lead encourage them not to proclaim their party loyalties so as to be able to capture the floating vote, the electorate is very well informed as to which party the candidates belong to. And the loyalty vote given to different parties, or more generally, to political tendencies continues being a more or less secure one. It is this, and

not the strength of the structure of the electorate in two blocks, which explains that in normal conditions (i.e. as long as there is no party re-alignment like the one the Christian Democrats generated in the 50's) the volatility of the vote in Chile is less than in other countries.

The loyalty of the electorate to the positions personified in party formations means that one can encounter a great deal of continuity in Chilean political options even after so many years of authoritarianism. In previous publications a co-author and I showed that the continuity in electoral options is impressive.¹³ With the results of the municipal elections of 1992 and 1996 (where to a certain extent the distortion of the binominal electoral system that is used in parliamentary elections does not apply) one can show that the distribution of the electoral forces, classified from Right to Left, practically repeats the relative forces of each sector on average from 1937 to 1973. The correlations of presidential votes, of the plebiscite or of political tendencies both before and after the military regime are very high, as we showed in the articles quoted above.

What I have not had the chance to publish are the correlations of the votes for each party individually. For this, it is important to do the calculations using data from the municipal elections of 1992 and 1967, for various reasons. Both elections occurred halfway through a presidential term and so one does not have the distorting effect of a honeymoon period for the presidential coalition (unlike the binominal one used in the present parliamentary elections), and all the parties of the country, including the Communists, were represented, something that happened for the first time after the beginning of the transition to democracy in the 1992 elections.

The results show the loyalty of the Chilean electorate to the candidates presented by the parties in spite of the passing of 25 years and the great changes that had taken place.

The communities in which the parties showed their strengths and weaknesses continued being to a large extent the same.¹⁴ Going from Left to Right, the correlation of the Communist vote between 1967 and 1992 is 0.55. For the Socialist Party it is 0.32, for the Christian Democrats it is 0.33 and for the Radical Party it is 0.14, a weakness that confirms the rule, given the disintegration of the party after 1967, which reduced it basically to its sector on the Left that remained faithful to the Unidad Popular. The figure for

¹³ Scully and Valenzuela (1993), Valenzuela and Scully (1997).

¹⁴ In Scully and Valenzuela (1993) one can see the manner in which we carried out a comparison of the present communities with the previous ones for the purposes of statistical analysis.

National Renovation (Renovación Nacional) is 0.27 taken together with the old National Party (Partido Nacional) and for the UDI 0.17 with the same party. Naturally the correlation of the two parties of the Right is weaker due to their strength being divided. In any case the result shows that Renovación Nacional has been the main inheritor of the Right as represented by the Partido Nacional at the end of the 70's. The correlations between opposing political parties are all negative and of the same magnitude, as one would expect. I have left the Party for Democracy (the PPD) for last since it has no important positive correlations. The strongest is only 0.10 with the Communist vote. If we use the 1971 municipal elections for this analysis, the correlations of the PPD increase, the most important being 0.18 with the National Democratic Party (PADENA), followed by a 0.15 with the Social Democratic Party of Chile (PSD). Far from being something that adversely affects the confirmation of party continuity in the vote due to the loyalty of the electorate to specific parties, the weakness of the correlations in fact confirm it. The PPD, a party that is clearly new in the political constellation of the Chilean Left, is made up of leaders and supporters who have arrived from previously different parties and political experiences. In any case it is symptomatic that the strongest correlations that one can find are those corresponding to parties that have the same position on the Centre Left as the PPD has today.

Given the expression of party loyalties that these figures demonstrate. I doubt very much if this aspect of Chilean electoral politics is going to disappear with the make up of the present alliances or with new ways of campaigning when facing the electorate. Put in another way, the solidity of the present blocs in electoral terms derives basically from the fact that any member of the public who votes time and time again for the same tendency or party line knows perfectly well that his party or preferred party line forms part of one coalition or the other and accepts it. Basic loyalty, then, is not to the coalition but to the party fragment or tendency.

Under these conditions, the pressure for a change to the actual system can only come from the electorate itself, if it concludes, for some reason, that the leaders of the parties do not now represent their way of thinking adequately enough, do not reflect their anxieties correctly or do not follow what they say they stand for. It is because of this that the floating or abstentionist electorate is not the one which menaces the present framework and gets rid of the party leaders: it is the loyal electorate that can do this once it reaches the conclusion that other candidates best represent its way of thinking. Naturally political leaders can end up within the present bipolar

framework if they do desire, keeping a great part of their electorate if and when they are seen as really representing its prevailing tendency.

In any case I do not believe that these kinds of changes are on the agenda either today or tomorrow. The present bipolar framework, to which the electoral law has certainly contributed, as Tironoi and Aguero point out, will very probably continue while the necessary constitutional changes to introduce a fully normal democracy in the country are not being carried out and while a commitment to democracy is not more strongly demonstrated by the Right. The present system of parties has been formed as a consequence of the military regime and because of the way in which the Chilean transition to democracy was carried out. It is coming up to 20 years in operation and has its life assured, while democracy is not fully consolidated in the country. Afterwards, we shall see.

Lastly, I do not believe that the increase in the amount of abstentions and null votes have such dramatic consequences as those indicated by Tironi and Aguero and other analysts of Chilean politics. We must not forget that this is a phenomenon that many analysts consider to be a normal part of democracy. Very high levels of electoral participation can be symptoms of a political crisis or correspond to elections that the population considers to be critical. Abstentions and null votes are lower in Chile than in several of the world's oldest and chief democracies, such as the United States and Great Britain. In Chile there is a legal obligation to vote, but the sanction for not doing so now no longer has the force that it had in the years after 1962, when the obligation to register and vote was introduced. For all transactions, even to open a bank account, you had to appear on the electoral register. It is also important to remember that the figures for abstentions before 1962 were very high indeed, which goes a long way to explaining why there was such a small but effective electorate. The real Chile, to use a French image, has been largely disinterested as far as participating in elections is concerned, even though the population as a whole absorbed the same political identities as the nucleus that voted. This can be seen by the fact that the increases in electoral participation did not affect the percentage distribution of the vote. It is not unusual that in a context like the present, where there is perceived to be a climate of political stability, for abstentions to increase. In fact this is a sign of normality that is somewhat premature given that the transition to democracy is still incomplete.

Final words

In short, Tironi and Aguero's article is both interesting and provocative, something which has motivated me to write this commentary. The present party system is different from before, but it cannot be said that this is due to a socio-historical "generative cleavage". For the same reason I believe that, underlying the present system, there still exist distinct political tendencies that go back various generations. Loyalties to these tendencies, expressed through party labels, form the essential basis of the two main coalitions that fight for the bulk of the Chilean electorate. It is certain the present party system is not going to change overnight. To consolidate the transition to democracy and to pass clearly to a post-Pinochet era in our national history appear to be steps, which are not yet fully taken, for such a change to happen. This would begin a sixth transformation of the Chilean party configuration. The present party system is coming of age and there is no reason to suppose that it is going to be more immortal in the long term than previous ones.

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