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STUDY

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Translated by John Bell

## **STRO WILL THE NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN CHILE SURVIVE?\***

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This article maintains that the Chilean party system, which emerged in 1990, shows an important lack of continuity with the system that had existed before the political crisis of 1973, which was characterized by its division into three thirds: Left, Centre and Right. According to the authors, the reconfiguration of the party system is the result of a new “generative cleavage”: an authoritarianism/democracy split. Born during the military regime, with the development of the political transition period, the split was not only not weakened but also branched out, deepened and became institutionalized, to the point where it managed to integrate and re-order the historical divisions (class and religion) that made up the previous system of parties in Chile.

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\*A first version of this article was presented at the panel “Political Intermediation, Parties and Socialization in New Democracies: Chile and Spain”, in the XX International Congress of LASA, Guadalajara, 17 -19, 1997. We should like to thank Frances Hagopian and Trisha Craig for their comments, as well as Claudio Rutlant for the help he gave with the processing of information.

More, they point out that the advances made in the political transition to democracy and the socio-economic modernization of the last decade appear to have closed down the possibility of a resurgence of the previous political landscape and a reproduction of the old idea of three thirds. This historical evolution would lead rather to a kind of cooling in the attitude of the population towards politics, which in turn would lead to less participation, and to a personalization of their preferences, which would make them opt for candidates rather than global political options. It is here that the greatest threat to the new political landscape lies. Nevertheless in the short and medium term, the authors add, these tendencies do not seem sufficiently powerful enough to modify the present political system.

**A**mong its main proposals, the authoritarian regime in Chile had the idea of terminating the pre-1973 party system.<sup>1</sup> The official thesis was that parties were an abnormal expression of politics, appropriate to an underdeveloped society with an excessive weight of State control, which in turn gave disproportionate importance to access mechanisms to itself via militancy in parties and elections. The adhesions to parties and the interest in politics, however, did not rest on ideological loyalties or cultural affinities but on mere client ties. As a corollary, these adhesions would fade away with economic development and the subsequent increase in consumer capacity, with the extension of the market and the privatization of the provision of benefits and services, as well as with an increase in the level of education of the population.<sup>2</sup>

### **The continuity of the parties**

The prohibition of parties and the repression of supporters of the opposition, the freezing of democratic institutions, the suspension of elections, the political censorship of the press, and the constant banning of public speeches from the parties or about politics added up to a severe socio-economic restructuring that drastically reduced the social and economic role

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<sup>1</sup> See Arturo Valenzuela and J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Party Opposition in an Authoritarian Regime" (1986).

<sup>2</sup> As Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1986) recall, the most complete exposition of this thesis (which has deep roots in Chilean conservative thinking) is to be found in an article by Jaime Guzman published in 1979 ("El Camino Político").

of the State and extended relations with the market, factors that nourished the expectations of the authoritarian regime in its proposal to do away with the traditional political parties. With the beginning of the movement for a transition to democracy in 1987, the regime even considered the creation of a party system entirely different —currents of opinion, regional parties— with completely new leaders. But to its surprise, it saw re-emerging the old parties with leaderships that were generally faithful to the panorama of 1973. It seemed that one of the fundamental objectives of the military regime had not been achieved.

These facts show that J. Samuel Valenzuela and Arturo Valenzuela were right when they warned that the aims of doing away with parties in Chile were doomed to failure. In their judgment, Chilean political parties had their origin in two fundamental generative cleavages: one that was formed around the polarization of State v. Church and the other around the polarization between workers and employers. Already consolidated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both cleavages had constructed early on in Chile a solid “political landscape”, which would survive the willful zeal of authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is inspired by the thesis of Lipset and Rokkan, according to which, once they have been formed by profound generative cleavages, party systems tend to last for a time without any great changes.<sup>4</sup> But this thesis was proposed for the case of democracies that were installed and confirmed in Western Europe. Arturo Valenzuela and J. Samuel Valenzuela introduced something new, therefore, by suggesting that a party system could also survive attacks from an authoritarian regime. In their opinion, the political demobilization provoked by this type of government would lead to the freezing of the principal characteristics of a party system, making it difficult to create a new “political landscape”. So, paradoxically, the freeze that stirred up such expectations in the authoritarian regime ended up by maintaining the previous systems intact, instead of undermining the bases of the party system that it had planned to destroy. At the end of the day, it is thus somewhat ironical that authoritarian regimes are substituted by the same political leaders and parties that they persecuted and repressed. This can be clearly seen in the majority of the new democracies that appeared in Latin America in the 90’s.

Chile’s recent evolution apparently verifies the above interpretation. In fact, the transition was led fundamentally by the same parties and the same

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<sup>3</sup> See also A. Valenzuela and J. S. Valenzuela, “Los orígenes de la democracia chilena” (1983).

<sup>4</sup> S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction” (1967).

leaders who were the protagonists during the democratic crisis of 1973 and the political membership – although weaker than before — basically follows along the lines of the old Left/Centre/Right axis, represented to a large extent by the historical political parties.<sup>5</sup> Timothy R. Scully summarizes the vision of numerous analysts when he asserts that “the basic contours of the political panorama that re-emerged as a result of the transition from authoritarian government, at the end of the 80’s, were not very different from those that had predominated during the 70’s. Just like the party system prior to its dismantling in 1973, it is possible to observe the re-appearance of, basically, three underlying tendencies in Chile: the Right, the Left and the Centre”.<sup>6</sup> Even when he admits that the party system has changed significantly, Scully discards the emergence of a new division with sufficient strength to re-organize the basic contours of the political panorama. In his opinion, the principal divisions in party conflicts in the 90’s will be ones based on class differences and there will be no space for the emergence of a new “generative cleavage”.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose behind this brief essay is to put the thesis on the continuity of the pre-1973 party system into a post-authoritarian Chile to the test, and to revise the most recurrent affirmations regarding cleavages in the system. With almost ten years having passed since the beginning of the transition to democracy and six elections having been called (two presidential, three parliamentary and two municipal) plus the fact that for eight of those years the country has been governed by the same Centre-Left coalition, one cannot go on asserting the validity of old historical divisions as being fundamental elements in the present party system. In fact, the continuity of the party system is more apparent than real. Almost all the same components persist, but they are structured in a different way: many of the same actors continue being centre stage but they now play different roles.

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<sup>5</sup> In fact., opinion polls show that the self- identification of Chileans as Left, Centre and Right was basically unaltered between 1958 and 1992. See Table N°4 in Felipe Aguero, Eugenio Tironi, Eduardo Valenzuela and Guillermo Sunkel, “Votantes, partidos e informacion politica: La fragil intermediacion politica en el Chile post-autoritario” (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy R. Scully *Los partidos de centro y la evolucion politica chilena* (1992), page 250.

<sup>7</sup> T. R. Scully “Reconstituting Party Politics in Chile” (1995), page 122. Scully points out how improbable the strengthening of an authoritarianism/democracy break is: “A new political fissure, democracy versus authoritarianism, appears with a certain amount of strength in the general elections of December 1989. But even though there are indices that there are opposing visions about what the most appropriate political regime for Chile might be, it does not seem probable that electoral tendencies will centre on this division in the future” (Note N° 56, page 497).

### The changes in the system

The lack of continuity in the political landscape can be expressed by two fundamental changes in the party system. The first is the step from what Sartori<sup>8</sup> calls a multi-party and multi-polar system that revolves around a Centre (with the Left on one extreme and the Right on the other) and whose dynamic tends to be centrifugal, to a bipolar system lacking a Centre where the pivots of the party system are the two poles (no matter how many parties exist) and whose dynamic tends to be centripetal. The second change is the step from “polarized pluralism” (which was prevalent up to 1973), where there is a great ideological distance between the parties, with not one capable of creating coalitions, and centrifugal competition, to a “de-polarized or moderate pluralism”, with less ideological differences, a “bi-polar configuration of coalitions” and centripetal competition, that is where both coalitions compete for votes from the Centre.<sup>9</sup>

What marked the end of the previous political landscape of the “three thirds” and inaugurated the present moderate bipolar system was the division among Chileans in the plebiscite called in 1988 to decide if General Pinochet should continue as President of the Republic or not. It was there, facilitated by the manner in which a plebiscite is conducted, that the generative cleavage of authoritarianism/democracy materialized and has governed party rivalry ever since. This event was preceded by numerous occasions and instances that, after 1983, expressed the fashioning of two of the three thirds into a pole of political democratic opposition to the authoritarian regime and to the political groups that had supported it since 1973. But it was only with the plebiscite that the coalition of the “No”, which got 53.7% of the votes, came together in a formal way and later became known as the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (the Grouping of Parties for Democracy), always made up of the Christian Democrat Party, the Socialist Party, the Party for Democracy and the Radical Party: the other pole, the coalition of the “Yes”, which got 43%, has been called by different names but has remained constant in its composition as being supporters of the military regime. In all the elections that have been carried out since the 1988 plebiscite, the same two coalitions have always confronted each other and always with the similar electoral support. The reproduction of both coalitions feed on each other reciprocally, in that the continuing existence of one stimulates the continuing existence of the other,

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<sup>8</sup> G. Sartori, “European Political Parties: The Case of Polarised Pluralism” (1966).

<sup>9</sup> G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (1976).

but, at the same time, they are reinforced by a binominal electoral system that strongly punishes candidates who are not from either of the two majority poles.<sup>10</sup>

With respect to the ideological distances between the different parties and coalitions in which they are grouped, it is necessary to point out that in the new political landscape, they have shortened and lost their intensity in several important aspects. This is principally determined by two factors. The first is the closeness of almost all sectors, mainly because of both changes in the ideology and programmes of the old Left and Centre, as regards a development model based on the preponderance of the market and unrestricted integration into the international economy.<sup>11</sup> The second factor that has played a part in shortening the distance between the parties is the impact, both programmed and ideological, of the dynamic of centripetal rivalry, which is a result of the bipolar organization of a system that tends to moderate its approaches in reaching out to the Centre vote. Despite this, the arrangement of this system around a new division points to the existence of important differences as regards the form of political government, the interpretation of the historical process that gave birth to the present situation as well as the evaluation of the authoritarian regime and its leader, General Augusto Pinochet, especially as to the violation of human rights.

### **The divisions in the transition**

Ten years have passed, together with two multi party governments (those of Aylwin and Frei), both of which have counted on solid support from the coalition parties, and it seems the time has arrived to admit that the new political environment is more stable than what was predicted. This environment is founded on a generative cleavage that stems from the experience of authoritarianism and that is composed of diverse phenomena, only some of which it is necessary to mention here. It includes, in the first place, the crisis of the democratic system in 1973, provoked to a large extent, by the collapse of the party political system, which precipitated the military

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<sup>10</sup> For characteristics of the Chilean electoral system, see A. Valenzuela and P. Siavelis, "Ley electoral y estabilidad democrática: Un ejercicio de simulación para el caso de Chile" (1991).

<sup>11</sup> As Genaro Arriagada recalls, the political changes in Chile coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, which "had been a fundamental factor in determining the principles of identity and contradiction" in what he calls the "the third party system": i.e. that characterised, since 1957, by the confrontation between three global utopian projects. See *Hacia un Big Bang del systems de partidos?*

coup.<sup>12</sup> In effect, the present bipolar configuration of coalitions presents itself as replacing a system whose crisis had dramatic effects for the country.

In the second place, this new cleavage stems from the fact that the authoritarian period was an experience common to a whole generation who constructed their own “framework of political reference” during that era, a framework which, once it has been crystallized, will tend to maintain itself for some time.<sup>13</sup> Said in another way, a large part of the citizens of today formed their political consciences and identities with reference to the framework of the authoritarianism/democracy polarity which characterized the period. Those who supported or played a role in the “capitalist revolution” that, from the establishment of the military regime onwards, reduced the role of the State and privatized and opened up the economy to the exterior, and those who opposed the regime and its reforming efforts and paid a high cost for doing so, both constructed common marks of reference and profound relationships of affinity and loyalty, which found their expression in the “Yes” and “No” vote of the 1988 plebiscite and have been reproduced since then.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, the continuation of this new division exists by feeding itself on different visions of political government, which are updated by the periodic efforts made by the Concertacion to reform the institutions inherited from authoritarianism, especially those aspects that act as a strong counter balance to the sovereignty of the people (institutional Senators, Constitutional Court, National Security Council). To this can be added the discrepancy that persists regarding the possibilities that the Chilean justice system investigates and sanctions the cases of violation of human rights during the military regime. The fact that these issues are still a source of conflict and controversy reaffirms on an almost daily basis the continuing existence of an authoritarianism/democracy polarity.

The development of the political process in our democracy, instead of weakening the new political landscape, has crystallized it to such a point that it is, in many ways, more solid than it was at the beginning of the 90’s. In the “No camp”, coexistence in the functioning of government has reinforced the transversal networks created during the authoritarian period in the bosom of

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<sup>12</sup> See Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile* (1978).

<sup>13</sup> For the idea of a “framework of political reference” and of a generational one, see S. M. Lipset, *El hombre político* (1977).

<sup>14</sup> The cleavage between the “Yes” and “No” has re-emerged with particular intensity at every critical political moment, like for example the one precipitated by the detention of Senator for Life Augusto Pinochet in London on the petition of the Spanish judicial system.

the political and technocratic elite, to the point where they are the same or more solid than original party loyalties.<sup>15</sup> Something similar has happened with those who elected the Concertacion, who tend to choose candidates from within the coalition, with relatively little importance given as to the party they belong to.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the Yes camp possesses a strong politico-cultural identity associated to the experience of the military regime and figure of General Pinochet, both in its leadership and in its social and electoral support. This fundamental identity has not been weakened as a result of being in opposition: on the contrary it has remained fully in force, helped by the influence that several powerful think tanks created by the military regime and backed by businessmen have over its political elite.<sup>17</sup>

The prevalence of this authoritarianism/democracy split is exactly the explanation as to why the Chilean party system has remained relatively immune, up to now, to a phenomenon common to modern democracies, which is volatility. This phenomenon consists of an electorate that fails to align itself behind historical party structures and that during electoral periods floats indecisively between the different political alternatives available, one of which they opt for at the last moment but without any great commitment of loyalty.<sup>18</sup> The Chilean electorate, on the other hand, remains faithful to the two coalitions that emerged from the 1988 plebiscite. Even though the old loyalty to parties has weakened consistently since 1992, according to polls carried out by the Centro de Estudios Públicos (the Centre for Public Studies), the coalitions that emerged from that plebiscite have managed to maintain a notable support from their electorate. The surprises —when there are any—

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<sup>15</sup> Proof of the transversalism of the elite of the Concertacion can be found in the debate generated in 1998 about two documents (one of which was titled “self satisfied” and the other “self critical”), signed by intellectuals and political leaders from different parties, who put forward global visions opposed to those of the Concertacion and their vision of the future.

<sup>16</sup> It is symptomatic of the fact that the majority of the candidates (in both municipal elections and parliamentary ones) omit explicit references to their parties, and in the case of the Concertacion, accentuate their identification with the coalition. Several party leaders have rebelled against this tendency and wanted to have a greater presence of party symbols on the campaigns but the candidates, for strictly electoral motives, pay scarce attention to this type of instruction.

<sup>17</sup> Such is the case of the Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo that exercises a great deal of influence over the political, economic and cultural thinking of the Centre Right, and in particular, over the legislative actions of its parliamentarians.

<sup>18</sup> On the concept of volatility, see Paul A. Beck, Russell J. Dalton and Robert Huckfeldt, “Intermediation and Electoral Volatility in a Multi-Message Environment: The Case of the United States”. An investigation prepared for the Cross-National Election Project meeting held in Madrid, June 1996.

are related to the distribution of preferences within each coalition, not to the difference between them. The new loyalty to coalitions, therefore, seems to be stronger than the old loyalty to parties.

Definitely then, the bipolar system of coalitions has not resulted in being a mere parenthesis before returning to the normal scenario of the “three thirds”. The experience of authoritarianism had the effect of creating a fundamental generative cleavage, which has re-organised the profile of the Chilean political landscape. The change is to be found not so much in the parties (which continue to be basically the same as before) than in their grouping in two coalitions that act in practice like “macro-parties”. For its part, the transition has contributed to the consolidation of this new political landscape, by not generating or encouraging events that could lead to the breaking or weakening of the two political blocs born in 1988, while the incentives for maintaining the present political scenario remain very much alive, especially for the coalition that wins an electoral majority.<sup>19</sup> This development has demolished the thesis that announced the extinction of coalitions once the authoritarian period became a thing of the past, leading once again to the traditional three thirds. Political strategies based on this premise have not, up to now, borne fruit.<sup>20</sup>

### The Concertacion

The most successful creation that the experience of authoritarianism left was, without a doubt, the coalition of the “No” or the Coalition for Democracy, which institutionalized the fusion of the Centre and the Left. Its

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<sup>19</sup> The ex-President of the Christian Democrats, Senator Alejandro Foxley, has stated the theme of incentives from the point of view of the Concertacion very clearly: “The incentives for continuing together are much greater than those which could cause the Concertacion to fall apart and they have to do with the possibility of forming part of the corps of this country’s leaders”, *La Epoca*, September 21, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Various political strategies have been based precisely on the idea of the transitory character of the post-authoritarian political landscape. Thus the Communist Party as well as the leadership of Andres Allamand of Renovacion Nacional wagered at some moment or other that the present coalition structure of Chilean politics would pass. It was because of this that the Communist Party tried to put back together the CP-SP (Communist Party-Socialist Party) axis that used to be the Left’s third of the electorate, while Allamand tried to create a post authoritarian RN-DC (Christian Democrat) one. Both attempts failed: Allamand’s thesis was defeated on the Right, even though it was returned to more recently by the Presidential candidate Joaquin Lavín, with what luck remains to be seen, while the CP for its part has to content itself by creating an axis that groups together all the old ultra-Leftists, but that does not count on historical Socialism among its support.

base goes back to the 70's, when the "Grupo de Estudios Constitucionales" (the Group for Constitutional Studies) or "Grupo de los 24" (the Group of 24) was constituted, formed basically by lawyers from the Centre and the Left who came together with the intention of arguing about the constitutional ideas of the military regime and proposing alternatives, and who figured as the first focus of public dissent to the authoritarianism of the government. The coalition of the Centre-Left also has its antecedents in the intense academic-intellectual discussion that unfolded in independent sectors from the end of the 70's. In this debate influential intellectuals from both those political currents came together and reached a considerable degree of concurrence and affective agreement.<sup>21</sup> Lastly one has to underline the extraordinary importance for the union between the Centre and the Left of the anti-authoritarian mobilizations in which both sides participated (together with the subsequent reprisals), especially the so-called "national protests" from 1982 - 1985, together with their common experience in creating and leading social organizations, such as those that grouped together teachers and workers.

The capacity the Concertacion has demonstrated to keep united together the old sectors of the Centre and the Left, to triumph in all the elections so far and to administer central government relatively successfully, is a good indicator of the continual presence of an authoritarianism/democracy generative fissure. We have to add to this its capacity to go on creating a political culture of its own that integrates the historic past of its participants with programmes and proposals of democratization, social justice, freedoms and economic and social modernization.

From the beginning the Concertacion has managed to superimpose the generative authoritarianism/democracy fissure over the historical one of social or class origin, with the result that its electoral support integrates both anti-authoritarian political and cultural currents as well as the lowest income sectors of the population who have historically voted for the Left and Centre as representing the popular or workers pole. This can be seen in Table 1, below, based on a CNEP poll carried out immediately after the December 1993 Presidential election, which shows how the social self-identification of the interviewees is associated with their voting preferences, in such a way that those who admitted to low incomes voted more frequently for the Concertacion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Jeffrey M. Puryear, *Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile, 1973 - 1988* (1994).

<sup>22</sup> The CNEP (Cross-National Election Project) is an international academic project that has been developed since 1992 in various countries throughout the world

TABLE 1 VOTING IN THE 1993 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PER SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP

	Union por Chile A. Alessandri	Concertacion por la Democracia E. Frei
High	41.9%	17.8%
Middle	36.2%	28.3%
Low	21.9%	53.9%
Total	100%	100%

Source: CNEP- Chile, December 1993.

It is necessary to add the capacity the “No” coalition has demonstrated to also integrate the historical lay/confessional division, to the point where, instead of being what one supposed, a source of tensions, and with time, a reason for the breakdown of the union between the Centre and Left, it has been transformed into a source of reinforcing the same. In fact the governments of the Concertacion have actively pushed certain “lay” themes forward —the elimination of censorship, the end of discrimination, legislation about the family and divorce, prevention of AIDS etc.—so as put them up for public debate and on the legislative agenda. From the moment when it could incorporate themes of a moral or cultural nature into its agenda without affecting its unity, the Concertacion has extended its identity beyond either social questions or questions of democracy. On the other hand, the incorporation of these themes has unleashed polemical debates with the coalition of the Right, who have adopted “conservative” or “confessional” values as their own, thereby reinforcing the bipolar configuration. In other words, the reappearance of the old lay/confessional division has not interfered with the authoritarianism/democracy split nor has it fragmented the political groupings that grew out of it, such as the Concertacion. On the contrary, the bipolar system of coalitions that emerged out of the experience of authoritarianism has proved its resilience, by being capable of successfully processing and incorporating those themes of the lay/confessional fight within the present political landscape, without affecting the existing party political order and even strengthening it.

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under the direction of Paul A. Beck (Ohio State University) and John Curtice (University of Strathclyde, UK). In Chile the CNEP questionnaire was applied, using a panel type sample, in Greater Santiago in two stages (one before and one after the election of December 12<sup>th</sup> 1993) by the Department of Sociological Studies (DESUC) at the Universidad Catolica de Chile.

To sum up, unlike what those many predictions assumed —that the authoritarianism/democracy split (and the grouping that best expressed it, the Concertacion)— would be transitory and that it would be extinguished with the success of the transition to democracy and the distance from the authoritarian past, it has remained in place, structuring other historical divisions and thereby re-ordering the whole Chilean political landscape. In fact new divisions have emerged, such as the one between protection of the environment and economic growth, but here as well, in the same way as the division that exists in the so called “moral themes”, they have produced transversal splits that in no way put the dominant alignment (i.e. the Concertacion) in danger.<sup>23</sup>

### **The new landscape: strengths and threats**

The stability that the new political landscape has shown is, without a doubt, linked to the effects of substituting the electoral system of proportional representation that favoured a fragmentation into multiple parties, for a binominal majority system that favours candidates for the two major coalitions and severely hampers any third force. It is a known fact that the conditions induced by “electoral engineering” contribute to making more solid those alignments that had their origin in cultural, social or political splits to the point that the effect of those divisions and their politico-institutional variables play off each other and become intertwined.

Even though there are intentions to reform the electoral law both in the heart of the Concertacion and among the forces marginalized by it, it will be difficult for them to obtain the majority required in parliament and it is also difficult to envisage this as being a central theme of the legislative agenda in the near future. In any case, even if the reform was approved, it would be limited to introducing some level of proportionality in the actual majority system, since there is a strong consensus for disregarding the idea of a return to the old system of proportional representation, which, as we have noted before, bears a heavy responsibility for the crisis in Chilean democracy at the beginning of the 70's. However, while this reform does not materialize, the

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<sup>23</sup> A “Green bench” has been created in Congress, with parliamentarians from both coalitions giving considerable weight to environmental matters. This is the first stable political grouping that has overcome the authoritarianism/democracy split. Despite this, international experience shows that the theme of the environment is far from having a capacity for structuring the political landscape and even giving birth to stable political parties. See, for example, Herbert Kitschelt, “La gauche libertaire et les ecologistes francais”, pages 339-365.

bipolar formula of coalitions continues operating, which in turn institutionalizes the political alignments of the new political landscape, strengthening and deepening the fissures that gave birth to them. Moreover, even if in the future they manage to introduce more proportional representation into the electoral system, the identities of both coalitions have now been crystallized, which means that they can quite easily go on reproducing themselves within new politico-institutional frameworks, such as has already occurred in the case of the municipal elections.

The nomination of the Presidential candidate for the elections that will take place in 1999 is an event which is subject to strong tensions in both coalitions. In 1989 and 1993, the Presidential election coincided with parliamentary elections, which helped to extend the bipolarity of the binominal system itself. The 1999 election will be an exclusively Presidential election, which will reduce the incentives to look for a “sole” candidate from within the coalitions. Because of this, both coalitions have reached agreements over procedures (in the case of the Concertación, an open primary) that tend towards the nomination of a common candidate. Nevertheless, even if this does not work and more than one candidate presents themselves in each coalition, the system of a second round or *ballot* that is contemplated in the constitution can, in the long run, generate the same glutinous effect of encouraging the binominal system within the parliamentary ambit, always and when the first two majorities come from different coalitions.

More worrying for the present political climate could be the results of the efforts of those on the Centre Right if they find it too difficult to gain the Presidency. These efforts will be directed at discarding the present coalition system, based on the authoritarianism/democracy cleavage. This can be seen in the case of the Mayor of Las Condes, Joaquín Lavín, who appears to be in a leading position according to opinion polls and who is looking to put his personal attributes and leadership potential above party identification. This is also the idea of some people on the Centre Right who have realized the convenience of not having their own candidate, someone who would be identified inevitably with the “Yes” campaign which would limit their political appeal, and of pledging their support to one of the candidates of the Concertación.<sup>24</sup> And we can see how successful this strategy is, in both its variants, when faced with a Presidential election where the public look for a more global identification in the candidates.

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<sup>24</sup> If one remembers, the thesis of not having one’s own candidate and supporting the candidate of the Concertación Andrés Zaldívar was insinuated by Senator for Life Pinochet himself and supported by leading members of Renovación Nacional.

There is another element which has acquired importance in the Chilean political environment and which has to be considered as an uncertain factor with respect to its influence over the present forms of alignment: the loss of vitality in politics itself. The fall in the statistics showing electoral participation, as well as the attitudes towards politics and parties that are demonstrated by the polls, show an estrangement, distrust and dissatisfaction towards politics in general, which include government, parliament, coalitions, parties and politics in the shape of people. For several analysts, these are symptoms of a situation that coincides with the idea that the present party system is no longer applicable and that there is no system to replace it.<sup>25</sup>

The indicators that show a kind of “cooling off” or apathy of the population towards politics are numerous. There is, for example, a significant reduction in electoral participation, principally among the young. In fact, around a million and a half young people refused to register for the parliamentary elections of 1997. We can also see a consistent increase in abstentions that rose from 2.5% in the 1988 plebiscite to 15.6% in the municipal election of 1996 and reaching 13.7% in the parliamentary election of 1997. In the latter, the null vote grew spectacularly, reaching 13.6% while spoiled votes grew to 4.2%. Although the motivations are different, if we put the non-registered, null and spoiled votes together, on this occasion they come to 40% of the Chileans, men and women, with the right to vote. As an indicator of dissatisfaction we need to point out also a severe deterioration of the image of political institutions in the eyes of the population. Given this, it is not so strange that, in the context of personal relationships, conversations about politics are also reduced as time passes and the transition process consolidates itself. (Table No. 2).

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<sup>25</sup> This is the thesis of Genaro Arriagada, for whom “the reasons that justified the emergence of the present parties have run out, without having been replaced by any new realities that might have given birth to a distinct party order or a radical reform of the present system” (*op.cit.* page 73).

TABLE NO. 2 TALKING ABOUT POLITICS WITH ... DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

	1993 Parliamentary	1996 Municipal
<i>Family:</i>		
Often	17.0%	11.5%
Sometimes	27.6%	24.2%
Almost never	27.7%	26.0%
Never	27.7%	37.4%
No answer	0.1%	0.9%
<i>Friends:</i>		
Often	13.7%	7.9%
Sometimes	24.0%	20.2%
Almost never	19.9%	20.1%
Never	38.7%	50.6%
No answer	3.8%	1.0%
<i>Colleagues at work:</i>		
Often	12.1%	9.8%
Sometimes	15.8%	14.8%
Almost never	14.3%	18.2%
Never	38.9%	54.3%
No answer	19.0%	3.0%

Source: CNEP and DESUC-COPESA polls 1966, Greater Santiago.

It is not the place here to analyze the factors that influence this “cooling off” or apathy towards politics —among those that have been mentioned are the consensual style of the transition, the perception that there are very few differences between the coalitions in their programmes, the role of the media, the extension of the market etc.— but it is certain that this is the newest phenomenon to appear and the one with the most perspectives to expand in the present political climate. Nevertheless, in the short term, the “cooling off” is not a threat to prevailing political landscape. On the contrary, it tends to fix the present alignment, characterized as it is by the dominance of the authoritarianism/democracy split, and to make any change more difficult. In effect, the possibilities of revitalizing old divisions that could reestablish the three thirds or the radical ideology of yesteryear, as well as the idea of generating new political splits or new forces capable of questioning or checkmating the present system, are very remote given an environment where interest and participation in politics is frankly in decline. In this sense, it is

indicative that those who marginalize themselves from all electoral participation do not manage to constitute a different group, since they have no perceptions, preferences or opinions distinct to the rest of the population in economic or political matters.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, there is no visible pressure “from below”, which is either questioning the present political alignment or actively trying to replace it. Nevertheless, further on from the short term, it is possible to speculate that apathy and a subsequent decrease in political participation will create electoral pockets ready for sectors of the elite or charismatic leaders with anti-political programmes to try and mobilize them “from above”, thereby threatening the present forms of political alignment. But it is also possible that these sectors will remain demobilized, or that they might eventually be incorporated into the present coalitions if they are made an attractive offer in terms of programmes, style and leadership or finally that they reduce their participation to an anti-system pole that plays no part in the present coalitions, but also does not seriously affect the physiognomy of the political landscape. All this leads to the point that there is a phenomenon of uncertain effects that could need to be addressed in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The authoritarian experience from 1973 to 1989 gave birth to a fundamental generative cleavage (the authoritarianism v. democracy split) that re-aligned political adherences and reconfigured the Chilean party system. This split is a predominantly cultural one and has superimposed itself on those historical ruptures of a religious and social character that had their origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on the three thirds effect of this that marked the political landscape prior to 1973. The two great coalitions that emerged from this new split have been able to integrate both old and new dimensions into their fundamental identity. If they manage to resolve, in an adequate fashion, the problem of the nomination of their respective Presidential candidates for the 1999 elections, then the stability of the new Chilean political landscape will be assured for various years.

Nevertheless the dissatisfaction of the population with politics, although it has not led to a reconfiguration of the party system, could well lead to various changes in the long run, which will have to be watched attentively. In its most radical version it might induce a total estrangement of the population from the political system, through a dramatic reduction in

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<sup>26</sup> See Carla Lehmann, “La voz de los que no votaron” (1998).

registration and participation in elections. This dissatisfaction could also induce a growing personalization and rationalization of politics, which might at the same time lead to more volatile situation, with the electorate choosing people in a similar way that consumers choose objects in the market place, without any consideration of long term adherence or loyalty. To carry this further, such a tendency would make all actual divisions obsolete and destroy the present political landscape: however what is certain is that, up to now, the split engendered by the experience of authoritarianism and deepened by the transition to democracy, continues to be prevalent.

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