

**SOME KEY POINTS REGARDING THE POLITICAL
TRANSITION IN CHILE***

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The author talks about the principal elements and events that are characteristic of the political process in Chile in the period between the plebiscite of 1988 and the elections of 1989 and examines the factors and conditions that came together at the same time to explain the triumph of the Concertacion's candidate, Patricio Aylwin Azocar for the Presidency.

Realism and Political Constructivism

The traditional account of Roberto Mendez and the analysis that Arturo Fontaine Talavera has delivered allows me to save time and go directly to several fundamental aspects of the political process which the last CEP-Adimark poll reveals to us. I wish, in the first instance, to declare myself in support of the judgement, which is highly positive, as regards the reliability of the poll, both as a measure of public opinion during the days

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that it was carried out, as well as for its predictive value regarding the Presidential Elections of last December 14th.

Reading the poll has aroused a first reflection in me, which stands outside the boundaries of the poll itself, but which serves as a framework for it. This reflection is on the reality and truth in the political processes and the limits of constructivism in the field of politics. I do not pretend to uphold the belief that such processes are determinable, rigid and absolute and that once their nature and the direction of their advance has been discovered, one can foresee, with complete certainty, their route and final outcome. I also do not believe that the capacity of people and groups to construct a political project and the atmosphere that surrounds this will be null and void. Neither one thing nor the other.

My aim is to point out the need to size up the political processes and the constructive capacity that exists inside a rigorous and moderate political realism, with the aim of learning lessons, avoiding infantilism and achieving a certain and quiet maturity.

In the first place, democratic political constructivism is limited owing to the type of power that it exercises, which is none other than the strength to persuade large majorities in a rational manner. Taking that meaning we can distinguish several basic elements in this strength: the proposal of a plan, the election of capable and adequate people to carry it out, and also the efficiency to convince vast sectors of society as to which is the best of the existing options to choose. Persuasive efficiency, as is well known, includes a series of inter-related technical resources such as organisation, the means of communication, marketing, publicity etc.

The second limitation or condition is that this constructivism must interpret the whole process through what it aims to do. That is to say, to recognise the process in all its reality, adopt its general direction, and, inwardly, shape itself as an option for driving it and eventually re-directing it.

The third and obvious limitation of democratic political constructivism is that it cannot use resources of power that are alien to democracy, like physical force, violation and coercion, the improper use of the state's power, religion, money etc., i.e. everything that goes beyond the sphere of verbal persuasion, which is always directed towards obtaining the voluntary consent of the individual and large majorities.

The Process of the Return to Democracy

As has been pointed out so timely by the CEP, the central and global political process in Chile after the plebiscite of October 1988 is the return to

democracy. This is the principal characteristic of the process and its corollary is the extinction of the authoritarian regime. And I am using the present tense because this direction is, and will be, in force for a long period of time while the political system consolidates itself, even though it will have to pass through many changes.

In this process of re-democratisation, the production of political events and their distribution and ordering are ruled by their own logic, distinct from the logic that happens to these same phenomena under an authoritarian or totalitarian regime. Its principal characteristic is that, within it, the basic and initial decisions of the majorities are given priority, and that the decisions of political minorities, who hold undemocratic power, lose value.

Once this process is open, and, by deploying the force of this logic, is beyond constitutional legal forms, we are in a legitimate democracy. It is this moment that marks the extinction of the old regime. In our case this legitimacy acquired an irresistible tone and extent. The history of the results would allow us to reconstruct a model of transition, almost in the manner of a theory. This theory, however, will be only a discursive reconstruction of a reality which was much more accidental. I do not believe that memory fails us either collectively or individually and that we have forgotten that there had been something more than just a wag of a tail: that the hard liners in the authoritarian regime announced that they would not change a comma of the Constitution and that several people ran to seek protection for themselves under the aging shade of the government and to ask for concrete anti-democratic and illegitimate acts. surprisingly almost all of them are recorded in the press at that time.

The Demise of the Regime.

I would like to repeat something that I emphasised in this same place some time ago: every political regime pays the cost of its own demise and all authoritarian regimes pays very high costs, higher than those that occur when there is merely a change of government within a normal political system. Reciprocally, every government which comes to power receives prizes, as it is in a state of grace. There are no exceptions to this rule. The costs and the prizes can be bigger or smaller, but they are always paid or won.

Now, how does one portray the authoritarian regime in extinction?.

In the language of rhetoric, we speak of a dictatorship. This term is technically false and inappropriate, but has massive appeal. This is what we

hear and read about, more and more abundantly every time. But if we want to speak with a certain exactitude, we must make the effort to use a more precise definition.

Our authoritarian regime was an alliance between the military and the technocrats. A very sophisticated type of authoritarianism in that power was shared by the Armed Forces and a modern tecno-infrastructure that was both intelligent and extremely efficient. Out of this last flowed the comprehensive project of modernisation, and out of the Armed Forces the power to implement it. This type of political authoritarian regime has been widely studied in Political Science.

If we look back, we have to accept that the Armed Forces correctly interpreted the libertarian state of mind that exists in our country. Chile is a free country or rather, using an expression of Machiavelli's, a country "accustomed to liberty". This why we talk of reconstructing or re-encountering democracy, assigning to this act the quality of the recovery or re-emergence of the country's own historical identity. Given the circumstances, the political plan of the Armed Forces could not be none other than the restoration of democracy: any other plan was destined to fail and would have called for an enormous amount of political constructivism that would be both artificial and false.

Here are two great vacuums: the Armed Forces used a strong and authoritarian model of government to restore democracy and chose as the central actor Augusto Pinochet. The technocrats, on the other hand, who had no interest in the political problems surrounding the restoration of democracy, took charge of the modernisation of the economy, which, according to their model, would include important doses of economic liberty. This was of decisive help in the reconstruction of democracy, but it was not part of a rationally desired plan. In this way a *modus vivendi* was established which was, at the same time, a *modus operandi*: "I will think or plan economically, you will carry it out or implement it using the power that you have to do so". Thus technocracy was reduced to a purely instrumental function, forcefully seduced by the efficiency given to it through the means of military power and by the vindicating effects of its own measures that derived from the ideas of economic liberty.

The Big Mistake

At the beginning of 1988, it was evident that President Pinochet, the alliance between technocrats and the military, several busi-

neesmen, and the hard-liners in the regime, supported by a considerable body of public opinion, had yielded to the temptation of keeping power for another 8 years: out of this came General Pinochet's nomination. It is obvious that the temptation was not totally arbitrary because the regime had major achievements to its name and important political support. The error was in claiming that the same people who had governed dictatorially could do so democratically and that the tecno-infrastructure could adapt itself to a new way of taking technological decisions, by entering the system fully and assuming direct political functions. Both errors were made manifest in the plebiscite campaign, which ended in disaster.

The authoritarian regime had put a strange interpretation on the promise to restore democracy. This interpretation was reflected in its attempt to continue and in the Constitution of 1980, while the technocrats wanted to assume a political function which was not appropriate for them and for which they had no time to prepare.

The Presidential Elections

The results of the plebiscite indicated that the idea of a legitimate democracy was in good health and that this logic would guide the course of events. It was now no longer possible to keep power as had been planned and the authoritarian regime had to give in before the imminence of its demise. The reality of this process was made clear in two parallel phenomena: a) the reforms to the Constitution and b) the alliances that were brought about by the opposition in the Concertacion.

This being the picture, the Centre-Right had to choose a path. They could not insist on the resurrection of Pinochet or the appearance of another military figure. This card was burnt (even though a small and discredited minority insisted on this alternative), but the technocrat option was still open. If modernisation had been so successful, wouldn't there be a similar alternative specifically among those who had carried it out? This question went against the logic of what was happening, but appeared to be realistic and was a distant possibility, whose force could only be judged by putting it into play. The third choice was to assume that power was inevitably lost and look for a distinct alternative. My personal proposal was a political candidature that would serve as the basis for the construction of a great party. They chose the second option and this is what is dealt with in this opinion poll.

The Opinion Poll and some of its Results

In the light of the analysis that I have carried out, the first relevant point is that the idea of a legitimate democracy appears as the background to the Presidential elections. All the candidates emphasised the idea of democracy. As a result, apart from the fact that those people who were polled awarded the highest points to the intelligence and preparation of the candidates in their evaluations (Aylwin- 70.9%: Buchi-47%: Errazuriz-44.6%), the two main qualities of the winner were tied up with this idea of a legitimate democracy. Thus Aylwin for his “democratic spirit” polled 61.2% and his capacity to govern 60.8%. These two qualities make mutual demands on each other. Buchi, on the other hand, polled 23.7% for his “democratic spirit” and 24.9% for his capacity to govern, while Errazuriz received 24% and 21.6% respectively. For “concern for the problems of the people”, which runs along the same lines as those qualities mentioned above, Aylwin scored 60.7%, Buchi 23.9% and Errazuriz 23%. The measure of a President’s independence in front of people or groups with influence is also relevant, given that the Head of a democratic state guarantees equality for all and not to grant privileges to either individuals or sectors. With respect to “the capacity to confront pressure from different sectors” Aylwin received 59%, Buchi 23.9% and Errazuriz 22.5%. A general look at the percentages above shows us that there are very few differences between Buchi and Errazuriz.

This is confirmed when we examine the main risks or fears associated with each candidate becoming President.

In Aylwin’s case the principal risk seen by those polled is an eventual conflict with the Armed Forces (38%): Buchi, on the other hand, is almost the antithesis, with 42.8% seeing “the excessive influence of Augusto Pinochet” as being the main problem. It is clear from this that Aylwin, as the standard-bearer of democracy, is running the risk of conflict with those people who were central to the authoritarian regime. Buchi, however, has not manage to free his image from its ties to the regime and persona of Pinochet.

The second important risk seen as the result of an Aylwin government is the potentially excessive influence of the Communist Party (34.1%). In this case one can clearly see a hard line one-third of voters, strongly influenced by the experience of living during the Unidad Popular government, sensitive to the dangers of Communism, but also under the influence of the world crisis through which this political movement is passing. We can also say that this 34.1% indicates disapproval of the possible tendency of Aylwin’s government to follow left-wing policies, although I think that if a question had been explicitly asked regarding this, the result would have

been higher. In Buchi's case "protests and disorders" come second with 33.5%: maybe the perception here is directed towards what would be the result of unsatisfied social pressures in a situation where there was a democracy, without the force of military government. Within this picture, Buchi could not break the idea that his government would insure the preservation of Human Rights, a fear that was held by 20.2%.

Parallel to this, the strengths of both candidates are consistent with the ideas they express. In the first place, Aylwin assures there will be respect for human rights (63.1%), which is the emblematic value of democracy, and, immediately afterwards, this throws out strong signals that he is better able to confront the principal problems on the public agenda: health, education, the reduction in poverty and housing, topics in which he wins with more than 54%.

In Buchi's case there is a curious phenomenon, which is well worth noting. His strong points are his capacity to make the economy of the country grow (28.8%), maintain public order (27.9%), reduce inflation (27%), build houses (26.6%), control protests and disorder (25.6%) and control terrorism. However the figures are lower when we come to reducing unemployment and poverty and improving hospitals and education. There is, therefore, an image of undemocratic capitalism. Or, maybe, it's an image that persists of holding things back and waiting in a disciplined and military way for the benefits of growth to come filtering down. This is consistent with the risks that certain sectors see in an eventual government of Buchi's: "low wages" (22.8%) and unemployment (18.5%).

It is interesting to note that in the poll almost invariably 18% placed themselves on the right, 31% on the left, 25% in the centre, and 24% as independent, figures which have nothing to do with socio-economic levels or stratas, as the upper-class make up 3.7%, the middle class 55.9% and the working class 41% (these percentages are those expressed in the poll and are different from the actual socio-economic breakdown of the country). If we compare the variations in voting between the poll taken in October and the other one in December, we can see that Aylwin goes from 43.5% to 52.8% in the middle class vote- an increase of 9.3%- while the centre drops from 46.5% to 45%- a loss of 1.5%. Buchi, for his part, drops from 32.2% of the middle class vote to 23.6%, a loss of 8.8% and from 24% to 17.1% as regards the political centre. Finally Errazuriz goes from 12.6% of the middle sector vote to 15.5%, a gain of 2.9% and from 23% of the political centre to 33.2%, an increase of 10.2%.

As to the other sectors, Aylwin drops as far as the upper class vote goes (7.8%), but goes up with the working class vote (7.8%). His support

also increases on the right (6.2%: from 9.5% to 15.9%), on the left (from 91.1% to 96%, i.e. 4.9%), and with the independents (from 32.3% to 44.5%, an increase of 12.2%). Buchi increases in the upper class vote 50.6% to 55.4% (4.8%), but goes down in the working class vote from 25% to 17.5%, a decrease of 7.7%: he also loses votes on the right, on the left and from the independents. Errazuriz shows increases in both the upper and lower class sectors, and in the independent one. He loses, however, votes from both left and right.

To sum up, we can come to several conclusions, which I shall express as a series of thematic points:

1. Sustained decline of Buchi
2. Impact of the centrist position, which also began to lose support, albeit lightly, to Aylwin
3. Preference of the independents for a candidate belonging to a political party, but committed to forming a national government.
4. Strong concentration of the middle and lower classes supporting Aylwin's candidature.
5. Concentration of the political centre in support of the candidatures of Aylwin and Errazuriz.

Translated by: John Bell