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# Legislative Preferences, Political Parties, and Coalition Unity in Chile

Eduardo Alemán and Sebastián M. Saiegh

Government coalitions are a common feature of Latin American presidential democracies. However, the politics of coalition formation and coalition unity have only recently begun to be scrutinized.<sup>1</sup> Since the last wave of democratization Chile has enjoyed the most stable multiparty coalition in Latin America. During the last fifteen years the presidency has been under the control of the *Concertación por la Democracia*, which has also controlled a majority in the chamber of deputies, while the opposition has in recent years coalesced into an alternative coalition called *Alianza por Chile*. Competition between these two multiparty coalitions has dominated contemporary electoral and legislative politics. However, despite the novel stability of the two coalitions, several scholars dispute the claim that a fundamental change has realigned the party system. The point of contention is whether a bipolar pattern has replaced the three-way split (*tres tercios*) in political competition that traditionally characterized the Chilean party system. For example, according to John Carey, Chile has a de facto two-party system, with the *Concertación* and the *Alianza* each behaving like a single political party. In contrast, Peter Siavelis claims that the two major coalitions are merely opportunistic marriages of convenience that may possibly break up in the near future, making way for new and different partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

The stability and unity of Chilean multiparty coalitions have profound implications for the workings of Chilean democracy and, more generally, for an understanding of political parties and coalition building in presidential democracies. Given the deep divisions that characterized the Chilean party system in the period before the military coup of 1973, a bipolar realignment would be an impressive break with the past. It would also be significant because in multiparty presidential systems stable legislative coalitions play a vital role in providing effective government.

Therefore, a key question is whether the current Chilean coalitions are not only electoral but also policy-based alliances. To answer this question, analysis of the voting records of Chilean deputies can test alternative hypotheses about the cohesion of parties and coalitions in the legislative arena. While previous studies have found some support for the view that the two main coalitions adopt distinct positions, they do not permit the rejection of the trimodal (*tres tercios*) view of partisan alignment or of the hypothesis that moderate members of "centrist" parties vote as a distinct bloc in the legislature.

Bayesian Markov chain simulation statistical methods can be used to estimate the ideal points of Chilean legislators. The analysis reveals a bipolar distribution of legislative preferences, where coalition membership rather than independent parties dictate policy choice.

Moreover, although Chilean parties can be ordered along a left-right dimension, a relevant centrist bloc does not exist. The two parties that are ideologically adjacent but belong to different electoral coalitions, the Christian Democrats and National Renewal, do not constitute a distinctive policy coalition (that is, a centrist bloc). The results indicate that Chilean legislators are grouped into two cohesive blocs, with little overlap in preferences, and that the distribution of preferences inside each coalition is unimodal. These findings imply a convergence among *Concertación* parties that reflects institutional incentives as well as a fundamental reorientation of social conflict.

### The Chilean Party System: Bipolar Competition or *Tres Tercios*?

Since Chile's return to democracy in 1990, two legislative coalitions have captured virtually all the seats in the chamber of deputies. The *Concertación*, comprised of the Socialist Party (PS), the Party for Democracy (PPD), the Christian Democrats (DC), and the smaller Radical Social-Democratic Party (PRSD), has held the majority in the lower chamber of congress and the presidency of the country since redemocratization. The opposition, made up of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), the National Renewal Party (RN), and the smaller Centrist Union (UCC), has also coalesced into a formal alliance, now called *Alianza por Chile*.<sup>3</sup>

The pattern of alliances that emerged at the onset of democratization followed partisan positions with regard to the referendum on the continuation of the military government of General Augusto Pinochet. The traditionally centrist DC entered into an alliance with most parties on the left, with which it shared an opposition to Pinochet's regime and a desire for rapid democratization. These groups had been previously at odds. Most leftist leaders belonged to parties that in the early 1970s endorsed Marxist ideals and supported deposed president Salvador Allende, who was adamantly opposed by the DC. By the late 1980s, however, programmatic differences between the center and the left appeared to have been subordinated to achieve a common front in the yes/no referendum on regime change.<sup>4</sup> After Pinochet's defeat in the plebiscite, these parties renewed agreements to support a single presidential candidate and establish a multiparty coalition government. The two main parties that supported a continuation of Pinochet's regime (RN and UDI) also entered into a formal electoral coalition and fielded a common presidential candidate.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to partisan positions over the military regime, broader policy goals also appear to have been a factor in choosing partners. Both Chilean coalitions, the *Concertación* and the *Alianza*, consist of parties with contiguous ideological positions

(connected coalitions). There is consensus about how Chilean parties are ordered on the main left-to-right axis of political conflict: the left is comprised of socialists (PS) and moderate leftists (PPD); Christian Democrats (DC) occupy the center; and the right is comprised of former nationalists who endorsed, albeit sometimes critically, Pinochet's regime (RN) and supporters of free market policies linked to the former military regime (UDI). Yet it remains unclear how close coalition partners are to each other and, more important, whether these alliances represent a substantial realignment of the party system.

The existence and durability of the coalitions have been seen by many observers of Chilean politics as a sign that a new political landscape has emerged in the post-Pinochet era.<sup>6</sup> However, this view has been contested by those who claim that the three-way competitive dynamic that has traditionally characterized the Chilean party system continues to persist both at the electoral and elite levels.<sup>7</sup>

A bipolar view of partisan competition has been advanced by both institutional and social studies. Institutional analyses were the first to claim that the two member district electoral reform encouraged the reorganization of the party system into two blocs.<sup>8</sup> Under the binomial system (open list proportional representation with sixty districts of magnitude two) voters pick one candidate from one list; list totals determine how the two seats are allocated among lists; and rank within a list determines how seats are awarded to individual candidates. Parties or electoral alliances can present two candidates per list in each district, but they can win the two available seats only if they win a plurality that doubles the vote of the list coming second in the district. As scholars have noted, the establishment of this voting system in a country characterized by four to five main parties encouraged the immediate formation of electoral pacts.<sup>9</sup> Advocates of the bipolar view also stress that coalition labels are meaningful to Chilean voters and that legislators concerned with keeping a seat in congress know that dropping out of one of the two main coalitions entails significant electoral risks.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, other authors predict bipolar competition and centrifugal positioning as a result of the binomial system. Both Magar, Rosenblum, and Samuels and Dow construct formal models of party competition in which each individual candidate competes for votes even at the expense of the other coalition candidate in a particular district.<sup>11</sup> These models seek to highlight the tension between coalition competition and intralist competition and to show why two member districts differ from plurality rule in terms of the expected position of candidates. The main argument is that centrifugal forces, rather than Downsian moderation, dominate coalition strategies. The lack of centripetal incentives seems consistent with the fact that most legislators win seats with a minority share of the vote and thus candidates do not need to appeal directly to the center of the voter distribution. Moreover, under reasonable assumptions regarding candidate mobility these models predict that candidates from the same coalition would tend to support similar (noncentrist) policies, implying a fairly cohesive center-left *Concertación* and a fairly cohesive center-right *Alianza*.

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11. Eric Magur, Marc R. Rosenblum, and David Samuels, "On the Absence of Centripetal Incentives in Double-Member Districts: The Case of Chile," *Comparative Political Studies*, 31 (1998), 714–39; Jay K. Dow, "A Spatial Analysis of Candidates in Dual Member Districts: The 1989 Chilean Senatorial Elections," *Public Choice*, 97 (1998), 119–42.
12. Tronzi and Agüero, pp. 155–56.
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15. Tronzi and Agüero, p. 166.
16. J. Samuel Valenzuela and Timothy R. Scully, "Electoral Choices and the Party System in Chile: Continuities and Changes at the Recovery of Democracy," *Comparative Politics*, 29 (1997), 511–27; Siavelis, "Continuity and Change in the Chilean Party System," pp. 664–672; Munck and Bosworth, pp. 471–93; Scully, p. 136.
17. See, for instance, Barbara Geddes, "The Development of Party Systems in Latin America," paper prepared for the Western Political Science Association meeting, Portland, March 2004.
18. For example, in late 2002 and early 2003 a series of corruption scandals shook the Lagos government and political parties across the spectrum. See Patricio Navia, "Cruz de Lagos," *La Tercera*, Feb. 22, 2003; Jon Jeter, "Spate of Scandals Sullies Chile Squeaky-Clean Reputation," *Washington Post*, Apr. 22, 2003.
19. Robert H. Dix, "Cleavage Structure and Party Systems in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, 22 (1989), 23–37; Scully, pp. 100–15; Maurice Zeitlin and James Petras, "The Working-Class Vote in Chile: Christian Democracy versus Marxism," *British Journal of Sociology*, 21 (1970), 16–29.
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21. Valenzuela and Scully, p. 525.
22. Siavelis, "Sistema Electoral, Desintegración de Coaliciones y Democracia en Chile," pp. 60–62; also, Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
23. See, for instance, John Londregan, *Legislative Institutions and Ideology in Chile* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Morgenstern, *Patterns of Legislative Politics*; Mark P. Jones and Wonjae Hwang, "Party Government in Presidential Democracies: Extending Carrel Theory beyond the U.S. Congress," *American Journal of Political Science*, 49 (2005), 267–82.
24. John Londregan, "Estimating Legislator's Preferred Points," *Political Analysis*, 8 (2000), 35–56; Joshua Clinton, Simon Jackman, and Douglas Rivers, "The Statistical Analysis of Roll Call Data," *American Political Science Review*, 98 (2004), 355–70; Joshua Clinton, Simon Jackman, and Douglas Rivers, "The Most Liberal Senator? Analyzing and Interpreting Congressional Roll Calls," *PS*, 37 (2004), 805–11.
25. Londregan, "Estimating Legislator's Preferred Points," pp. 35–37. There are different ways to obtain useful estimates of uncertainty, though. For example, some of these problems can be mitigated by using Lewis and Poole's parametric bootstrap.
26. Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers, "Statistical Analysis of Roll Call Data," p. 356. Simon Jackman, "Multidimensional Analysis of Roll Call Data via Bayesian Simulation: Identification, Estimation, Inference, and Model Checking," *Political Analysis*, 9 (2001), 227–41.
27. Given the multiple sources of influence on a legislator's vote, the estimated ideal points should not be treated as a measure of a legislator's personal ideology, but rather as a useful summary of the ideological content of his voting record.

28. Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers, "Statistical Analysis of Roll Call Data," pp. 357–58.
29. The 1997–1998 data contain sixty-three nonunanimous votes taken by 120 legislators, and the data from the 1999–2000 session comprise sixty-one nonunanimous votes taken by 120 legislators. Thus, 7,560 and 7,320 individual voting decisions, respectively, are modeled.
30. The results were generated using IDEAL, a computer program developed by Simon Jackman (available at <http://jackman.stanford.edu/ideal/>). See Simon Jackman, "IDEAL Point Estimation and Roll Call Analysis via Bayesian Simulation" (mimeo, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, 2004). A more extensive explanation of the methodology employed in this study, including a discussion of identification, priors, and convergence, is available from the authors upon request.
31. The discrimination parameter increases in the distance between the year and may alternatives and decreases in the vote-specific variance of error; the higher the value, the more a vote distinguishes well between individuals with opposing ideal points.
32. The possible influence of a second dimension is addressed in the next section.
33. Results are shown for the 1999–2000 period, which are almost identical to those from the 1997–1998 period (available from the authors upon request).
34. However, one should be careful with the interpretation of these null results. The fact that the DC and PS medians have overlapping confidence intervals may not mean that the two parties are not distinct. A Wilcoxon rank sum test shows that these medians are statistically distinct. Therefore, the overlap between the confidence intervals may mean only that there is too much noise to find that they are distinct. The analysis of the overlap between the individual members of each party presented below, though, gives us more confidence in the accuracy of our estimates. We thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out.
35. These results are consistent with Londregan's analysis of right-wing senators in the Labor Committee of the Chilean Senate. See Londregan, *Legislative Institutions and Ideology in Chile*, pp. 122–45.
36. John E. Jackson and John W. Kingdon, "Ideology, Interest Group Scores, and Legislative Votes," *American Journal of Political Science*, 36 (1992), 805–23.
37. Morgenstern, pp. 162–63.
38. The question reads: "When people talk about politics, the expressions left and right are usually employed. The following card presents a series of cells going from left to right. In which cell would you place yourself taking into account your political ideas?" The survey was conducted between April 11 and July 31, 1998, so the legislators are the same as in our sample. Unfortunately, though, it is not possible to match the individual responses with our ideal point estimates, as the survey was anonymous.
39. In addition to Chilean legislators' ideological assessments, the results were also compared with W-NOMINATE scores for the Chilean chamber of deputies (1997–1998). There was no significant difference in those scores and our estimator, as the ideal point estimates correlate at 0.896. But, as expected, on average the W-NOMINATE pseudo standard errors were too small (by a factor of 1.73) in comparison to our estimates.
40. Siavelis, "Sistema Electoral, Desintegración de Coaliciones y Democracia en Chile," pp. 74–78; Añinat, Londregan, Navia, and Vial, pp. 30–32.
41. The 2004 data comprise 201 nonunanimous votes taken by 115 legislators for a total of 23,115 individual voting decisions.
42. Given space limitations, we can not present here a full discussion of the results obtained using the 2004 data. A complete survey is available upon request.
43. In only one of these votes does a majority of the DC face the rest of the parties.
44. Barry Ames, "Party Discipline in the Chamber of Deputies," in Morgenstern and Nacif, eds., pp. 185–221.
45. Chilean legislators can move to force the discussion of a bill with a discharge petition, which passes by majority vote. See Eduardo Alemán, "Policy Gatekeepers in Latin American Legislatures," *Latin American Politics and Society* (2006).
46. Carey, pp. 250–52; Baidez and Carey, pp. 32–34; Eduardo Alemán and George Tebelis, "The Origins of Presidential Conditional Agenda Setting Power in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review*, 40 (2005), 3–26; Peter Siavelis, "Executive-Legislative Relations in Post-Pinochet Chile: A Preliminary