Legislative Politics in Latin America

Edited by

SCOTT MORGENSTERN
Duke University

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*Parties, Coalitions, and the Chilean Congress in the 1990s**

JOHN M. CAREY

Chile's Congress has conventionally been regarded as among the ... effective in Latin America in representing diverse interests and influ... ing policy. Analyses of Chilean politics prior to the 1973 coup consis... point to the strength of Chilean parties to support this evaluation. V... zuela (1994), for example, argues for the adoption of parliamenta... in Chile largely on the grounds that its party system resembles tho... western European parliamentary democracies. Mainwaring and S... (1995) point to the stability of support for Chilean parties among the ... torate, their ideological consistency, and the strength of national ... organizations. In the 1990s, after the return to democracy, the c... questions were whether and how the Chilean legislative party syst... different from the preauthoritarian period, and what are the implic... for the effectiveness of the Congress.

Accounts of Chilean politics at midcentury portray a system chara... ized by parties with widespread membership and activism at the grass... prominent parliamentary leaders, and highly articulated national p... agendas that were spread across a broad ideological spectrum (Scully ... Valenzuela and Wilde 1979). This portrait stands in sharp contr... that of party systems in neighboring Argentina (McGuire 1994), ... (Mainwaring 1999), and Peru (Cotler 1994), where personalism and ... telism were endemic, weakening the ability of legislatures to act ef... tively and to compete with strong presidents in shaping policy.

* Comments on various manifestations of this chapter were offered by seminar part... at the Centro de Investigaciones y Docencia Económica in Mexico City, Harva... versity, the Ohio State University, Duke University, and long-suffering graduate s... at Washington University. Special thanks are due to Scott Morgenstern, for in... follow-up questions for this chapter in his interviews with Chilean legislators an... officials in August 1998. All of the usual caveats apply.

In addition to portraying a highly institutionalized party system, the ...rature on Chilean politics emphasizes that coalitions among legislative ...ies were highly fluid (Agor 1971). Between 1932 and 1973, for ...mple, Valenzuela (1994, pp. 123–125) identifies 19 separate coalitions ...ng legislative parties in support of the eight presidents who served ...ng this period.[1] The mean coalition lifespan during this period was ... 2.1 years, with the longest surviving coalition lasting five years, from ...32 to 1937. The Chilean Congress was a center of partisan compromise ...dealmaking, and served as an effective counterweight to the presidency ...hrough the 1960s. From the late 1950s through the early 1970s, ...ever, a series of electoral and constitutional reforms undermined ...tives for cooperation, both among parties and between the branches ...gart and Carey 1992). In an increasingly ideologically polarlized envi...ent, these reforms contributed to the stand-off between Salvador ...de's Popular Unity coalition and the parties on the right, which pre...d the military coup of 1973 (Valenzuela 1994; Valenzuela and Wilde ...).

The transition to democracy in Chile in 1990 raised a number of issues ...the roles and performance of the newly reestablished legislature. ...eral Augusto Pinochet's 1980 Constitution, even as amended in 1988, ...des for a presidency with extensive formal powers, including the ...ity to control the legislative agenda (Baldez and Carey 1999; Siavelis, ...olume). The establishment of a large block of generally conservative, ...lected senators has served as a brake on policy changes and proposed ...utional reforms (Arriagada 1994). With respect to the parties them...s, one question is whether the new, two-member district electoral ...a imposed by the outgoing military regime fundamentally alters the ... system.

In this chapter, I argue that the post-transition Chilean legislative party ...m differs from the midcentury system portrayed in previous literature ...least one important way: Throughout the decade of the 1990s, it has ...characterized by the stability and cohesiveness of the two main leg...ve coalitions – the *Concertación* on the center-left, and the coalition of

[1] ...uela does not define precisely what he means by coalition. Although he discusses ...s by presidents to ensure legislative support by naming cabinet ministers from a range ...rties (pp. 119–120), he does not state explicitly that cabinet participation is his crite... for coalition membership. It appears that party statements of support for, or oppo...n to, the president determines what counts as a coalition (p. 122). How this is ...ionalized remains unstated.

two-member district reform makes imperative at election time. For Scully (1995) the

> chief conclusion . . . is that the underlying patterns and tendencies within the Chilean political landscape are quite resistant to fundamental change. A key genetic feature, from the mid-nineteenth century on, is that party politics in Chile tends to divide among three fundamental politcal segments, right, center, and left.

The tripartite (or *tres tercios*) description of the party system refers both to voter attachments and to legislative behavior. Scully (1995) emphasizes the former when he shows that, in response to the survey question, "Do you feel closer to the right, left, or center?" the percentages of respondents who locate themselves in each category has been fairly stable, even from 1958 to 1993. Scully interprets these data as evidence that the party system is "still manifestly tripartite" (p. 133).[6] Alternatively, the tripartite description at times refers to historical patterns of coalitions among parties. Valenzuela (1994) distinguishes among blocks of parties on the left (Socialists and Communists), center (Radicals and Christian Democrats) and the right (Nationalists – formerly Liberals and Conservatives), emphasizing the fluidity in their patterns of coalition, both in presidential elections and behind common legislative programs, and arguing that these are impervious to the institutional reforms of the military regime.

The second line of argument regarding polarization under two-member districts draws on spatial theories of elections and cautions against overstating the analogy between Chile's system and the Downsian account of SMD plurality. Both Magar, Rosenblum, and Samuels (1998) and Dow (1998) establish formal models of electoral competition under two-member districts, emphasizing the importance of open lists in what are still multimember districts and rejecting the Guzman (1993) and Rabkin (1996) claims of parties/candidates clustering near the median voter. Both of these studies conclude that the new Chilean system encourages the two legislative candidates from within the same coalition in each district to stake out similar ideological positions, but for each pairing to diverge considerably from the center of the voter distribution. If extended to the national level, this would suggest coalitions that are internally cohesive but ideologically distinct from each other. My results suggest that this is an accurate description of the Chilean party system in the 1990s.

[6] He does not, however, consider whether the result is merely a product of the survey question, which is explicitly tripartite.

bancadas, along with key government ministers, meet each Monday in the presidential office building to plan strategy and negotiate the legislative agenda. The substance of these conferences is communicated both at subsequent weekly meetings of the individual *bancadas* themselves and among the entire *Concertación* cohort of legislators. Legislators generally emphasize the informational and consensus-building functions of such meetings, rather than strict coalitional *or* partisan discipline backed up by sanctions. In different interviews, Dep. Orpis (UDI) refers to both discipline at the coalition level (1996) and, later, to a more subtle "tacit agreement" within the coalition of the right on cohesiveness (1998). The Executive Secretary of the PPD *bancada* in the Chamber gives a similarly ambiguous account, referring to a "moral obligation to support the *Concertación*" and to "discipline," but downplaying the imminence of explicit sanctions against those who vote against the coalition (Canales 1998).

The coalition-level unity that is evident from the roll-call data may be a product either of discipline, which implies exerting pressure on deputies to vote together, or coordination of the legislative agenda. The interviews suggest that discipline at the coalition level is a function of moral obligation rather than sanctions imposed on maverick legislators. An alternative source of discipline is the electoral incentive under the two-member district system for candidates from the same coalition to stake similar ideological positions while distinguishing themselves from the candidates of the other main coalition, as implied by the formal models of Dow (1998) and Magar, Rosenblum, and Samuels (1998). The role that the coalitions play in coordinating the activities of their constituent parties is more clear and straightforward. The weekly *Concertación* meetings provide regular information to those who control the legislative agenda – the executive, the *mesas directivas*, the *bancadas*, and committee chairs – about what issues can be pushed through the legislative process with majority (or, where necessary, supermajority) support; and conversely, when legislation is potentially divisive enough that it should be kept off the Chamber floor. The polarization of the two main coalitions, together with their internal unity, demonstrate that the coalitions are either exerting pressure on their members to vote together, or else that they are determining what matters are put to decisions before Congress, or some combination of these. Whatever the balance between these two types of influence, the coalitions are clearly central actors in structuring congressional decisions.

A second implication, following from the cohesiveness of coalitions in the Chamber, is that the existence of nonelected senators means that much

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