

Elite-Mass Congruence and the Quality of Democracy in Chile

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Chile is lauded for its successful democratic transition and the high quality of its democracy. However, Chile's status as an iconic political model in Latin America belies a growing frustration with the functioning of democracy among the Chilean mass public. Only 15% of Chileans think democracy functions well or very well.² Further after almost two decades of democracy, only 45% think in all cases democracy is the best regime, and the number who think so has actually decreased. Indeed, the percentage of Chileans who agree that in some circumstances an authoritarian regime is acceptable (18%) or that it really does not matter whether a regime is authoritarian or democratic (29%) exceeds the 45% who think that democracy is always preferable.³ Even in relative Latin American terms, though Chile is lauded by academics and analysts as a high quality democracy, on several key indicators of mass public opinion other countries rank higher, and some of Chile's indicators are disturbing. Only 36% of Chileans report being satisfied or very satisfied with democracy. This places Chile in the 8th position among the 18 countries included in the Latinobarómetro survey. The citizens of the other poster-children for democracy usually grouped along with Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica, reported much higher rates of satisfaction with democracy at 66% and 47% respectively. In addition, systemic support for democracy as a regime dropped by 10% (from 56% to 46%) between 2006 and 2007, placing Chile among the countries with the lowest support for democracy as a system, along with Brazil (43%), Paraguay (33%), Honduras (38%) and El Salvador (38%), and Guatemala (32%).⁴ On these measures Costa Rica and Uruguay scored 83% and 75% respectively. More worrying for the future, while 95% of Chileans over 55 are registered to vote, only 22% of 18-24 year olds are.⁵

This data, along with increasing social mobilization and large scale protests during Socialist President Michele Bachelet's administration have led some analysts to

¹ Research for this paper was undertaken while I was a visiting researcher in the Area de Ciencia Política of the University of Salamanca. I am gratified for the institutional support provided by it, and in particular, the personal help and support of Manuel Alcántara, Flavia Freidenberg and Agustin Ferrero.

² Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP), et al. "Estudio nacional sobre partidos políticos y sistema electoral," March-April 2008. Accessible at http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas_cep.html

³ CEP, et al. "Estudio nacional"

⁴ Corporación Latinobarómetro, "Informe, Latinobarómetro 2007," November, 2007, www.latinobarometro.org,

⁵ CEP, et al. "Estudio nacional"

tie political dissatisfaction to political parties that have “lost touch” with the public. However, several studies have shown that there is congruence in elite mass opinion in Chile and parties are very well institutionalized; making them theoretically capable of effective representation. If this is the case, why do Chilean politicians and the Chilean public refer to a “crisis of representation” in the country? This puzzle leaves us with three possibilities. The first is, of course, that those measuring elite-mass congruence have somehow got it wrong, and that Chilean elites have views different from those of the voting public. The second is that elite-mass congruence does not matter for the performance of democratic regimes. The final possibility is that despite agreement on policy, somehow elites are failing Chileans when it comes to other aspects of democracy.

This paper argues that when it comes to the crisis of representation in Chile, the most accurate characterization of the elite mass equation is the third. The thesis of this paper is that the growing dissatisfaction with the functioning of Chilean democracy is not rooted in incongruity between elite and mass opinion. Rather, this study confirms there is elite/mass congruence on the most important topics facing Chile and Chilean society.

However, while there is broad agreement on the content of politics between elites and the mass public, there is dissatisfaction with democratic processes and outcomes. In focusing on a single indicator or representational quality (commonality of elite and mass opinion), studies of elite-mass congruence do not measure success in realizing the full range of elements that are central to the success of democracies, including accountability, efficacy, and a guarantee that citizen preferences actually make a difference. This paper argues that the interaction of the electoral system and the structure of post-authoritarian competition has forced an elitist form of politics in Chile that fails on these other counts. For very good reason elites continue to act within a political model that guaranteed a successful political transition. However, it is also a model which, in terms of longer term government performance, limits accountability, undermines legitimacy, and prevents party alternation within congressional districts. In essence, the model for a successful democratic transition is not necessarily the model for the institutionalization of a successful model of long-term democracy and only with significant reforms and transformation of this model will the long-term performance of a high quality democracy in Chile be successful.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first section explores studies of elite-mass congruence in Latin America, referencing the most systematic study to date undertaken by Luna and Zechmeister.⁶ The second section uses data from the Chilean Centro de Estudios Públicos and the University of Salamanca Database of Parliamentary Elites (or PELA) to provide a more impressionistic, but perhaps more complete, confirmation of the existence of elite-mass congruence in Chile based on general orientations toward the fundamentals of politics, as well as particular issue areas. The third section explores the roots of dissatisfaction with Chilean democracy despite the existence of elite-mass consensus, focusing on how elements that helped to make the democratic transition a success actually work at cross purposes with the performance of a high quality democracy. The conclusion explores comparative parallels and discusses the challenges faced in devising a new form of post-transition politics.

Elite Mass Congruence and the Quality of Democracy

Representative democracy by definition entails a mechanism to channel public will into policy through a smaller number of elected representatives. According to this idea, the policy preferences of legislators ideally should reflect those of the electorate.⁷ Luna and Zechmeister provide an excellent study elite mass congruence in Latin America by combining indicators from elite and mass surveys to measure the extent to which such a parallel between electors and the elected exists.⁸ They offer a quantified measure of the extent to which political parties represent the preferences of voters based on 11 questions that are broadly parallel and asked of elites and voters in nine Latin American countries. In addition to ranking countries based on the level of mass-elite congruence, they also find that representation is correlated positively with high levels of party institutionalization and high levels of socioeconomic development. It would come as no surprise to those accustomed to Chile's portrayal as the poster child for democracy in

⁶ Juan Pablo Luna and Elizabeth Zechmeister, "Political Representation in Latin America: A Study of Elite-Mass Congruence in Nine Countries," *Comparative Politics* 38 (2005): 388-416.

⁷ The purpose of this paper is not to enter into a debate concerning the distinction between trusteeship vs. representative models of democracy. Rather its focus is primarily in the tradition of representative democracy which posits that the will of the elected should parallel the will of the electors.

⁸ Luna and Zechmeister, "Political Representation."

Latin America that the country ranks the highest as the most representative democracy among cases covered in the study.

Further, Luna and Zechmeister find high correlations between party institutionalization and representation. They propose that this is the case because, “[i]n systems in which parties have had time to develop clear and consistent track records, citizens and elites are more likely to link to each other on the bases of programmatic criteria” (409). While Luna and Zechmeister’s findings are interesting, there are some problems with them in terms of measuring the full extent of elite-mass congruence. First, and as they acknowledge, their measures only provide a snap-shot of elite-mass congruence at a given time, and do not account for the possibility of change over time. Second, though their study measures elite mass congruence in 11 areas, the measure is necessarily based on a narrow set of questions. So it is possible that the extent of elite mass congruence could be muted or elevated based on the questions selected.

Nonetheless, it is impossible to find uniform political opinion survey data that questions a broad range of the citizenry and elites asking the same range of questions in the same way. Therefore, in pushing this analysis further for Chile, rather than present an analysis that is very tight methodologically, but risks inaccuracy by measuring a very narrow range of agreement while missing a whole range of disagreement, here I present a more impressionistic (and admittedly in some ways methodologically problematic) analysis of elite-mass comparisons on a wider range of issues. Rather than challenging Luna and Zechmeister’s findings or framework, this paper seeks to build upon it for a particular case and explore the extent of elite mass congruence in the country over time. Though questionnaires worded exactly the same way for elites and public opinion do not exist, there are broad parallels between the public opinion surveys carried out by the Centro de Estudios Públicos and the elite interviews carried out for members of congress by the team at the University of Salamanca.⁹ This study is based primarily on comparisons of these data.

⁹ The N for each of the elite surveys (out of a total Chamber of 120 members) was 93 for the 1994-1998 period, 89 for the 1998-2002 period, and 88 for the 2002-2006 period, closely weighted to party identification. For details on all of the surveys, see the questionnaires and “fichas técnicas” at http://americo.usal.es/oir/elites/bases_de_datos.htm.

Elite Mass Congruence in Chile: A More Complete (but Impressionistic) Look

On what fundamental issues can we find congruence in elite and mass opinion in Chile? Given the violence and severity of the military regime, and the recognized toll it took on Chilean society, one would expect widespread rejection of authoritarian politics. In addition, given the country's iconic status as a model democracy in the region, and frequent news and scholarly allusions to the quality of Chilean democracy, one might think that support for a democratic regime would be increasing at the elite and the popular level. Actually, the data suggests that the reverse is true. The Salamanca data show that the percentage of Deputies who agreed with the statement that an authoritarian regime may be preferable in "situations of political and economic crisis" grew across the three legislative sessions from 1.0%, to 6.7% to 9.0% (1994-1998, 1998-2002, 2002-2006). However, it is among parties of the right that we find such an increase, as Table 1 shows. Once again, survey data that corresponds to the same time period are difficult to come by. However, from 2006 to 2008, the percentage of Chilean who agreed with the statement that an authoritarian regime "might be preferable to a democratic regime in certain circumstances" increased from 12.6% to 18% from 2006 to 2008.¹⁰ At the most basic level of the governing regime, there is consensus and general congruence, with generalized acceptance of democracy, but a moderately growing small percentage of both the population and elites who acknowledge that at times an authoritarian regime may be preferable.

Another essential question, of course, concerns the role of the state. Chile is notorious for its early adoption of a neo-liberal model, and is lauded as a successful model of capitalist development. While the actual extent of the free market model is subject to dispute and beyond the scope of this analysis, among elites and the public there is a shared consensus that Chile should be an economy with a strong market orientation. With the rejection of the Washington consensus and neo-liberalism across much of the continent, one might think that at the elite and mass level there would be increasing support for a greater role for the state in the economy. In addition, the fact that Chile had

¹⁰ Latin American Public Opinion Project <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/> and Centro de Estudios Públicos, et al. "Estudio nacional sobre partidos políticos y sistema electoral," March-April 2008. Accessible at http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas_cep.html

two governments headed by the more centrist Christian Democratic Party, followed by two Socialist governments might suggest a trend toward a larger role for the state. At the elite level such a supposition is not borne out. Table 2 shows that there was a moderate move towards decreased support for state intervention in the economy across three legislative sessions. Indeed, it is interesting to note that among elites, Table 2 shows a counterintuitive evolution in the orientation of elites, with UDI legislators (the party usually most closely associated with the neo-liberal oriented authoritarian government) actually moving slightly toward a greater preference for state intervention in the economy, and Socialist Party (PS) legislators trending towards a preference for less intervention.

How does the public feel about the role of the state in the economy? There is less data, and certainly none that measures orientations toward the role of the state in the same way. However, a 2008 survey asked the question in a slightly different way, but one that broadly parallels the 1-5 scale cited above in Table 2 for elites. When asked to place themselves on a scale from 1-5 (with “businesses should be private” a 1 and “business should be owned by the state” a 5) Chileans average 2.96, perhaps suggesting that the Chilean public wants a smaller state than Chilean elites.¹¹ It might appear then that Chileans are closer to the parties of the right in their estimation of the role the state should play. However, caution is in order. First, the question asked of elites was much less expansive, referring to “intervention” rather than ownership. Second, the public opinion survey data is revealing in another way. When asked to rank the orientation of different coalitions with respect to their position on the preferred role of the state, the Chilean mass public suggested that ALL coalitions (even the governing coalition, and the coalition of the far left, Juntos Podemos Mas) had a greater preference for privately controlled business than they did (see Figure 1).

With respect to the state’s role in social provision, there appears widespread support for market solutions to public problems among deputies, though as Table 3 shows such support is still concentrated among parties of the right. Still, for the 2002-2006 legislative period a full 29% of deputies agreed with the statement that “all public

¹¹ This was adjusted from a 10 point scale in the original survey reporting.

services should be privatized” up from 24% and 21% in the 1994-1998 and 1998-2002 legislative periods respectively.

On a 5 point scale similar to that used above, with 1 being “responsibility for economic sustenance rests with the state” and 5 being “responsibility for economic sustenance rests with individuals” Chileans placed themselves on average at 3.37. However, once again it is interesting that the Chilean public on average perceives that every coalition (and even the Alianza on the right) sees the state as more important to economic sustenance than they do.¹² Survey data also suggest that Chileans generally agree on a limited role for the state in other ways. In a series of four surveys undertaken between 1995 and 2001,¹³ when asked to choose the top three most important determinants of personal success from a list of 14 categories, Chileans chose “educational level” (39.7%), “individual initiative” (23.7%) and “pitutos”—or personal contacts (19.5%)—as their top three on average across surveys. Economic help from the state was only named by 5.3% of the population, trailing “luck” (7.2%), and significantly trailing “faith in God” (12.4%).

Does this mean that the Pinochet government has stripped Chileans of their attachment to the state, and that they are even more statist than their representatives? The answer is clearly, no, and may have something to do with how surveys are constructed. Responses to other questions suggest that Chileans still want their state to be involved in the economy. For example over 70% of Chileans polled in 2000 either “agreed” or “very much agreed” with the statement “It is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income between high income and low income people.” In addition, despite the widespread privatization of the health and educational sectors, when asked in 2006 which should be the three most important initiatives to which government resources should be devoted, health care was named by 92% of respondents and education by 80% of those surveyed. In addition, Chileans agreed or very much agreed with the following statements in the following proportions, when asked about measures the government should take with regard to the economy:

- Finance new projects which create jobs (88.0%)

¹² CEP, et al. “Estudio nacional” 2008.

¹³ More recent surveys did not ask this question.

- Support industries to develop new products and technologies (72.8%)
- Support industries experiencing problems in order to protect jobs (81.8%)
- Reduce the length of the work day to create more jobs (60.9%)¹⁴

Therefore, it appears that Chilean elites and the Chilean public share broadly similar views on the fundamental questions or at the very least do not differ in a marked or striking way. All favor democracy, but a small portion of both elites and the public acknowledge that in some instances an authoritarian regime might be preferable. In addition, there is broad support for a market economy, though most Chileans, among the elite and public, generally agree that the state should play some role in social provision and has a responsibility for addressing inequality.

While there appears general consensus on the basics, perhaps the potential source of dissatisfaction with democracy is disagreement when it comes to more specific policy areas? CEP surveys and the University of Salamanca survey of parliamentary elites provide enough data to analyze similarities and differences with respect to elite/mass congruence in specific issue areas. Despite broad parallels between the questions asked on the two sets of surveys there are a few problems. First, the questions are worded a different way for elite questionnaires and for the public opinion survey questions. While elites were asked to rate the importance of a series of issues by their degree of importance, the public was asked to choose the three most important issues facing the country. The second important difference is that certain choices were missing from either the elite or public opinion survey. Most significantly “poverty” was not included in the Salamanca questionnaires and for two of the three waves of questionnaires “health care” was left off. These are obviously serious problems preventing any definitive conclusion concerning elite mass congruence in specific issue areas. However, what insights do these admittedly impressionistic comparisons provide?

Tables 4, 5 and 6 summarize the results of these comparisons. Equivalent issues are paired together, and the original language used in the surveys and elite questionnaires is presented in the tables so the reader can compare the wording of questions. For public opinion survey data the tables present averages from seven waves of public opinion surveys undertaken by CEP during two congressional sessions (1994-1998) and (1998-

¹⁴ Centro de Estudios Públicos, Documento de Trabajo Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública No. 24, June July 2006.

2002), and eight waves during the 2002-2006 legislative session, for a total of fifteen waves of public opinion survey data. The survey of parliamentary elites represents a single wave of interviews undertaken towards the middle of each legislative session with a large, party representative sample of members of parliament.¹⁵ The tables present the hard numbers from each of the scoring schema. It is important to note that these numbers are not comparable given the different scales used for each (however, the hard numbers are included to give the reader an idea of the relative distance between rankings in each set of results). The ranking of each issue for the general public in public opinion survey data and then for parliamentary elites is presented.

Table 4 suggests that for the 1994-1998 period that there is minimal congruence in the ranking of importance of particular issues. Legislators and the public only hold in common two of their most important five issues. This is due largely, however, to problems with the data. The public ranked “poverty” and “health” respectively as the first and second most important problems facing the country, and these categories were not included in this wave of the Salamanca questionnaires for parliamentary elites. In addition there is a very far outlier (that carries through all three sets of comparisons, with respect to “the environment” as an important issue). “The environment” scored second in importance among parliamentary elites, but was identified by less than 5% of the Chilean population as one of the three most important issues facing the country. Also notable for the 1994-1998 is that elites appeared more concerned about corruption, ranking it number 4, than the citizenry who ranked it as the 10th most important problem. In addition, though the public is consistently concerned with crime and safety (“delincuencia”), elites perceive it as much less serious a problem, although in later surveys elites will perceive it as a growing problem, as it consistently ranked among one of the top four concerns for the citizenry across all surveys included in this analysis.

The 1998-2002 comparisons presented in Table 5 demonstrate more commonality in the ranking of concerns for elites and the Chilean public, with three of the top five issues for each overlapping. Once again, the absence of poverty as an option for elites is part of the problem, and the inclusion of “sanidad” (health) provided for an additional element of overlap given that Chileans consistently identify health care as one of the top

¹⁵ See note 9 for a description of the elite interviews and questionnaire.

three problems facing the country during the last decade. Elites once again, identified the environment as a much more pressing problem than the general public, and seemed much less concerned about unemployment, which was rated as the most pressing concern of the public during this period.

Table 6 shows that 2002-2006 period demonstrates the highest degree of congruence between the citizenry and parliamentary elites in terms of issue concerns, with an overlap in 4 of the 5 cited areas, and roughly the same rank order for each of the problems. Once again, it is the absence of poverty as a choice for parliamentary elites that prevents what could have been almost absolute congruence in the ranking of the top 5 issues for the 2002-2006 period; had poverty been included, it likely would have ranked in the top five concerns. This assertion is based on another question included in the Salamanca questionnaires. The 2002-2006 wave of interviews introduced a new question asking legislators to identify what they see as the issue that could “represent a significant threat or risk to democracy.” By far legislators identified “poverty and marginalization” as the element representing the highest potential threat from a list of ten issues (much higher than relations between the armed forces and civilians), with 30% of legislators ranking poverty as a “high” potential threat and 68% calling it “high” or “significant.”

Therefore, and once again from an admittedly impressionistic interpretation, there is not a huge gap in what the public and what elites consider to be the most important issues facing the country. Indeed, the data presented here suggests that over the course of the consolidation of Chilean democracy elite and mass opinion have become more congruent.

Neither is there a fundamental disconnect between the mass and elites with respect to the ideological placement of parties. Figure 2 shows public placement of political parties on a left/right space. Using the same scale elites ranked parties in the following order from left to right:

- PS: 2.30
- PPD: 3.36
- PRSD: 3.72
- PDC: 4.62
- RN: 7.24
- UDI: 9.60

The order of ranking on the left-right scale is identical, with the exception that the PRSD was placed slightly farther to the left than the PPD by the public. However, members of parliament tend to place the major parties at the outside edges of the ideological spectrum (the UDI on the right and the PS on the left) in a more extreme position than the public. Indeed, parliamentary elites placed the UDI to the extreme right and the PS farther left than the Communist Party when compared to the placement of the Chilean public. This latter finding is not insignificant and will be analyzed later with respect to the growing importance of party identification among elites and the shrinking importance among the electorate.¹⁶

Therefore on the essential issues and with respect to particular issue areas, impressionistic analysis at best suggests relatively strong indicators of elite mass congruence, and at the very least, few areas where elites and masses fundamentally disagree.

Agreement on Issues and Dissatisfaction with Process

If elites and the citizenry generally agree on the fundamentals and policy issues, what then, is the source of Chilean's dissatisfaction with democracy? Survey and elite data also provide some insights for answering this question. In particular, rather than a fundamental disconnect between the governed and the governing as the root of dissatisfaction with democracy, there are strong indications that Chileans are dissatisfied with process rather than content. That is to say, rather than fundamentally disagreeing, Chileans may be dissatisfied with patterns of participation, how representative functions are undertaken, and issues of accountability and legitimacy. This paper argues that Chile's much lauded institutionalized party system is a double-edged sword that underwrote a successful democratic transition, but at the same time is at the root of public dissatisfaction with democracy.

To understand this argument it is necessary to put the role of Chilean parties in historical perspective. The literature on the historical development of political parties makes two central points. First, before the Pinochet government, parties were recognized

¹⁶ All of the parties were not included on the parliamentary elite survey. Therefore, they were not asked to place the PC (Communist Party) or PH (Humanist Party).

as *the* central actors in the political system, with high levels of institutionalization and importance and very high levels of citizen identification and social penetration—to such an extent that they were referred to as the “backbone” of the Chilean political system.¹⁷ The second major feature of the system was its high level of party fractionalization and wide ideological spectrum. As Valenzuela notes only Finland and the French Fourth Republic exceeded the levels of party system fractionalization in Chile.¹⁸

With the return of democracy, and despite the Pinochet’s government efforts to transform it, the party system forcibly re-emerged with the same general physiognomy, and indeed the same leaders, following 17 years of authoritarianism.¹⁹ By all accounts this was a party-led and party-centered democratic transition. At the outset of the democratic transition 17 political parties (5 of which could be considered major parties: the PS—The Socialist Party, PPD—The Party for Democracy, PRSD—The Radical Social Democratic Party and PDC—The Christian Democratic Part) joined to form the center-left Concertación coalition to face off against the Alianza on the right (made up of 2 major parties, the UDI—The Independent Democratic Union and RN—National Renewal). Parties realized that the only way to win post-authoritarian elections (especially in light of the majoritarian legislative electoral system bequeathed by Pinochet) was to join together in a negotiated transition characterized by power sharing between major parties. Political parties constructed a series of elite-negotiated formal and informal institutions aimed at power sharing and securing the democratic transition.²⁰

First, the Concertación coalition, which has governed Chile since the return of democracy, is based on an elaborate form of party power sharing. The details of this

¹⁷ Manuel Antonio Garretón, *Reconstruir la política: Transición y consolidación democrática en Chile*. Santiago: Editorial Andante, 1987, p. 64. See also by the same author, *El proceso político chileno*. Santiago: FLACSO, 1983, and on the historical evolution of the party system see Timothy R. Scully, *Rethinking the Center: Party Politics in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Chile*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, especially Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Arturo Valenzuela, “Orígenes y características del sistema de partidos en Chile. Una propuesta para un gobierno parlamentario,” *Estudios Públicos* 64 (Spring 1996): 1-70.

¹⁹ 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 (4) (1997): 511-27 and Peter Siavelis, “Continuity and Change in the Chilean Party System: On the Transformational Effects of Electoral Reform,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 30(6) (1997): 651-674.

²⁰ For a complete analysis of informal institutions and democratization in Chile see, Peter Siavelis, “Accommodating Informal Institutions and Democracy in Chile,” in eds. Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, 33-55.

bargain include careful division of ministerial portfolios among its constituent parties. This arrangement, referred to somewhat derisively as the “*cuoteo*” (or quota) leaves the impression among the Chilean public that ministerial positions are not awarded based on the talents or experience of would-be minister, but rather on the exigencies of party politics. The model also includes an informal arrangement known as the *partido transversal*, which refers to the informal group of key politicians in the first democratic governments who define themselves more as “leaders of the Concertación” rather than leaders of their parties. Despite a lack of formal organization or formalized meeting of the *partido*, the actors themselves know who they are, and they structure informal relationships among themselves, between their parties and the coalition, and as discussed later, with social actors whose input has been central to the legislative success of presidents. Ignacio Walker, who served in the Ministry of the General Presidency (SEGPRES) under President Patricio Aylwin, notes that the *partido*’s members “correspond to informal networks that have...exercised a strong influence under the three administrations of the Concertación, both in terms of strategic design and the set of public policies that have been pursued.”²¹

Second, the policy making process has been dominated by elites, and given the weakness of Congress, mostly by executive branch elites belonging to the *partido transversal*. The post-transitional political model involved a series of deals between party elites within the Concertación and between the Concertación and potential veto players on the right. In terms of the Concertación’s relationships with veto players on the right, the bargain included a tacit agreement that the president should negotiate with powerful economic actors and leaders on the right to arrive at consensus solutions for the most controversial legislation. This model, dubbed “*democracia de los acuerdos*” (“democracy by agreement”), was used in reforming the tax code, expanding social welfare and anti-corruption legislation, and in the comprehensive constitutional reforms

²¹ Ignacio Walker, “Chile: Three Stories of Informal Institutions in a Limited Democracy,” paper presented at the conference, Informal Institutions and Politics in Latin America, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, April 23-24, 2003, p. 5.

of 2005. These major policy deals involved very little popular or congressional involvement.²²

Third, the election system bequeathed by the Pinochet government limits the impact of voters on the outcome of elections. The legislative election system, known as the binomial system, establishes two-seat districts for elections to Congress, for which each coalition can present two candidates. The details of the electoral system have been analyzed in depth elsewhere and need not be recounted here. However, in terms of the representative capacity of the election system, its most significant feature is that the highest polling coalition in a district can only win both seats if it more than doubles the vote total of the second-place list; otherwise, each list wins one seat. So within the context of Chile's post-authoritarian pattern of two-coalition competition, a coalition must poll 66% of the vote to win both seats, but can usually win one seat with only 33%. Because both major alliances almost invariably poll between 33% and 66% in each district, the outcome of elections is a foregone conclusion: except in a few cases one member of the Concertación and one member of the Alianza are likely to win in each district. Accountability is central to democracy. The current coalitional configuration combined with the properties of the binomial system does not provide voters the opportunity to hold their representatives accountable. Indeed, as Navia notes because of the thresholds of the system a candidate who loses support in a district could conceivably go from a level of 60% support to 35% without losing the congressional seat.²³

The binomial system also makes it almost impossible to defeat incumbents. Barring incompetence or extreme indiscipline, Chilean parties consider incumbents to have a right of re-nomination.²⁴ The election system in the context of two coalitions strongly limits the ability to unseat an incumbent. Rarely will one list contain two candidates from the same party, providing incumbents the luxury of not facing intra-party competition at least in the electoral arena. More importantly, if a voter seeks to unseat an incumbent there are two potential strategies. The voter can either completely abandon

²² Eduardo Silva, "Capitalist Regime Loyalties And Redemocratization In Chile," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 34(4) (1992): 39-76 and Delia Boylen, "Taxation and Transition: The Politics of the 1990 Chilean Tax Reform," *Latin American Research Review* 31(1) (1996): 7-31.

²³ Patricio Navia. "La transformación de votos en escaños: leyes electorales en Chile, 1833-2003" *Política y Gobierno* 12 (2) (2005).

²⁴ Peter M. Siavelis, "The Hidden Logic of Candidate Selection for Chilean Parliamentary Elections," *Comparative Politics* 34 (2) (2002): 419-38.

his or her ideological convictions and vote for an opposition list, or cast a likely more ideologically sincere vote for the list partner of the incumbent. However, because votes are pooled in determining seat distributions, a vote for one candidate on a list is in many respects a vote for both. Therefore by voting for an incumbent's list partner, a voter may actually be contributing support to the very incumbent the voter aims to defeat!²⁵

While the candidate selection process has the potential to allow for more citizen input into choosing representatives, the dynamics of the electoral system have also prevented any significant democratization of the candidate selection process. Because the binomial system only provides 2 seats to each coalition, and the Concertación is composed of 5 major parties, the number of candidacies that each party in each coalition receives is subject to arduous negotiations before the elections. Parties offer evidence of their performance in previous elections, their standing in polls, and what they can potentially contribute to the coalition as bargaining chips. However, the pairing on individual lists crucial. Parties seek to place their candidate on the same list either with an extremely weak candidate (who they can handily beat), or an extremely strong candidate (who can carry the list to an unlikely two seat victory). This complexity, and political the horse-trading involved in placing candidacies on individual lists leaves candidate selection completely in the hands of party elites, and works at cross purposes with any efforts to democratize the legislative candidate selection process, which has been dominated by party elites since the return of democracy.²⁶

At the elite level the party system seems remarkably like that of the pre-authoritarian period, and numerous studies attest to the extent of continuity. However, the fundamentally different nature of party society relations has been less recognized and less analyzed, and likely lies at the root of Chileans' dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in their country. Given the centrality of parties one is tempted, therefore, to argue that they still form the "backbone" of Chilean politics. However, while they have

²⁵ For an elaboration see Navia "La transformación".

²⁶ On legislative candidate selection in Chile see Patricio Navia, "Legislative Candidate Selection in Chile" in eds. Peter M. Siavelis and Scott Morgenstern, *Pathways to Power: Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Latin America*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008, pp. 92-118 and Peter M. Siavelis, "The Hidden Logic of Candidate Selection for Chilean Parliamentary Elections," *Comparative Politics*, 34:4 (July 2002): 419-438.

been the “backbone” for structuring elite politics and the democratic transition, the nature of society-party relations is very different than in the pre-authoritarian period.

As noted, Chile was notorious for its wide ideological spectrum, high levels of party fractionalization, and high levels of party identification. Survey data from the post-authoritarian period demonstrate deep and fundamental changes to this pattern. Perhaps most remarkable, while Chile was often noted as the most politicized country in Latin America, recent data from the Latinobarómetro ranked Chile as the least politicized among the 18 countries surveyed based on a question regarding the ideological self-identification of those polled. 29% either said they would or could not place themselves along a right-left spectrum in ideological terms.²⁷ Data from the Centro de Estudios Públicos confirms this trend, with 34% of the Chilean public attesting to not sympathize with any of the ideological positions, and 3% saying they did not know.²⁸ Among those who do place themselves, the data suggests that Chileans have become remarkably centrist. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the farthest right and 1 being the farthest left, the average ranking was 5.45 suggesting that Chileans identify themselves, on average, as slightly right of center. What is, indeed, striking is that 30% of those surveyed placed themselves exactly at the center at “5”, with none of the other deciles on the ten point scale exceeding 7%.²⁹

With respect to identification with particular parties, the nature of citizen party connections has also been transformed. When surveys began immediately following the return of democracy in 1990, 62.5% of the Chilean public attested to identifying with a political party. By 1992, the number of Chileans self-identifying with political parties increased to 87%. From there this percentage has registered gradual declines, to the point that in 2008 only 43% of Chileans said they identified with a particular political party, and none of the parties registered a level of adherence above 10%.³⁰

This low level of party identification is certainly a function of the low esteem in which Chileans hold political parties. When asked their opinion of a series of 16

²⁷ Latinobarómetro 2007 p. 74.

²⁸ CEP, et al. “Estudio Nacional” 2008.

²⁹ CEP, et al. “Estudio nacional” 2008.

³⁰ These numbers are based on analysis of every political opinion survey undertaken by the Centro de Estudios Públicos between 1990 and 2008 where this question was asked. A total of 37 surveys were consulted which can be found at http://www.cepchile.cl/dms/lang_1/home.html

institutions, Chileans ranked political parties dead last. Only 6% expressed “some or much” confidence in political parties, trailing far behind the military (57%), the government (30%), newspapers (28%), and unions (26%). The Courts and Congress which ranked 14th and 15th had “some or much” confidence of 18% and 16% of the population respectively.

Certainly support for political parties is relatively low across Latin America. In terms of comparative referents among the 18 countries included in the Latinobarómetro survey Chile ranks 9th with respect to the citizenry expressing the least confidence in political parties.³¹ While not at the bottom regionally with respect to the evaluation of parties, this position is remarkable given the strong historical connections between society and parties, and scholarly work that lauds the quality and institutionalization of Chile’s parties.

Clearly, the importance of ideology has decreased in Chile, and the traditional role of parties as the main representational interlocutors for society has been transformed. Nonetheless, at the elite level, ideology remains very important and parties—and in particular party elites—remain the most important political actors in Chile. Several sets of data with respect to voting behavior and answers to elite surveys underscore this reality.

While the importance of ideology and party differentiation has decreased at the mass level, at the elite level they have actually intensified since the return of democracy. While certainly the ideological scope even at the elite level has narrowed in light of transformations wrought by the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, ideological differentiation among parties within this narrower spectrum has increased. Through analysis of a series of questions drawn from the three waves of the Salamanca survey of parliamentary elites, Rodríguez found that while in terms of actual policy program elites seemed to be moving closer together, tests of ideological positioning showed that self professed ideological distinctions between parties have actually become sharper since the return of democracy.³² In addition, as noted above with reference to

³¹ Latinobarómetro 2007, 94.

³² Leticia M. Ruiz Rodríguez, “El sistema de partidos chileno: ¿hacia una desestructuración ideológica?,” in eds. Manuel Alcántara and Leticia M. Ruiz Rodríguez, *Chile: política y modernización democrática*. Barcelona: Edcions Bellaterra, pp. 73-110.

Figure 2 and the accompanying discussion, members of parliament make much sharper distinctions than the citizenry when it comes to the perceived ideological space between parties. Alcántara also finds that among countries included in the three waves of PELA interviews, Chile is the country where ideology most sharply differentiates legislators' perceptions of the severity of different sets of problems. For example, self identified leftist legislators are more likely than those on the right to consider economic problems the most important, while those on the right see political problems as much more serious.³³

With respect to the importance of parties, a cursory view of the self-reported data of legislators would suggest that the concerns of citizens and constituency reign supreme. For the two waves of surveys for which data was collected from legislators, 83.1% (1998-2002) and 73.3% (2002-2006) contended that deputies should always vote in the interests of their constituents rather than voting in the interest of their parties or base their decision on the material at hand. Further, 100% (1998-2002) and 88.6% (2002-2006) contended that "securing resources for my district" is "important" or "very important." However, both of these sets of data probably reflect what deputies perceive to be the "correct" response. First, levels of party discipline in the Chilean legislature were (until very recently) quite high suggesting a good deal of party voting.³⁴ Second, Chile's constitution sharply proscribes the ability of deputies to secure pork or material resources for their districts.

In reality, political parties, and in particular party elites, still retain a good deal of control. From the most basic perspective, parties are recognized as important actors by members of parliament. When asked whether the structures of deputies' parties "were continuous" or "merely mobilized for elections" over the three waves of questionnaires deputies pointed to the continuing structural importance of their parties by wide margins: 94.7% (1994-98), 88.8% (1998-2002) and 85.2% (2002-2006). As already noted, party elites exercise almost complete control over the legislative candidate selection process, and in the few cases where primaries are undertaken party elites have overridden the

³³ Manuel Alcántara Sáez, "Legislators and Political Agendas," in ed. Manuel Alcántara Sáez, *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008, pp. 87-112.

³⁴ John Carey, "Parties, Coalitions and the Chilean Congress in the 1990s," in eds. Scott Morgenstern and Benito Nacif, *Legislative Politics in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 222-253.

decisions of popular contests to satisfy other deals related to coalition maintenance.³⁵ With respect to the power and influence party elites in particular, Chile is the only country of the 15 included in the PELA study where party leaders are ranked as most important ahead of voters and party militants in terms of whose opinions deputies take into account when making decisions.³⁶ With respect to internal party democracy, legislators perceive it as quite low, albeit growing, when measured in terms of the power and influence of party militants. During the three legislative periods dealt with here, 16% of deputies termed levels of party democracy as “high” or “very high” during the first (1994-1998), 31% during the second (1998-2002) and 44.4% during the third (2002-2006). Overall, among the 15 countries included in the PELA study, Chile ranked 3rd from the bottom in terms of perceived internal party democracy, only behind Argentina and the Dominican Republic.³⁷

Public opinion survey data suggest that citizens’ perceive and object to this elite dominance, lack of turnover, and the elite lock on power. When asked whether members of congress are concerned about the problems of average people, only 14 percent of the population answered in the affirmative.³⁸ When asked to name the two principal defects of political parties, the top three responses were “they are not transparent” (36%), “they are always the same...there is no turnover” (33%) and “they pass out government position among themselves” (31%).³⁹ While it is impossible to directly tie demands for electoral reform to these responses, it is notable that when asked about reforms to the binomial system, 46% said it should be changed completely, 42% said it should be maintained, and 12% did not know or did not answer.

³⁵ Siavelis, “The Hidden Logic” and Navia, “Legislative Candidate Selection in Chile.”

³⁶ Patricia Marenghi and Mercedes García Montero, “The Conundrum of Representation,” in ed. Manuel Alcántara Sáez, *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008, pp. 29-64.

³⁷ Leticia M. Ruiz Rodríguez, “The Organization of Political Parties,” in ed. Manuel Alcántara Sáez, *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008, pp.113-138.

³⁸ Centro de Estudios Públicos, “Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública, No. 56,” November-December, 2007. Available at http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas_cep.html

³⁹ CEP, “Estudio Nacional, No. 56, 2007.

Conclusion: Elite-mass congruence and the Transitional “Desface”

The extent of elite mass congruence in Chile is one reason that scholars tend to categorize Chile as a successful democracy. Studies of elite-mass congruence are prefaced on the long-held notion that where the preferences of elites are parallel to those of the citizenry that democracy will be efficacious and valued by the public. Nonetheless, democracy entails more than just agreement on orientations and issues. It also entails legitimacy, accountability, alternation of power, and a sense that participation in elections makes a difference. While this study has confirmed, albeit in an impressionistic way, that there are high levels of agreement between a certain set of elites and the mass public, on other counts the analysis here suggests some difficulty in fulfilling these other requisites of democracy. This study argues that many of these are tied to a *desface* (gap) between elite orientation and continued acceptance of the transitional model for democracy, while citizens demand a new model that performs better on measures of accountability, legitimacy, and influence on policy outcomes. This is not to suggest that this growing dissatisfaction is somehow a harbinger of a potential return to military politics, but rather that Chile is not immune from the widespread dissatisfaction with the *quality of the functioning of democracy* that plagues much of Latin America, despite its status as an iconic democracy in the region.

Chile's highly institutionalized parties are also credited with underwriting the success of the democratic transition and the stability of Chilean democracy. However, like with elite-mass congruence, we must say more about the role of institutionalized parties to get at the root of the fault-lines of Chilean democracy. While party institutionalization has provided presidents workable legislative majorities, strong parties, and powerful party leadership, party elites dominate decision-making and candidate selection, with little citizen input. Party elites exercise strong control over legislative behavior. Party elites in concert with the president bypass congress to work out legislative deals with major social actors and veto players before for they are presented to Congress. Finally, at the system level, the dynamic interaction of coalition politics and the electoral system have provided Chile's two major coalitions an effective lock on

power, where citizen preference mean little and each major coalition is provided an effective assurance of one of the two seats in each electoral district.

In writing on pre-Chavez Venezuela, a country previously touted as a “model” and island of stability in Latin America, Coppedge contended that “The institutions that make Venezuela a stable polity also tarnish the quality of its democracy.”⁴⁰ Coppedge noted that Venezuela’s highly institutionalized parties had come to completely dominate the political system in the form of a “partyarchy” or *partidocracia*. In a very similar way, the institutions and political dynamic which made Chile’s transition to democracy a success have also tarnished the quality of democracy, and many of these are tied to a developing *partidocracia*. The success of the Concertación coalitions was based on a complex power sharing arrangement; one which increasingly brings charges of elite domination and politics by quota. The sharing of electoral spoils guaranteed peace between Chile’s parties, but could only be undertaken through elite selection of candidates. The binomial system provided incentives for coalition formation among Chile’s major parties and provided a stable pattern of two coalition competition, but it gave the two coalitions an effective lock on power. It is difficult to unseat incumbents, and each coalition is likely to win a seat in every electoral district.

This is not to say that party institutionalization is a bad thing. Just as Coppedge noted the different forms of institutionalization and partisan power, Chile’s parties can play the vital role in democracy that they played in the past. In their study of Uruguay, Buquet and Chasquetti refer to the *partidocracia de consensos*, noting the extraordinary strength of Uruguay parties. However, the crucial difference is that Uruguayan parties demonstrate many of the same prerogatives as Chilean parties, but unlike Chile, they enjoy extraordinarily high levels of cohesive support among the mass public.

This conclusion does not suggest that a Chavez-type politician waits in the political wings to assume power in Chile with the advent of a crisis. However, long-term deficiencies in Chile’s democratic performance have the potential to at the very least move Chile from a moderate form of democracy with a balanced social-market orientation towards more populist forms of representation. In terms of regaining the type of support and adhesion characteristic of Uruguayan parties, Chilean parties must regain

⁴⁰ Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 2.

some of the support and levels of identification they enjoyed in the past. A good place to start would be a significant reform of the electoral system. Though all four post-authoritarian presidents have presented electoral reforms to Congress, none has succeeded, as much because of the entrenched interests of the Concertación as the unwillingness of the opposition. Short term political incentives militate against reform. However, the introduction of some form of moderate, small magnitude proportional representation would provide greater competition and accountability. In addition, new forms of connection between the citizenry and parties, more real power for legislators in the legislative process, and enhanced levels of internal party democracy also form a fundamental part of much needed and new form of post-transitional politics.

Table 1—Parliamentary Elite Support for An Authoritarian Regime in Case of Economic or Political Crisis. Percentages*

	1994-1998	1998-2002	2002-2006
PDC	0	0	0
PS	0	0	0
PPD	0	0	0
UDI	0	11.8	20.0
RN	4.5	5.9	18.7

*Percent that agree with the statement “In contexts of economic crisis or political instability an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democracy.” Source: Rodriquez, p. 90.

Table 2—Preferred Level of State Involvement in the Economy by Chilean Parliamentary Elites (Rated from 1= “minimum intervention” to 5 “maximum intervention”)

	1994-1998	1998-2002	2002-2006
PDC	3.67	3.09	3.16
PS	3.56	3.48	3.49
PPD	3.72	3.50	3.47
UDI	2.92	2.97	2.97
RN	2.67	2.69	2.85
AVERAGE	3.31	3.14	3.18

Source: Adapted data from Rodriquez, p. 91.

Table 3—Evolution in Position Regarding the Privatization of Public Services. Parliamentary Elites (Rated from 1= “minimum intervention” to 5 “maximum intervention”). Percentages*

	1994-1998	1998-2002	2002-2006
PDC	0.0	3.4	5.6
PS	0.0	12.5	0.0
PPD	0.0	0.0	0.0
UDI	70.0	56.3	52.0
RN	0.0	41.2	68.8

*Percent that agree with the statement, “All public services should be privatized.” Source: Rodriquez, p. 91.

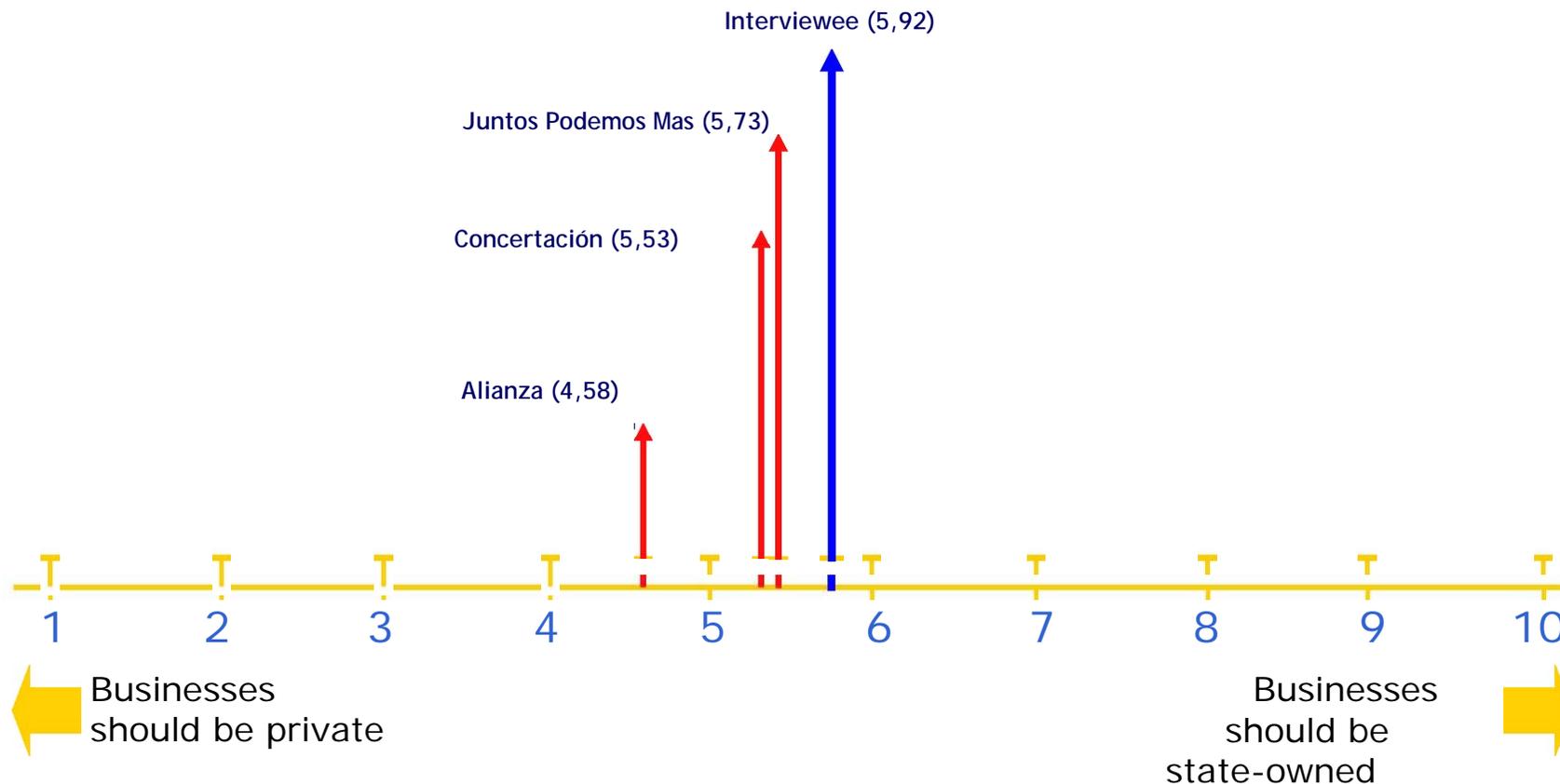
Table 4					
Public Opinion vs. Legislators Views of Most Important Issues Facing the Country 1994-1998					
Top five for each in Bold					
	<i>Public Opinion</i>		<i>Legislators</i>		
	Score*	Rank	Rank	Score**	
Pobreza	48	1			
Salud	38	2			
Delincuencia	37	3	9	9	Inseguridad Ciudadana y delincuencia
Empleo	29	4	5	19	Desempleo
Educación	28	5	1	62	Educación
Sueldos	27	6	3	22	Salarios
Drogas	26	7			
Vivienda	16	8			
Alza de precios	16	9	11	6	Inflación
Corrupción	10	10	4	20	Corrupción
Derechos Humanos	<5%	n.r	6	15	Derechos humanos
Medio Ambiente	<5%	n.r	2	35	Medio Ambiente
Sistema Judicial	<5%	n.r			
Sistema Binominal	<5%	n.r			
Infraestructura	<5%	n.r			
			7	14	Democratización de la vida pública
			8	11	Relaciones con FFAA
			10	7	Estancamiento de actividad productiva
			12	3	Deuda Externa
* Percentage of those surveyed that ranked the issue as one of the top three problems facing the country					
**Percentage of legislators calling the issue of "great" importance					

Table 5					
Public Opinion vs. Legislators Views of Most Important Issues Facing the Country 1998-2002					
Top five for each in Bold					
	Public Opinion			Legislators	
	Score*	Rank	Rank	Score**	
Empleo	51	1	7	21	Desempleo
Pobreza	42	2			
Salud	38	3	1	48	Sanidad
Delincuencia	38	4	2	41	Inseguridad Ciudadana
Sueldos	27	5	5	23	Salarios
Educación	24	6	3	38	Educación
Drogas	23	7	8	21	Narcotráfico
Vivienda	12	8	9	16	Vivienda
Alza de precios	9	9	16	3	Inflación
Corrupción	10	10	6	23	Corrupción
Derechos Humanos	<5%	n.r	12	9	Derechos humanos
Medio Ambiente	<5%	n.r	4	29	Medio Ambiente
Judicial	<5%	n.r			
Sistema Binominal	<5%	n.r			
Infraestructura	<5%	n.r			
			10	15	Democratización
			11	12	Estancamiento de actividad productiva
			13	9	Derechos humanos
			14	8	Relaciones con FFAA
			15	5	Violencia política
			17	3	Conflictos de poderes del estado
			18	1	Deuda Externa
* Percentage of those surveyed that ranked the issue as one of the top three problems facing the country					
**Percentage of legislators calling the issue of "great" importance					

Table 6					
Public Opinion vs. Legislators Views of Most Important Issues Facing the Country 2002-2006					
Top five for each in Bold					
	Public Opinion			Legislators	
	Score*	Rank	Rank	Score**	
Empleo	46	1	1	80	Desempleo
Delincuencia	45	2	3	50	Inseguridad Ciudadana
Salud	40	3	4	39	Sanidad
Pobreza	37	4			
Educación	27	5	5	35	Educación
Sueldos	26	6			
Drogas	21	7	7	14	Narcotráfico
Vivienda	16	8			
Alza de precios	16	9	10	6	Inflación
Corrupción	13	10	8	12	Corrupción
Derechos Humanos	<5%	n.r	9	8	Derechos humanos
Medio Ambiente	<5%	n.r	6	24	Medio Ambiente
Judicial	<5%	n.r			
Sistema Binominal	<5%	n.r			
Infraestructura	<5%	n.r			
			2	52	Estancamiento de actividad productiva
			10	5	Relaciones con FFAA
			11	2	Conflictos de poderes del estado
			12	2	Violencia política
			13	1	Deuda Externa
* Percentage of those surveyed that ranked the issue as one of the top three problems facing the country					
**Percentage of legislators calling the issue of "great" importance					

Figure 1—Chilean public opinion concerning the role of the state in business, 2008.

The question asked: Where would you position yourself on this scale, where 1 would be, “business should be private” and 10 would be “businesses should be state owned”? Using the same scale where would you place the (insert coalition name)? (Averages)

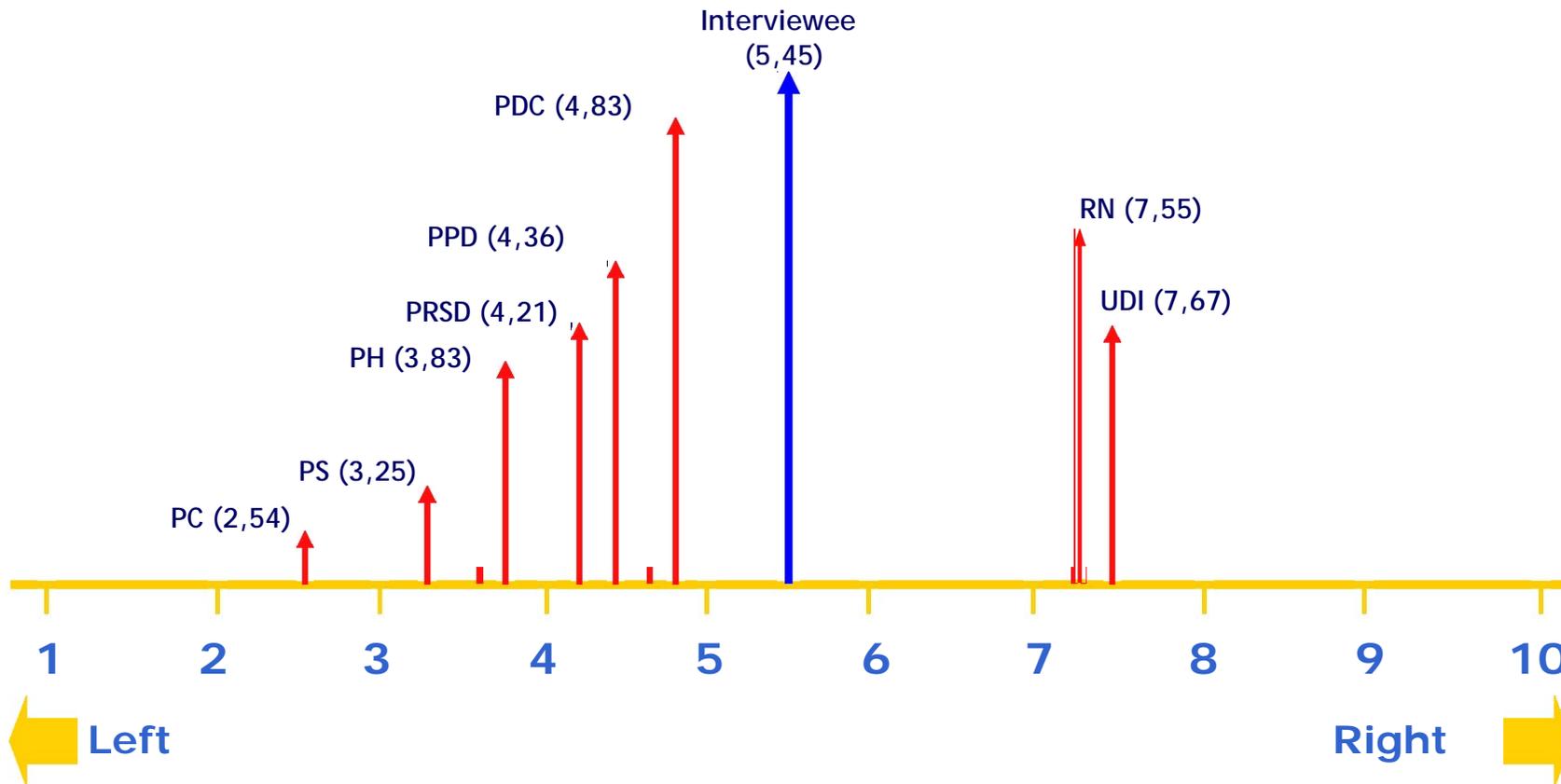


Note: Averages are calculated from those who expressed an opinion (“don’t know” or “no opinion” not included)

Source: Centro de Estudios Públicos, et. al, “Estudio nacional sobre partidos políticos y sistema electoral” March-April 2008.
http://www.cepchile.cl/bannerscep/encuestascep/encuestas_cep.html

Figure 2—Ideological placement of political parties by the Chilean Electorate, 2008

The question asked: The concepts of left and right are useful for summing up in a simple manner what people think about many issues. I would like you to classify on a scale where 1 represents the left and ten represents the right where you stand. And using the same scale where party (insert name) stands?



Note: Averages are calculated from those who expressed an opinion ("don't know" or "no opinion" not included)